

TRIDENTINE RENEWAL AND SPIRITUAL EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN THE EXPERIENCE OF FEMALE MONASTICISM. THE CASE OF VERONA IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

*La renovación tridentina y la educación espiritual de las mujeres
en la experiencia de vida monacal femenina.
El caso de Verona en el siglo XVI[§]*

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Abstract. The catholic world of the Sixteenth century, especially after the Council of Trent, exalted the condition of monastic life as the most perfect and noblest of the conditions of life traditionally reserved for women. The monastic state became the model to which the educational path of every woman had to conform to, even if she was destined to live in the world (as mother, virgin, widow, or married woman). The strong paradigmatic value exerted by the monastic condition of life is clear from the analysis of the pedagogical literature devoted to women published in this period.

The present article focuses on two relevant examples of this literature: the *Costituzioni per le monache* (Constitutions for Nuns, 1539) by Gian Matteo Giberti and the *Ricordi lasciati alle monache* (Recollections left to nuns, 1575) by Agostino Valier. The two texts contain very interesting reasons for understanding the pedagogical directions of the time, which are highlighted by the author with specific references to the historical context and thanks to the support of documentary and published sources. These two works were written by two great reformer bishops, and are highly meaningful

[§] The expression «spiritual renewal» recalls the historical category of Catholic renewal and refers to the process of inner reformation which interested the Catholic Church before and after the Tridentine Council. For a first approach to this topic see: Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal (1540-1770)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). We inform the reader that this article proposes, for the first time in English and in an update and reviewed version, the research published in Italian in Elisabetta Patrizi, *Pastoralità ed educazione*. (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2015, 2 vols.). The quotations in the text have been translated by the author.

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not only because they complement each other, since both were prepared for the religious women of the diocese of Verona, but mainly because they offer one very vivid insight into the growing importance assigned to the monastic *modus vivendi* in Sixteenth century Catholic society.

Keywords: Women's education. Religious education. Catholic Reformation. Agostino Valier. Gian Matteo Giberti. Italy; Sixteenth century.

Resumen. *El mundo católico del siglo XVI, especialmente después del Concilio de Trento, enaltecó la condición de la vida monástica como la más perfecta y noble de las condiciones de vida tradicionalmente reservadas para las mujeres. El estado monástico se convirtió en el modelo al cual había que adaptar la trayectoria educativa de la mujer, si bien esta estaba destinada a vivir en el mundo (como madres, vírgenes, viudas o mujeres casadas). El fuerte valor paradigmático que ejercía la vida monástica queda manifiesto a partir del análisis de la literatura pedagógica dedicada a las mujeres publicada en este periodo.*

*El presente artículo se centra en dos ejemplos relevantes de esta literatura: las *Costituzioni per le monache* (Constituciones de las Monjas, 1539) por Gian Matteo Giberti y los *Ricordi lasciati alle monache* (Recuerdos para las monjas, 1575) por Agostino Valier. Los dos textos contienen razones muy interesantes para la comprensión de las orientaciones pedagógicas de la época, que el autor destaca con referencias específicas al contexto histórico y mediante el respaldo de fuentes documentales y publicaciones. Estas dos obras fueron escritas por dos grandes obispos reformadores, y son altamente significativas no solo porque se complementan entre sí, ya que ambas se escribieron para las religiosas de la diócesis de Verona, sino porque principalmente ofrecen una percepción muy intensa de la importancia cada vez mayor asignada al *modus vivendi* monástico en la sociedad católica del siglo XVI.*

Palabras clave: *Educación de la mujer. Educación religiosa. Reforma católica. Agostino Valier. Gian Matteo Giberti. Italia; siglo XVI.*

INTRODUCTION

In the history of monasticism of the *Ancien Régime*, the Council of Trent represents a turning point, because it introduced measures that, although often elusive and not always immediately applied, led to concrete, long-lasting changes in the lives of religious men and women. With the Council of Trent, and more precisely with the decree *De regularibus et monialibus*, approved in the last session of the Council dated 3 December

1563,¹ «the reaffirmation of monasticism as *status perfectionis*, in contrast to the Protestants, and therefore the necessity of reintroducing discipline in an institution that was often criticised and contested, resulted in a rehabilitation that extended to all female communities of monastic seclusion, restraint, and ultimately, suppression in the male communities of the *licentiae extra standi*», as Gabriella Zarri remarked.²

In female religious communities the decree provided for the restoration of monastic discipline by requiring cloister for all religious women who had taken solemn vows (chapter V).³ In particular, the Tridentine decree, referring the *Periculoso* bull of Boniface VIII (1298), prescribed the enclosure to religious women in two forms, active (exit ban for nuns) and passive (prohibition of access to monasteries for exterior people), but did not state to which monasteries this rule should be applied, opening a thorny debate on the interpretation of chapter V of the decree. At the time of the Council of Trent there were two main categories of female monasteries: the «closed monasteries», where women were submitted to the enclosure, and the «open monasteries», where the female inhabitants could go out under certain conditions. The monasteries of tertiaries which, although not required by their rule and profession, voluntarily chose to lead a life in enclosure, could belong to the first category. So it could occur that to the category of «open monasteries» could belong not

¹ For the text of the Tridentine decree: Giuseppe Alberigo *et al.* (ed.), *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum decreta, edizione bilingue* (Bologna: EDB, 1991), Sessio XXV (3 dec. 1563), *Decretum de regularibus et monialibus*, 776-784.

² The centrality of the Council and more generally the so-called Confessional Age in the history of religious women is analysed in two dense essays written by Gabriella Zarri, «Storia delle donne e storia religiosa: un innesto riuscito», in *Innesti. Donne e genere nella storia sociale*, ed. Giulia Calvi (Roma: Viella, 2004), 149-173, in particular 157-164 and for the quotation 157-158 (original Italian text has been translated by the author of this article), and Roberto Rusconi, «La storia religiosa “al femminile” e la vita religiosa delle donne», in *Innesti*, ed. Giulia Calvi, in particular 175-182.

