

Letters of the Venerable Foundress
Giulia, Marchioness of Barolo nee Colbert



Introduction

This booklet consists of a series of letters sent by Venerable Giulia of Barolo to the Sisters of St. Ann, in whose foundation Giulia had collaborated with her husband. Both lovingly followed their growth and formation. After the premature death of her husband, Giulia, his universal heir and worthy successor of his work, took to her heart the future of the Sisters of St. Ann, whom Venerable Carlo Tancredi himself had defined as “*very dear to me*” in his Testament.

This booklet includes **seven letters**, which are only a part of her Letters to the Sisters of St. Ann. In fact, from indirect sources we know of the existence of other letters which can no longer be traced: two are quoted by Sr. Mary of the Angels Fracchia, another by Silvio Pellico.

From a letter written by Sr. Mary of the Angels to the Marchioness on 29th October 1845, we can deduce the existence of two letters of the Foundress to the Sisters of St. Ann sent from Rome, where she had gone to obtain papal approval for the Constitutions. In the first letter she asks the Sisters what structure they wished to give to the Congregation, and Sr. Mary of the Angels replies that all the Sisters wished for a Superior General, wanting to preserve the unity of the Congregation. In the second letter Sr. Mary of the

Angels responds: *"With regard to your second letter [...] which we received today, I have the honour of replying that the Sisters have agreed to accept or not accept, only those things which will be pleasing to the Holy Roman See and will be according to the desires of our most loving and beloved Foundress"*.

A third letter, quoted by Silvio Pellico, is dated 26th January 1846 and is addressed to the first Secretary of the Marchioness Burdizzo, to be delivered to the Sisters. In this letter, information was given on the developments of the Roman situation and the Sisters were asked for a copy of the Rules of the Association for young girls, the "Servants of Mary", to be presented for papal approval.

Returning to the seven letters collected in this booklet, the first is dated 23rd August 1850, written from Turin to Sr. Gabriella, Superior at Castelfidardo, a Community opened shortly before and still economically dependent on the Marchioness.

Four others were written in 1851 from Rome to Sr. Elisabetta, Superior at Turin. The Foundress had gone to Rome for the revision of some articles of the Constitutions, approved in 1846.

Here is also published a circular letter of 1857, written from Turin, addressed to all the Sisters and called *"Testament-letter"*.

Finally, there is a letter written from Turin on 10th October 1863 (a few months before her death), in which the addressee is not specified, but from the context it is understood to be Blessed Mother Enrichetta Dominici (there is a certain reference to the day of her birth), who in those days was in Moncalieri to be present for the exams and the prize distribution of the students of the School of the Vigna.

These few letters reveal the care and concern with which Giulia followed not only the communities but also the individual Sisters, whom she felt were close to her heart, also giving some spiritual exhortations. Giulia communicated to the Sisters both important affairs and normal daily events; in turn she wanted to be informed about the life of the communities, of the spiritual journey and of the health of each Sister.

It is interesting to note the simple and direct style with which Giulia addresses the recipients, using the informal “*you*” and omitting the title “*Sister*”. And to think that we are in the XIX century and the writer is a Marchioness!

The total absence of formality, the simplicity and spontaneity of the communications, the frankness in making even small corrections and the expressions of affection and tenderness, show the relationship that the Foundress had with the Sisters of St. Ann and the love she had for them.

To Sr. M. Gabriella - Superior at Castelfidardo

Turin, 23rd August 1850

Transcribed by Silvio Pellico

Original in French

Before replying to you, my dear Gabriella, I wanted to speak a bit to Mary of the Angels, to understand better the various things written in your letter.

We spent quite some time talking together, now that I know more about the facts, I shall also speak to you. I need to divide my letter into two parts; the first will be a small reproof, the second a sweet. Let us begin with the reproof, so as not to spoil the taste of the sweet. You strongly advised me not to send you the letter in a sealed envelope and I obeyed; I strongly advised you not to send me blank paper, and not only is there a blank sheet of paper in your letter, but also in Victoria's. Tell Victoria that I thank her very much for what she has written; it is clear that both of you need to practice French because there are some mistakes in your letters. It will be useful for both of you to know this language, for yourselves as well as for others.

So try not to forget this and from now on when you have just a few things to write, write in the same letter. The weight of the letter costs the same from Castelfidardo to here, just as from here to there,

therefore I save my money, just as you desire to save what I send you.