³ For an overview on Council of Trent measures aimed at regulating the women's religious life see: Gabriella Zarri, *Recinti. Donne, clausura e matrimonio nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2000), in particular chapter I («*Monasteri femminili e città*», 43-143). A review of studies on female monasticism in the Modern Age is proposed, with specific reference to the Italian context, in the triptych of essays written respectively by Gabriella Zarri, Francesca Medioli and Paola Vismara published under the title «*De monialibus (Secoli XVI-XVII-XVIII)*», *Rivista di storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, 33 (1998): 643-715. For an international overview on this topic, with methodology reflections and comparisons between the Italian and American historiography see: Zarri, «Storia delle donne e storia religiosa», 149-173. A documented history of female monastic communities of Catholic Europe in the Modern Age is proposed in: Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns. A History of Convent life*. (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

only the monasteries of tertiaries of various religious orders, but also those of nuns with solemn vows, who did not live in enclosure.⁴ Then the Tridentine decree was clarified by the *Circa pastoralis* bull issued by Pius V in 1566 and by later papal provisions.⁵

In this regard, we can recall that the *Circa pastoralis* bull issued on May, 29th 1566 dissolved the doubts left open by the decree *De regularibus et monialibus* on the introduction of the enclosure in female monasteries, establishing a direct link between profession and enclosure, which was extended to all women's religious institutes, including the communities of tertiaries with simple vows, to which the solemn profession was imposed or, in the case of non-consent, the inability to accept novices, disposition which inevitably caused the community extinction. The constitution of Pius V, in essence, recognized only one category of religious women, i.e. those who professed solemn vows and lived in strict seclusion. With the *Decoris et honestati* bull of January 24, 1570, Pope Pius V made the application of enclosure even more rigid, establishing that a nun could leave the enclosure only in presence of three conditions, namely fire, plague and leprosy, and after approval of a bishop and a «father» superior. In *Deo sacris virginibus* bull of December 30, 1572, Gregory XIII was concerned to solve some of the economic problems that the provisions of his predecessor had caused, primarily in relation to the poorest «open monasteries», whose livelihood mainly depended on the collection in alms. In particular, the bull stated that half of the alms collected everywhere for the poor was to be used for the maintenance of cloistered nuns, in order to ensure the sustenance of a certain number of religious women, defined by a bishop or a local father superior. Most of the «open monasteries» accepted the enclosure, even if a few of them were able to maintain a less rigid condition of life thanks to the protection of bishops or influential princes. This context did not provoke the disappearance of tertiaries, which was officially readmitted by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in 1616, with a formula according to which they were tolerated, although not approved.

⁴ See Raymond Creytens, «La riforma nei monasteri femminili», in *Il Concilio di Trento e la riforma tridentina. Atti del convegno internazionale, Trento, 2-6 settembre 1963* (Roma: Herder, 1965), vol. 1, 45-84.

⁵ See Creytens, «La riforma nei monasteri femminili», 62-79; Evangelisti, *Nuns*, chapter 2; Zarri, «De monialibus», 683-685.

The provision on tertiaries of Pius V was cancelled only in 1749 with the *Quamvis iusto* law of Benedict XIV.

Anyway, the Tridentine decree was constituted by different important provisions, for example, raising the age of eligibility to sixteen years, preceded by one year of probation and by the examination of the bishop or his vicar before the issue of a vote, established to guarantee the freedom of choice of the young woman (chapters XV, XVII). We know that the topic of forced monastic professions is a classic of female monasticism historiography and one of the most famous direct testimony in this regard is represented by the work *Inferno monacale* («Monastic Hell»), written at the beginning of the Seventeenth century by the Benedictine nun Arcangela Tarabotti.⁶

Other relevant disposals of the Tridentine decree concerned the rules on the regulation of the government's functions roles and on the management of monasteries' assets (chapters VI, XVI), aimed at dismantling privileges and powers born of family status and restoring common life which had long been compromised by the so-called «system of cells». On this last point, it is worth noticing that at the beginning of the Sixteenth century the monasteries had frequent contacts with the outside world and the nuns often maintained strong ties with their family. In many cases, the monasteries became one of the expressions of power and magniloquence of the great families of the time, which exercised a very strong influence on the monastery life, especially in the management of the monastery assets and in the definition of the number of nuns of the same lineage in the same monastery. So, the expression «system of cells»

⁶ See Francesca Medioli, *L'inferno monacale di Arcangela Tarabotti* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990). There were many cases of imposed cloister, even in the men side (cf. Guido Dall'Olio, «La disciplina dei religiosi all'epoca del Concilio di Trento: sondaggi bolognesi», *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento*, 21 (1995): 93-140) which have contributed to root in the common imagination the idea of monastery as a physical and mental «prison». However, it must be pointed out here as the most innovative studies of the last two decades have allowed a much richer and varied frame of life in female monasteries, identifying a widespread presence, especially in the more aristocratic institutes, of educational, artistic and literary activities, such as to qualify the female monasteries as lively places of cultural transmission and processing. See Craig A. Monson (ed.), *The Crannied Wall. Women, religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan press, 1992); Elissa B. Weaver, *Convent theatre in Early Modern Italy: spiritual fun and learning for women* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002); Gianna Pomata and Gabriella Zarri (eds.), *I monasteri femminili come centri di cultura fra Rinascimento e Barocco* (Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2005); Evangelisti, *Nuns*, chapter 3-5.

refers to the fact that the community life appeared compromised by an internal organisation of the monasteries focused on the individual cells of nuns, which in their interior reflected the social differences existing between the nuns, and were organised in such a way as to allow the nuns to lead an almost private life.⁷

From the examples proposed so far it is evident that the decree's primary intent was to intercede in the main abuses which plagued monastic life at that time, but the rules were worded so generally as to leave many unanswered questions, which made application of the Council's provisions problematic.