Now I come to the second part, the sweet. I am very happy that Msgr. Bishop has obtained for you from Rome the permission to have the Chapel; I ask you to extend to him my sincere thanks. Mary of the Angels thinks that we probably will not have to pay more than 5 or 6 *scudi* as charges. If he were kind enough to take charge of paying, you could reimburse him and I will add this small amount to the money which I have to send you at the first opportunity, or ask Monsignor to let you know who is the person to whom the payment must be made in Rome and who can send it. I could get it written, but this would take much longer because the person I could ask to do it is not in Turin at the moment. Once the permissions are obtained, you will desire (as you already desire at present) to have a Priest who says Holy Mass for you every day in your Chapel. If, as Mary of the Angels assures, it is sufficient to give him 120 francs a year, I willingly grant you the permission for this expense. This is fine without saying that it will be Lord Canon Cattarelli or Monsignor Bishop who will decide the choice of the person who will come to say Holy Mass for you. You should already have a chalice etc. Finally, the basic necessities. Do not buy any ornaments without asking for my permission. You must

forget the lavishness of the chapel in Turin and be content with what is purely necessary. This is a time in which I lack money. This will prevent me from seeing you soon, because I know that there is a plan to ask me to buy a house, near yours, to demolish it, to build a chapel and to enlarge the convent, etc. In the end there will be more expenses to be made than have already been made. My finances will not allow me to do so without going into debt. If Our Lord and His Holy Mother want these expenses, let them make it known and not only to me; but all that I have and all that I could have is at their disposal. It is good for you to know that the population of Castelfidardo must contribute a lot to your living among them. They were unable to maintain these commitments and I was the one who bought the house etc... But it will be painful to be behind you and to be forced to refuse the requests that will be made to me. The desire of doing the good which Our Lord deigned to put into my heart, makes it very painful for me to always refuse the continual requests.

Thus, at this moment the Parish Priest of St. Vincent would like a new building and from Carpegno they have written to Mary of the Angels to get me to do there what I did in Castelfidardo, etc... You see, dear daughter, that they have found the way of postponing my journey

indefinitely. I am sorry I am not able to make the pilgrimage to Loreto and to Rimini. Finally I would like to see all of you whom I love tenderly, and get to know the postulants, future Sisters of St. Ann, whom I already love very much.

I take advantage of this little space still left to give you news about the house here. In general the Sisters are keeping good health. Lately in Turin the large infirmary was empty, there was only Raffaella in the small infirmary. Angelica is here, she is not too well, I hope it is nothing serious, but this will delay the recital at St. Giulia's which the students want to present and which my brother has to attend. I conclude by embracing you, dear Gabriella, and also your companions: I often recommend you to God in my prayers, do not forget me in yours. Never forget that God, who knows our weakness, does not ask great things of us, but He desires our heart and desires that this heart be sweet and humble. Through the intercession of Mary, may He, in His divine goodness grant us this.

Marchioness of Barolo nee Colbert

To Sr. M. Elisabetta, Superior – Turin

Rome, 3rd November 1851

transcribed by Silvio Pellico

One month seemed to me a long time without any news from my dear daughters of St. Ann. Now I have received your letter of the 28th and I thank you for it. In exchange I can give you news of our Sisters of Bagnorea [they have been here only for a month, editor's note]; the health services are very good, the town is very ugly, and it seems very poor. When I entered, I told them that St. Ann had come to pay a visit to Nazareth. They will write to you and you will hear more from them than from me.

If you truly believe that the girl from Carmagnola could be useful to our Institute, let us exempt her from paying the entire pension, but a small pension and a trousseau is necessary.

I will write to Mr. Viuni for Angelo Pometto of Moncalieri. He will come and talk to you and you will arrange together for the booklet as it was given to all the others.

I have already spoken to Fr. Giusto, now Monsignor, about article 40 of Chapter 6 for which we have agreed with Mary of the Angels to have it modified for the good of your Institute. You can see that as soon as I arrived in Rome I immediately occupied myself about you. I hope that you do not need this new proof to believe in my

tender, maternal affection. I prayed for you near the bodies of so many holy Nuns who, having died hundreds of years ago, are still marvelously preserved outside the grave: St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Magdalene de' Pazzi, other Carmelite Saints (visible), St. Rose of Viterbo, etc.