At an institutional level, the *De regularibus et monialibus* decree strengthened the authority of the bishop and diminished that of regular orders, even in the case of women's communities that were not cloistered. That authority had, on the one hand, often been diminished by the many doubts arising from implementation of the reform –the answer to which was often entrusted to the powerful Congregation of the Council and later to the Congregation of Bishops and Regular Clergy. On the other hand, due to the indeterminacy of Tridentine rules, considerable autonomy and mediation were left at local levels, which were differently managed within the various European states and individual dioceses.⁸ In this regard, Pio Paschini observed in a well-known piece from 1960 referring to the conditions of Italian convents:

It would be an over-simplification to assume that the spiritual conditions of religious life in female monasteries could be uniformly reproduced throughout Italy; one can conclude that in this era such treatment was markedly better in some places [...]

⁷ See Zarri, *Recinti*, 84-100; Ezio Bolis, «Tra concilio e postconcilio: la vita religiosa femminile dopo Trento», in *La sponsalità dai monasteri al secolo. La diffusione del carisma di Sant'Angela nel mondo. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi (22-25 novembre 2007, Brescia-Desenzano)*, ed. Gianpietro Belotti and Xenio Toscani (Brescia: Centro mericiano, 2009), 159-181.

⁸ The process of enclosure introduction was not linear and in the regulations issued by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, which had the force of law, there are strict provisions requiring compliance or restoration of the precept, alongside others welcoming exceptions, as further proof of the fact that on this matter a great variety of solutions was adopted at the regulatory level. Cf. Francesca Mediolì, «La clausura delle monache nell'amministrazione della Congregazione romana sopra i regolari», in *Il monachesimo femminile in Italia dall'Alto medioevo al secolo XVII. A confronto con l'oggi*, ed. Gabriella Zarri (San Pietro in Cariano: Il segno dei Gabrielli, 1997), 249-282; Niccolò Del Re, *La curia romana. Cenni storico-giuridici, 4 ed. aggiornata e accresciuta* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria editrice Vaticana, 1998), 369-373.

than in others —as he subsequently added— only diligent local investigations could lead to clearer conclusions».⁹

In the past fifty years, numerous studies have supported the hypothesis formulated by Paschini, which expanded the framework for understanding and interpreting the timing and manner of the implementation of reform within female monastic communities. Among these studies are those relating to the Diocese of Verona of the early Sixteenth century written by Adriano Prosperi, which showed how significant results in the areas of discipline and spiritual renewal were attained in the convents, far above those of Trent, due to the vigorous pastoral work of Bishop Gian Matteo Giberti.¹⁰ It should be noticed that as early as the second decade of the Sixteenth century, just after the explosion of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic ecclesiastical authorities (often with the support of the city authorities who were generally jealous guardians of the prestige of convents, in which they saw the prestige of their own cities reflected), began to view the «moral disorders» of religious communities, which had been previously tolerated, as a dangerous gateway to heresy, and as such to be blocked by vigorous reform, led by secular clergy in the restoration of Rules.¹¹ Giberti's episcopate exemplifies this strategy. Beginning in May, 1525, Giberti had gained the right to visit monasteries and compel compliance with rules. Aided by broad authority granted to him by the Pope by virtue of his role as apostolic delegate, he gathered the first information on nuns' living conditions during a pastoral visit in 1526. Therefore, he proceeded to an operational plan, proposing incisive and targeted measures which, after a few years, enabled him to achieve tangible reorganisation of female monastic life in Verona. His efforts ensured a solid foundation for the ameliorative measures realised by his successors, among whom Bishop Agostino Valier occupies a place of particular importance in the extension of the episcopate and the efficacy of pastoral action.¹²

⁹ Pio Paschini, «I monasteri femminili in Italia nel Cinquecento», in *Problemi di vita religiosa in Italia nel '500* (Padova: Antenore, 1960), 31-60 and 42-43 for the quotation.

¹⁰ Gian Matteo Giberti was bishop of Verona from 1524 until 1543, year of his death. The main work on this important figure of pre-Tridentine period is that written by Adriano Prosperi, *Tra evangelismo e Controriforma. Gian Matteo Giberti (1495-1543)* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1969).

¹¹ Cf. Zarri, *Recinti*, 78.

¹² Cf. Prosperi, *Tra Evangelismo e Controriforma*, 183-193 and 187 for the quotation; Olindo Viviani, «Il vescovo di Verona G. M. Giberti e il riordinamento dei monasteri femminili», in *Atti dell'Accademia di Agricoltura, Scienze e lettere di Verona*, 6 (8), (1956-1957), 135-166 and in particular 146-160.

THE CONSTITUTIONS FOR NUNS AND GIBERTI'S LEGACY

The most significant document of the reform work carried out by Giberti is the *Costituzioni per le monache* (Constitutions for Nuns), published for the first time in 1539, in Verona.¹³ The *Constitutions* provides many of the same rules set by the Tridentine decree for the regular clergy: from the provisions relating to the introduction of the leadership *ad tempus* (chapter III), already tested in other cities, especially within the Fifteenth century observance movement; to the most innovative rules pertaining to the raising of the age of religious profession and the examination of the professed women by the bishop (chapter XXX); through to the equally original provisions on the generalised imposition of cloister (chapters XV-XVI, XXIII, XXVI); and the prohibition to accept novices who could not be maintained by a monastery's fixed assets (chapter XXXIII). Giberti himself was well aware of the exemplary nature of this text, insofar as he had promoted its publication intending that it provides a model for reform, useful not only *for the city and diocese of Verona* but –as stated in the title of the work– *also for other cities*. In addition to their undisputed paradigmatic value, it was noted that the *Constitutions for nuns* had the added advantage of effectively and eloquently introducing,

the legal-regulatory elements relating to the monastic institution in a substantially parenetic text, which strongly suggests the *fundamentalia* of religious profession, leading to an orderly and holy community life, consistent with the ancient monastic rules.¹⁴

In fact, the *Constitutions* are not a sterile list of minute prescriptions combined with severe penalties; on the contrary, the prescriptive aspect was a secondary element of the text. In this sense, the observance of vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and the same seclusion, as well as the adherence to monastic discipline, were proposed as a direct consequence of a religious life model. This model was described primarily in positive terms, focusing on evangelical precepts, community life and prayer, and as such were basic elements of a regeneration process, arising primarily from

¹³ Gian Matteo Giberti, *Constitutioni de le monache per la città et Diocesi di Verona, utili anco alle altre città* (Verona: per Antonio da Portese, 1539).

¹⁴ Cf. Gabriella Zarri, «I circoli spirituali femminili della riforma. Gian Matteo Giberti e le Constitutioni per le monache», in *Atti del Convegno di Studi Gian Matteo Giberti (1495-1543)*, ed. Marco Agostini and Giovanna Baldisson Molli (Verona: Biblos, 2012), 29-37 and 36 for the quotation.

the desire to give new light to ancient and indispensable rites of purification and intercession sustained by monasteries, as protection and support of the well-being of the whole *civitas christiana*. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the *Constitutions for the nuns* are introduced by a warm appeal, in which Giberti asked the nuns for full and conscious adherence to the status of monastic life, which qualified as the most perfect among the existential conditions because it was closer to an evangelical life model.

First of all, we order that you respect the precepts of the supreme and great God, loving him with all your heart, turning over to him the will and the right intention, loving him with all your mind, so that the intellect submits to God for sincere faith, with all your soul, that is with the sensory appetite, subduing the senses to reason, and adapting these according to God, and similarly loving him with all strengths, performing also with external deeds, because faith without good works is dead. Then love your neighbour as yourself for the same purpose, wishing him the good that everyone conveniently wants for himself, to reach eternal happiness. And you in the same way serve the precepts of our Holy Mother Church [...]. The sisters must obey their rules with due respect (to keep and apply them with words and deeds, we prepared these orders used in each convent), but they also must make gains in evangelical perfection with each study, day by day, because they are intended to perfect life, not only trying to observe the evangelical precepts, but also the advice of Our Lord Jesus Christ, as required by the monastic state.¹⁵

Giberti's reform of the female monasteries in the diocese of Verona ended, as Adriano Prosperi pointed out, with «the clear victory of Giberti» and the *Constitutions for nuns* may be regarded as the most complete expression of this success, given that it depicts a situation

by then essentially smooth and peaceful [... so that] the kind of abuses that are mentioned with regard to the enclosure seems to confirm that the most serious issues of laxity of discipline in the monasteries of Verona had been eradicated.¹⁶

¹⁵ Giberti, *Constitutioni de le monache*, fol. 2v-3r.

¹⁶ Prosperi, *Tra Evangelismo e Controriforma*, 192.

As a result, Gian Matteo Giberti left his successors a well-established path and all that was required to advance further on the road to Church reform was to continue in his footsteps.¹⁷ This is essentially the implicit message in the second edition of Giberti's *Constitutions for nuns*, printed in 1565 at the behest of Bernardo Navagero, who died in that same year, after only two years of Episcopal governance, leaving stewardship of the diocese of Verona to his beloved nephew, Agostino Valier.¹⁸ This second edition of Giberti's instructions was introduced by a translation into the vernacular Italian of certain chapters of the Tridentine decree which pertained to regular clerical reform for the religious condition of women.¹⁹ It was accompanied by the *Nuovi Ordini* (New Orders) prepared by Navagero, followed by two dense pastoral letters addressed by Bishop Luigi Lippomano *alle venerande madri abbadesse et priore, et a tutte le religiose delli monasteri di Verona* (to the venerable superior mothers and all the nuns of the monasteries of Verona).²⁰ In the end, *alcuni utilissimi trattati pertinenti à persone religiose* (some useful treatises for religious people) were proposed; among these, a short work (again found and printed by Luigi Lippomano) entitled *alcuni belli avisi et utilissimi ricordi, fondati sopra gli essempli et miracoli de santi antichi* (some good advice and useful reflections, based on examples and miracles of ancient saints), was singled out for its high educational value.²¹ This well-constructed and detailed plan shows the clear desire of Navagero—who had followed the final phase of the Tridentine Council as papal legate, and had been able to appreciate many facets of Giberti's pastoral plan—to praise Giberti's model of reform as the most sophisticated point of convergence among the tradition of the early

¹⁷ Viviani has rightly observed as Giberti tried to ensure continuity in the time to his reform work, achieving from the Republic of Venice the official approval and patronage of the *Constitutions of nuns*. The *princeps* of the *Constitutions*, in fact, ended with a letter of the Doge Pietro Lando, dated 28 February 1539 and addressed to the Rectors of Verona, the Podesta Christopher Morosini and the Captain Giacomo Marcello, who were invested of the task of ensuring compliance with the rules laid down by Giberti for the regulation of life of city female monasteries. See Viviani, «Il vescovo di Verona G. M. Giberti», 159-160.

¹⁸ *Decreto del Sacro Concilio Tridentino sopra la Riforma delle Monache, insieme con le costituzioni de esse monache per la città, et diocesi di Verona. Con aggiunta anche di alcuni utilissimi trattati pertinenti a persone religiose* (s.l.: s.n., 1565).

¹⁹ Compared to the Tridentine decree, the chapters VIII, XI-XIV, XX-XXI are omitted. *Decreto del Sacro Concilio Tridentino*, fol. 1v-8r.

²⁰ These are letters written by Lippomano in 1549, during his legation in Germany. Luigi Lippomano was bishop of Verona from 1548 until 1558. *Decreto del Sacro Concilio Tridentino*, fol. 61r-83r.