I had masses said everywhere, not only for the general good of the Institute, but for each of you in particular, that the spirit of unity and obedience may grow in all of you and that you may be kept in good health and joy and in union with one another. I charge you to say this on my behalf to the Professed, to the Novices, to the Postulants. You will also say many things to the Boarders, to the Giuliettes; I will not name any of them, but I see you all in my mind and I keep you all in my heart. You did my part very well at the prize distribution; you will also distribute my friendly remembrances to all of them.

Marchioness of Barolo nee Colbert

* * * * *

I also charge you to present my respects to the Most Rev. Fr. Isnardi, my greetings to Fr. Fissore and Fr. Casassa. I commend myself to their holy prayers, and also very much to yours all small and big.

To Sr. M. Elisabetta, Superior – Turin

Rome, 17th November 1851

Transcribed by Silvio Pellico

I commission you, my dear daughter, to thank the Teachers of the Giuliettes for their nice letter and good care they take of my daughters and also to the latter for their dear letter, telling them that I am pleased that some of them have had the fortune of entering into the Congregations. I hope that from now on things will get better and better because on the 9th of this month I was received by His Holiness. He received me very kindly, he made me sit down. I did it out of obedience and then sitting down I said to him: I ask Your Holiness to let me stay on my knees, I have so many Blessings to ask of you that it is a real litany. So you were together with me as I named the Sisters, Giuliettes, Students and the zealous Priests who take care of you.

I beg you to tell them on my behalf. The Holy Father has a goodness, an amenity on his face that is radiant and makes itself felt in one's heart. Cooperate with the Blessings of this Holy Pontiff through the exact observance of the Constitutions approved by His Venerated Predecessor through good works and prayers. I also ask this for Your Cardinal Protector who till now is in the countryside for health reasons. I have not yet been

able to do anything regarding the point of the Holy Rule that is known to you.

If you truly believe that the Postulant who recently presented herself can be useful to Your Institute, let us take her with the little she has, and may God give us in spiritual graces what He condones her in material means. I am sorry for the poor health of Sr. Eugenia, out of charity let her recover a little before sending her away. In the meantime, while she is still in the Monastery, given that Dr. Polto has condemned her to leave, show her to Dr. Fioretta. If the sentences of the two Doctors agree, that good daughter must be returned to her family. In case Dr. Fioretta still has hope, we could try the new remedies.

In case my letter finds Vittoria Negro still alive, tell her on my behalf that I prayed for her. I regret that Our Lord wants to take her to Himself; it seems to me that she could still do much for us. But since our aim is to work for heaven, the first who arrives there, I hope will pray for the others.

Ask Raffaella if she needs some sweets or the chocolates I used to give her when I was in Turin; buy them without considering the vow of poverty, I am the one who is paying.

I commission you to act on my behalf towards the Sisters, Giuliettes and Boarders, I take you with me to all the holy places where I am. For example, this morning, I received Holy Communion with the permission of the Pope in the room where St. Ignatius died. The first time you see Fr. Isnardi, give him my respects, and tell him that he too is often present in my poor prayers. I place you all through the intercession of St. Ignatius, under the mantle of Our Lady and I ask her to place us all in her heart and in that of her Divine Son.

Marchioness of Barolo nee Colbert

To Sr. M. Elisabetta, Superior - Turin

Rome, 1st December 1851

Transcribed by Silvio Pellico

I would like to be able to thank you by writing a letter to you, to Angelica and to the Boarders, but it is not possible for me to find time to write so many letters; I must treat St. Ann's as I do everywhere and ask the Superior to do the task for me. I was pleased with the letter from the Boarders, it is well written, well expressed, and today I am going to take it to Monsignor of Bagnorea to let him know that if piety corresponds to education, our students can become teachers. We have proof of this in our Head Mistress. I was happy to get the good news about the Boarders and the affectionate expressions in your letter are dear to me because you are dear to me. I regret only that the three little girls are sick, they are suffering a lot, poor things!

The first time that you will write to me I would like to know something about the two Giuliettes who entered at the time of my departure. As for Marietta Giudice, I do not remember her well. I advise you to get information from Madam Allamandi and Miss Gloria.

If she is the one whom I think she is, it would be better not to... I will try to present Fr. Fissore's application, I hope to find someone who will see to it for me, because

I have already made many such requests. I am afraid it would seem indiscreet.

The matter concerning the number of Constitutions that you know about, is well underway, but here things take a long time, all the more because the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars is not in Rome now. Cardinal Orioli is favourable towards obtaining a good result for the above matter. Even that of Bagnorea is proceeding well. We held a meeting with Msgr. Scerra and Msgr. Bishop, money is being collected to open a paying school for young ladies.

If Sr. Eugenia does not feel like continuing in the religious life, neither I do feel like keeping her; therefore send her back home as soon as charity permits it!

It is therefore probable that I will no longer find poor Raffaella anymore. For some years her life has been a long suffering, let us hope that God will have mercy on her and receive her in a place of rest.

We are now in the novena to the Immaculate Conception. I am sure that you will make it and it will help you to prepare the cradle for the divine Child in your heart; let us first make it clean, pure and then let us put in it lilies of purity (I mean purity of intention in all things), purple violets of humility and roses of love. Let us be careful not to put anything of our poor nature

in it. The Mother of God and ours will obtain for us all these flowers of virtue. After having placed them in our hearts to receive Baby Jesus, she will grant us the grace of preserving them forever. While making this preparation, do it also a little for me; I ask this of all my dear sisters, daughters of St. Ann, of the Boarders and also of my Giuliettes.

You will tell this to them, and I hope that they will not deny that help to my soul, while I do not let a day pass by without presenting them to God in my poor prayers. I also recommend myself to Fr. Fissore and Fr. Casassa.

You, my dear daughter, and all of you, know how much I love you; meanwhile I am pleased to assure you of it once again, I think this will also please you.

Marchioness of Barolo nee Colbert

* * * * *

If I do not directly see to the request of Fr. Fissore it will be entrusted to an authoritative person, who will be more certain of succeeding, since I am very keen to do something that is pleasing to him.

To Sr. M. Elisabetta, Superior - Turin

Rome, 24th December 1851

Transcribed by Silvio Pellico

I thank you, my dear Elisabetta, for your nice letter and for those written to me by the Giuliettes and the Boarders. I am very happy that the exams went off well. After having prepared our hearts for the coming of Jesus, this morning I took you all with me near the Cradle of the Divine Child! I was granted permission to receive Communion in the private Oratory of the Chapter of St. Mary Major (Our Lady of Snows) where that Sacred Cradle was exposed for the Holy Father to come and take it for the Midnight Mass and expose it publicly for veneration. All of you came with me, small, big, daughters and Sisters, the healthy and the sick. How sorry I am that there are so many who are sick! Do me the favour of not neglecting the devotion to Saints Cosmos and Damian. And that Giuliette, the elder of the two I recently took, can harm the others, it is better to send her away. I am sending you the address, given to me by Fr. Ponte, of a worthy Ecclesiastic to whom you can hand her over.

I am very happy with the full votes received by the two Postulants. One could take the name Natalia and the

other Stefania, if you like. If you wish to give other names, do it by all means. Since the information received is good about the girl Marietta Giudice, you can accept her provided she has a vocation and good health. I feel there is no need to make much problem about money, what do you think of it? When I think that you are destined to work for the glory of God, my confidence grows in that good God, who I hope, will not let me lack the means to favour the good will which He by grace has given to all of us. If now I had three or four dozen Sisters of St. Ann, I would know where to place them, but they are not something to be taken by dozens. Virtue, capacity and health are needed. Be very careful not to take girls without aptitudes, those whom I call "*Saints*". These can become saints without us, and they occupy the place of those who could be useful to the Institute. I do not remember if I wrote to you that I had lost a wallet containing important papers. Thank God! It has been found. They took the money that was in it, but I forgive this theft, and I bless the Lord; all the papers that were so important to me have been recovered.

I do not know how many times my letter has been interrupted. I leave on Monday the 29th, I have many things to do, so my dear Elisabetta, I embrace you in a hurry and entrust you with all my good wishes for the whole Community, Sisters, Postulants, Boarders,

Giuliettes. Tell them a thousand tender and gracious things on my behalf, I will send you a thousand, if this number is not enough, give them more. I have such a store of attention for you, that I am not afraid that you will make me go bankrupt.

Marchioness of Barolo nee Colbert

**Letter of the Venerable Foundress
to the Sisters of St. Ann**

(Testament-Letter)

Turin, 15th February 1857

For many years I have tried to give you, my dearest daughters, proofs of my concern for your good.

You know that you have had such proofs right from the time of your foundation. I want the good of your Institute, as much as is possible, even after my death. It is not enough that I have left you a large share of my wealth; I feel it is my duty to re-state for you, my intentions and those of my husband, to whom I owe all that I have had, and you all that you have.