²¹ *Decreto del Sacro Concilio Tridentino*, fol. 85r-128v.

Church, the recent history of the Veronese Church, and the new challenges posed by the application of Tridentine provisions. Navagero's desire was fulfilled by his nephew, Agostino Valier, who staged his intervention in Verona's convents, inspired by a profound awareness of the important achievements and great potential of Giberti's reform programme.²²

Valier quickly became aware of the excellent results produced by Giberti's reform. In fact, on October 6th, 1565, just five months after his election to Verona's bishopric, he was to present to his mentor and living exemplar of pastoral care, the Archbishop of Milan Carlo Borromeo²³, a decidedly positive comprehensive picture of the moral and spiritual behaviour of male and female monasteries of his diocese:

Among the many ways in which Our Lord God has graced this city, it is of great moment that the monasteries are ordained in such a way as to give example to the monasteries of other cities, and on this point, for my role and the care that I must have of this church, I wanted to be fully apprised, and I felt great comfort, giving thanks of this to Our Lord God forever.²⁴

In Agostino Valier's time there were a total of nineteen convents in the diocese of Verona, out of which eighteen laid within the city walls and one was located in the village of Legnago, in accordance with the prevailing town definition of female religious institutions of the Old Regime.²⁵

²² The bishopric of Agostino Valier in Verona covers more than forty years (1565-1606) and interests a nodal period both for the history of Church and the history of education of European context, in which the confessional identities became central in the educational processes. On his life and pastoral-educational activities see: Patrizi, *Pastoralità ed educazione*.

²³ For a first overview of Carlo Borromeo's pastoral programme we should remember, among the many works: Franco Buzzi and Danilo Zardin (eds.), *Carlo Borromeo e l'opera della «grande riforma». Cultura, religione e arti del governo nella Milano del pieno Cinquecento* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana editoriale, 1997) and John M. Headley and John B. Tomaro (eds.), *San Carlo Borromeo: catholic reform and ecclesiastical politics* (Washington: The Folger Shakespeare library, 1988). On the relationship between Carlo Borromeo and Agostino Valier see: Lorenzo Tacchella, *San Carlo Borromeo e il card. Agostino Valier: carteggio; prefazione di sua eminenza il cardinale Michele Browne* (Verona: Istituto per gli studi storici, 1972).

²⁴ Letter of Agostino Valier to Carlo Borromeo, Verona, October 6, 1565; Biblioteca Ambrosiana of Milan (hereafter BAM), F. 106 Inf., 45r-45v, 69v; published in Tacchella, *San Carlo Borromeo ed il card. Agostino Valier*, 92-93.

²⁵ For the specific case-study of Verona see Prosperi, *Tra evangelismo e controriforma*, 183, and Viviani, «Il vescovo di Verona G.M. Giberti», 135; while on the process of urbanization of convents see Zarri, *Recinti*, 117-126.

These details are deduced from the report *ad limina* of 1607, completed a year after Valier's death, which shows that the city's monasteries followed the rules of «the Order of St. Francis, St. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. Dominic», and that, with the exception of the nuns of St. Catherine of Siena, governed by the Dominicans of St. Anastasia, the nuns of St. Clare, «subject to the Minors of Observance of St. Bernardino», and the Benedictine nuns of the rich monastery of St. Michael Archangel, «governed by the Cathedral Chapter», «the remaining female monasteries [... were all] subjected to the jurisdiction of the Bishop». With respect to the nuns' conduct, the same document specified: «each nunnery has a well-defined number of religious women and for forty years, a very strict seclusion is observed».²⁶ About the convent of St. Catherine of Siena, we know it was instituted in the late Fifteenth century, and had prospered during the course of the following century to the point that in 1600 could accommodate as many as one hundred and twenty nuns. The Benedictine convent of St. Michele was one of the oldest and most prestigious monasteries of Verona, known for the breadth of its possessions, for the refinement of its furnishings and the beauty of the nuns' textile work; at the end of the Sixteenth century it had reached the height of its splendour, housing sixty nuns, coming mostly from the most distinguished patrician families of the city. As for the convent of St. Clare, we learn from the Veronese historian Biancolini that in 1600 the monastery housed one hundred and fifty nuns, who lived «with great austerity, and very retired».²⁷ About the monastery of Legnago, instead, the Proceedings of pastoral visits of 1580, 1594 and 1597, reveal that the monastery was dedicated to St. Bartolomeo, that the «propositions for regulation, order and form of the monastery» were established during the pastoral visit of 1580 and that it was founded in 1584. In the Proceedings of the pastoral visit of

²⁶ See Alberto Valier, *Dello stato della Chiesa veronese*, 1607, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Sacra Congregazione del Concilio, Visite ad Limana, Verona, parte I; published in Lorenzo Tacchella, «La diocesi di Verona nei secoli XVI e XVII. Dai processi Concistoriali e dalle Relazioni delle Visite ad Limina Apostolorum», *Studi storici veronesi Luigi Simeoni*, 24-25 (1974-1975): 119-120.

²⁷ See Tullio Lenotti, *Chiese e conventi scomparsi* (Verona: edizioni di Vita Veronese, 1995, 2 vols.), vol. 1, 13-16 (St. Caterina da Siena); 51-57 (St. Michele Arcangelo); Giovanni Battista Giuseppe Biancolini, *Notizie storiche delle Chiese di Verona raccolte [...]* (Verona, per Alessandro Scolari al Ponte dalle Navi, 1749-1771, 8 vols.), vol. 3, 239-241 (St. Chiara); vol. 5/1, 165-220 (St. Michele Arcangelo); vol. 4, 356-360, vol. 7, 224-228 (St. Caterina da Siena).

1594 there is a description of monastery church, while in those of the visit of 1597 there are details on its revenues.²⁸

Hence, during his episcopate, Valier had worked hard and, as the Report *ad limina* reveals, with excellent results, to consolidate the work undertaken by Giberti and, more generally, from all of its predecessors relating to female monastic reform. However, Valier didn't always have the possibility to work on 'already ploughed' fields. In fact, in the above-mentioned letter of October 1565 to the Archbishop of Milan, the Bishop of Verona could not hide his disappointment about the serious situation of «one monastery entrusted to the care of the Humiliati fathers».²⁹ Valier was referring to the convent of St. Christopher of Verona, under the jurisdiction of the Humiliati, an order under Borromeo's protection, which, after some unsuccessful reform attempts, was suppressed by Pope Pius V in 1571.³⁰ In a June 27, 1567 letter, also addressed to Borromeo, Valier returned to the question of the nuns of St. Christopher, whom he had found «in wretched state, full of clutter and without any government» following a visit upon request of the Verona magistrates.³¹ Four more years passed before Agostino Valier was able to resolve this situation, for which he on several occasions requested the advice and intervention of Borromeo. In November 1568 he notified the Archbishop of Milan that he had placed the convent under his authority, as suggested by Borromeo himself and in compliance with a papal provision enacted in that year, which withdrew the Humiliati from the control of the male branch of the Order.³² However, it was only after the bull of suppression *Quem*

²⁸ Cf. Agostino Valier, *Visite pastorali a chiese della diocesi di Verona anni 1565-1589. Trascrizione dei Registri XIII-XIV delle Visite Pastorali, a cura dell'Archivio della Curia Diocesana di Verona* (Verona: Archivio Storico Curia Diocesana, 2001), 318 (for the visit of 1580 and quotation), 518-519 (for the visit of 1597); Agostino Valier, *Visite pastorali a chiese extraurbane della diocesi di Verona anni 1592-1599. Trascrizione ei registri XV-XVI delle Visite Pastorali, a cura dell'Archivio Storico della Curia Diocesana di Verona* (Verona: Archivio Storico Curia Diocesana, 2000), 122 (for the visit of 1594).

²⁹ Letter of Agostino Valier to Carlo Borromeo, Verona, October 6, 1565.

³⁰ On the presence of Humiliati in Verona area, see: Gino Barbieri, «Un insediamento dell'Ordine degli Umiliati», in *Chiese e monasteri nel territorio veronese*, ed. Giorgio Borelli (Verona: Banca popolare di Verona, 1981), 196-208; Franca Baldi Cammarota, «Origini della domus degli Umiliati di S. Christopher di Verona», *Studi storici veronesi Luigi Simeoni*, 24 (5), (1974-75): 46-73.

³¹ Letter of Agostino Valier to Carlo Borromeo, Verona June 27, 1567; BAM, F. 84 Inf., 87r-88v; published in Tacchella, *San Carlo Borromeo ed il card. Agostino Valier*, 95-97.

³² Letter of Agostino Valier to Carlo Borromeo, Verona June 27, 1567; BAM, F. 84 Inf., 87r-88v; published in Tacchella, *San Carlo Borromeo ed il card. Agostino Valier*, 95-97.

admodum sollicitus pater of 1571, that the Bishop of Verona finally placed the convent of St. Christopher under the supervision of some Benedictine nuns of the convent of St. Maria degli Angeli, so that they could introduce their Rule.³³ The leadership of the convent was then assigned to Angela Vico, who was made perpetual abbess and held this position until her death on April 23, 1619. In this context, a nineteenth-century biographer of Valier, Cesare Cavattoni, observed, based on reports from historian Biancolini, that

this distinguished woman found four Humiliates, who asked humbly to stay, and finding them to possess a good and docile spirit, she obtained from the Bishop the grace to dress them with the Benedictine habit and keep them with her.³⁴

The case of the convent of St. Christopher was thus closed. In the early period of Valier's Episcopal governance this convent had represented the main pocket of resistance to the female monastic reform process undertaken by Giberti, a process which Valier was able to perfect and adapt to the Council's provisions, leaving the legacy of a comprehensive legal framework, in which each convent was perfectly adapted to the norms of seclusion and, more generally, to Tridentine discipline.³⁵

³³ Biancolini fully reports the document containing this provision, in which there is a reference to five nuns from Santa Maria degli Angeli intended to St. Christopher; of these only three actually moved to St. Christopher, i.e. sister Angela from Vico, sister Arcangela Giolfino and sister Samaritana. Cf. Biancolini, *Notizie storiche*, vol. 6, 163-165, 173.

³⁴ Cesare Cavattoni, «Sulla vita e sopra alcune opere del prestantissimo Agostino Valerio cardinale e vescovo di Verona. Discorso dell'editore», in *Due opere latine del precarissimo Agostino Valerio cardinale e vescovo di Verona le quali col loro volgarizzamento il sacerdote Cesare Cavattoni pone a luce [...]* (Verona: dalla tipografia di Giuseppe Civelli, 1862), XII; Biancolini, *Notizie storiche*, vol. 6, 153, 173.

³⁵ The *Constitutions of the Nuns* by Giberti certainly gave a fundamental contribution to the reform process of female monasteries of Verona diocese, but it must be said also that some resistance to old customs and habits condemned by Giberti provisions and, then by the Council of Trent, continued to remain over time. That appears by the reading of *Ordini et decreti per le monache della Città, et Diocesi di Verona, publicati, et stampati di ordine dell'Illustriss., et Reverendiss. Monsign. Sebastiano Pisani, vescovo di Verona* («Orders and Decrees for the nuns of city and diocese of Verona, published and printed by order of the Most Illustrious and Reverend Monsignor Sebastian Pisani, Bishop of Verona»). This «little book», in fact, contains the decrees issued by the Bishop Pisani and his predecessors, Agostino Valier, Alberto Valier and Marco Giustiniani, about the behave in convents and confirms that—even in the middle of Seventeenth century—it remained the need to reiterate prohibitions and rules to be observed in matter of «dowry, gifts, banquets, and other costs», as well as on relations with family members and people outside the monastery. For the quotations: *Orders and Decrees for the nuns of city and diocese of Verona, published and printed by order of the Most Illustrious and Reverend Monsignor Sebastian Pisani, Bishop of Verona* (Verona: Per Gio. Battista Merlo, 1657), 6, 35.