Well, his intention, as well as mine, was not to make you live a comfortable life. You make a vow of poverty, you must live as poor persons, imitating our Divine Saviour Jesus Christ. This poverty regards not only your material style of life, but also the occupations to which you are dedicated.

1st - Your holy Constitutions speak at length about poverty, particularly in Chapter XVIII. I ask God to give you the grace of living them not only to the letter, but according to their spirit.

2nd - You will never be able to impress sufficiently in your minds and your hearts, the contents of Chapter I of your holy Constitutions, which tells you clearly that your aim 'consists in procuring the glory of God and the good of souls among the poorer classes'. You will never model yourselves on the educational institutions founded for rich children. There are many religious institutions dedicated to that purpose. Remember that you have been founded for the poorer classes. As you have done till now, you may have a boarding for pupils of modest means, belonging to families that have come down socially or are not rich. The education you impart should therefore be homely: never lessons in dancing, music or drawing; never the study of science etc. All this is written in your Constitutions; repeating it seems useless to me. But, to the obedience that you owe to the Constitutions, I want you to add the sentiment of gratitude towards the one who has founded you.

3rd - Chapter VI, article 40, prescribes the use of the surplus that may accrue on the wealth that I am leaving you: fulfill it exactly; to be able to do this it is necessary that your food, your beds, the furniture keep up their present simplicity: until now you have been the least paid teaching Sisters, continue to be so still: there should always be some money left over for those poor villages that call you to educate their girls. I hope that being

economical, you will continue to satisfy the people. To the glory of God, to your satisfaction and mine, I must say that till now you have satisfied all over.

Remember, dear daughters, that even though I have procured for you a Novitiate House outside Piedmont, my will however is, that you dedicate yourselves especially to this place in which I have founded you, where I have had my wealth, where I have lived for so many years: political happenings and any change of government, do not impede that kind of good to which you are dedicated. I see only one obstacle, namely (God forbid that it should happen) the impossibility of being able to give the youth a Catholic education. You are aware of all that I suffered when there was fear of disobeying Holy Mother the Church!

Be firm and courageous: what one might do outside the Church is no longer a good.

Our Institute is dedicated to all the works of charity commanded by your legitimate Superior, who is the Diocesan Bishop: you also have a Cardinal Protector. I hope there will never be anything that divides them; if ever this should unfortunately happen, always abide by the decision that will place you more in conformity with Holy Mother Church. It is not that I want to make you judges of the respectable ecclesiastical authorities, but in case of conflict it would be better to abandon the

charitable work in that place and go to some other place, where Providence will suggest some other good work for you to do.

The care of the sick is also within the scope of your Institute. I was pleased to know that your Sisters in Castelfidardo, with God's blessings, dedicated themselves successfully to the care of the cholera-stricken. When an opportunity presents itself, take it with courage; God will bless you, as He has done in the past. The omnipotent hand of the Father of mercies never fails, neither in goodness nor in power, towards those who trust in Him. I ask Him to bless you.

I ask Mary Most Holy and glorious St. Ann, your Patroness, to be mothers to you always. I trust in your prayers to be able to reach Paradise: from there, my dear daughters, at the feet of the Divine Saviour and of his Most Holy Mother Mary, who deigns to be our mother too, I shall implore the most abundant blessings on your Institute, and on each one of you in particular.

Giulietta Marchioness of Barolo nee Colbert.

To Mother Enrichetta Dominici

Turin, 10th October 1863

Thank you dear daughter for the account of the distribution and of the exam held at the School of the Vigna: everything went very well thanks to your patience, I have never had much of it, but I think you did well, very well: therefore you must also be given some pictures, so keep the ones that are left, I am sending you two for Fedele and Cherubina, speaking the other day to Giuliana I feel more compassion for those poor daughters, that they do not economize on trains, or on carriages if they need fresh air, near dear Mother General, whose birthday, I came to know is today, and together with all her good daughters I thank God for having given her to us. Agnese's letter gives me hope of having one more good daughter soon. Praise God, I saw Francesca of Druent this morning, so far I like her, she has something good and simple in the way she presents herself. As for the note about the dowries, you will tell Olimpia to go ahead like the other years, and then the favourite daughter will come to the Secretary's office with Father or Mother on the day she wants, carrying a note signed by you, or by Olimpia.

Good morning dear daughter, I give you many caresses, I send you many blessings, give some of them to your Secretary.

M. Barolo



Portrait of Silvio Pellico