THE PATERNAL WARNINGS OF *RECOLLECTIONS LEFT TO NUNS*

During his long Episcopal government (1565-1606), Valier paid particular attention to women's monasteries, the most explicit proof of which comes from one of his pastoral works devoted to the monastic state. This work was composed on the occasion of the pastoral visit made by Valier in the Jubilee year 1575, which he describes in a passage addressed to the nuns of his diocese, in these terms:

I have visited you many times, as you know, and I have heard each of you one by one, and visiting you for the Lent of this holy year of Holy Jubilee, I wish that all may live piously in this life to be then placed in the roll of saints in the other.

The pastoral work we refer to is entitled *Ricordi di monsignor Agost. Valerio, vescovo di Verona lasciati alle monache nella sua visitazione fatta l'anno del santiss. giubileo, 1575* (Recollections of Monsignor Agostino Valerio, Bishop of Verona, left during his visit to the nuns made in the holy jubilee year 1575), first published in Venice in 1575, by Bolognino Zaltieri.³⁶

Valier's work presents a clear example of that literary genre addressed to cloistered nuns, dictated by «educational and devotional exigencies» that flourished in the period from the late Sixteenth and early Seventeenth centuries.³⁷ As such, it belongs on the same shelf as three educational treatises on the subjects of, respectively, virgins, widows, and married women, which the Bishop of Verona published in the same year, 1575, as a single volume entitled *Institutione d'ogni stato lodevole delle donne christiane* (Institution

³⁶ Agostino Valier, *Ricordi di monsignor Agost. Valerio, vesc. di Verona lasciati alle monache nella sua visitazione fatta l'anno del santiss. giubileo, 1575* (Venetia: appresso Bolognino Zaltieri, 1575). Hereafter *Recollections left to nuns*. The quotation in the before paragraph is taken from fol. 25v.

³⁷ For an overview on the educational literature for women produced in Italy between the Fifteenth and Seventeenth centuries, see: Danilo Zardin, «Mercato librario e letture devote nella svolta del Cinquecento tridentino. Note in margine ad un inventario milanese di libri di monache», in *Stampa, libri e letture a Milano nell'età di Carlo Borromeo*, ed. Nicola Raponi and Angelo Turchini (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1992), 135-243; Katherine Gill, «Women and the Production of Religious Literature in the Vernacular, 1300-1500», in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy. A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, ed. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1994), 64-104; Gabriella Zarri (ed.), *Donna, disciplina e creanza cristiana dal xv al xvii secolo* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1996); Tiziana Plebani, *Il genere dei libri: storie e rappresentazioni della lettura al femminile e al maschile tra Medioevo ed età moderna* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2001), in particular chapter I (*Le lettrici tra Medioevo ed età moderna*), 15-56.

of every praiseworthy state of Christian women).³⁸ Under this title three separate treatises were collected, each of which had a specific addressee, presented as model of perfection for the treated condition of life, so *Del Modo di vivere proposto alle vergini che si chiamano demesse* (The Way of life offered to maidens who are called Demesse) was dedicated to the Ursulina and Bishop's sister Donata Valier, *Della vera et perfetta viduità* (Of true and perfect widowhood) to the Venetian noblewoman Adriana Contarini and *Instituzione del modo di vivere delle donne maritate* (Institution of the lifestyle of married women) to another Bishop's sister, Laura Valier, married Gradenigo. The three walks of life proposed in these three treatises, even if deemed legitimate methods of spiritual improvement, were described as inferior life choices with respect to the monastic condition, which for Valier and especially for the Tridentine Church was absolutely «the highest praiseworthy state» of Christian women.³⁹ It is thus understandable that the Bishop of Verona chose to reserve a completely separate volume for the *Recollections left to nuns* in order to further emphasise the primary and exemplary status assigned to the monastic state in contrast to other honourable conditions of life traditionally reserved to the female sphere. The Canon of Verona Pier Francesco Zini, writing of the particular task entrusted to this treatise, in the dedication to the above-mentioned *Institution of every praiseworthy state of Christian women*, addressed to the Venetian noblewoman Vienna Contarini, stated:

In the good management and virtuous life of women there is not merely half, as others believe, of the perfection and happiness of houses, cities, republics, kingdoms and every state of the world, but almost the entire sum. Inasmuch as (leaving

³⁸ Agostino Valier, *Instituzione d'ogni stato lodevole delle donne cristiane* (In Venetia: per Bolognino Zalieri, 1575). Hereafter *Institution of every praiseworthy state of Christian women*. For an analysis of the three treatises: Elisabetta Patrizi, «For good education of my beloved people: Agostino Valier and the Company of St. Ursula of Verona», *Estudios sobre educación*, 23 (2012): 99-116; Claudia Di Filippo Bareggi, «Le donne nella chiesa borromaica», *Studia Borromaica*, 20 (2006): 155-184. Now the two Valier's works devoted to the female world (*Institution of every praiseworthy state of Christian women* and *Recollections left to nuns*) are available in two modern recent editions: one introduced and commented in English, edited by Francesco Lucioli [Agostino Valier, *Instituzione d'ogni stato lodevole delle donne cristiane and Ricordi di Monsignor Agostino Valier Vescovo di Verona lasciati alle monachenella sua visitazione fatta l'anno del santissimo Giubileo 1575* (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2015)] and the other edited in Italian by Elisabetta Patrizi, together with other «educational works» by Agostino Valier (*Pastoralità ed educazione*, vol. 2: Lettere, decreti, ordinamenti e scritti educative, 258-364).

³⁹ Valier, *The Way of life offered to maidens who are called Demesse*, chapter 5, 11-14.

aside for now nuns and cloistered virgins, women who professed vows, who with their lamps lit by living faith and ardent charity, watching and waiting for the heavenly bridegroom, with devout prayers in convents, like fortresses and impregnable fortresses defend the people from divine wrath, pestilence, famine, wars and sins, of which state of virgins this wise bishop speaks widely in other works, which already exist, but which for good reasons will appear separately) these women are well educated, they govern their homes well, capably direct their children to pity, and toward every virtue incline the husbands, relatives, and families who comprise their communities.⁴⁰

By emphasising the fundamental contribution made by women to the health and safety of families and society, Pier Francesco Zini not only highlighted the need to prepare girls through appropriate educational pathways to the tasks they would accomplish as adults, but he proposed a long digression entirely focused on the peculiarities of the monastic condition, which he explained more fully in the following dedication to *Recollections left to nuns*, similarly addressed to Vienna Contarini:

Given that in the past I presented you with the beautiful and pious little work of the *Institution of every praiseworthy state of Christian women*, given to me by my gracious master, the Most Reverend Bishop of Verona, it is only fitting to perfect this gift, adding that which was missing which is perhaps the most noble part, that is, the treatise on nuns and cloistered virgins, which is among those works the eye, the heart, and the soul.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Valier, *The Way of life offered to maidens who are called Demesse*, fol. VIr-VIIIr. Some information on the life of Vienna Contarini, nephew of the doge Andrea Gritti, emerge from the dedicatory letter to the *Recollections left to nuns* (fol., 2r, 3v-4r), in which Pier Francesco Zini, after mentioning the family relationship of Contarini with the Bishop of Paphos Pietro Contarini, qualified the Venetian noblewoman as wife of Paolo Contarini, one of the most distinguished members of the Senate of Venice, and finally recalled her strong bond with the granddaughter Vendramini Vienna, at the time betrothed to Polo Nani.

⁴¹ Valier, *The Way of life offered to maidens who are called Demesse*, fol. 3r-3v. The dedicatory letter that introduces the *Recollections left to nuns* contains a precise date, that is February 15, 1575. This date can be taken as a *terminus ante quem* for the dedicatory letter and the publication of the *princeps* edition of *Institution of every praiseworthy state of Christian women*, because Pier Francesco Zini, in the abovementioned passage, says that he paid homage to Vienna Contarini in the past few days with the «beautiful and pious little works» collected in this edition.

The *Recollections left to nuns* was thus to crown the proposed trilogy of the *Institution of every praiseworthy state of Christian women*, focused as it was on the most noble and perfect *status vitae* granted to the female sphere, the one toward which every woman, be she virgin, wife, or widow, had to look to acquire the rudiments of Christian manners. Such manners were composed by shared, external behavioural codes (lowered gaze and bowed head), considered to be extrinsic manifestations of an inner attitude and a pedagogical plan that nuns were especially called upon to embody, but that was valid for all women and whose goal was the outline of a *modus vivendi* which, albeit with different nuances and qualities, no woman, regardless of her existential condition, could refuse to respect and assimilate.⁴² While remaining faithful to the «pure, simple, fatherly» style adopted in the three books of *Institution of every praiseworthy state of Christian women*, which was typical of his pastoral works,⁴³ Bishop Valier for the *Recollections left to nuns* chose a particularly colourful and evocative style of prose, replete with vivid images intended to leave an indelible mark on the memory and consciousness of the readers to whom the treatise was addressed. In the twenty-nine short chapters of this work Valier, moving from large frescoes of the Last Judgment to intimate and heartfelt scenes of individual meditation, proposed a series of recollections, presented as advice and admonitions, designed to guide a nun's existence with a few clear rules for living, which were to remain impressed in her mind. But the *Recollections left to nuns* was not only intended to provide a small handbook of useful precepts to better address the tasks specific to the monastic state; it actually also evidences Valier's desire to illustrate and thus help his readers to understand the deeper meaning of the main provisions of Giberti's *Constitutions of nuns*.

⁴² The topic of the influence of the monastic *forma vivendi* in the definition of the good manners code of secular society in old regime was faced with cross-references and parallels between the disciplinary educational literature for religious people (rules, constitutions, behaviour treaties, ascetic manuals) and that devoted to secular world (educational treaties, devotional manuals, courtesy books), written between Middle Ages and the Modern Age, in particular by: Giovanni Pozzi, «Occhi Bassi», in *Alternatim*, ed. Giovanni Pozzi (Milano, Aldelphi, 1996), 93-142; Dilwyn Knox, «Disciplina: le origini monastiche clericali del buon comportamento nell'Europa cattolica del Cinquecento e del primo Seicento», in *Disciplina dell'anima, disciplina del corpo e disciplina della società tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. Paolo Prodi (Bologna: il Mulino, 1994), 63-100 (Annali dell'istituto storico italo-germanico, 40).

⁴³ Valier, *Institution of every praiseworthy state of Christian women*, fol. Vr.

In this context, it is interesting to bear in mind that, simultaneously with Giberti's work, in 1539 Tullio Crispolti a priest and close collaborator of the Bishop of Verona published a work entitled, *Alcune cose sopra li voti et delle monache* (Some thoughts on the vows and customs of nuns).⁴⁴ Once again we are presented with a work in the literary vein of *ad status*; however, in contrast to Valier's work, Crispolti appears focused exclusively on the prescriptive and normative dimension. The priest from Rieti's chapters focused mainly on the theme of monastic vows and on two key aspects of Giberti's reform, namely, cloister and everyday life, which give special focus to an analysis of the main factors leading to the decline of monastic discipline.⁴⁵ Crispolti's treatise lacks the pedagogical perspective that is Valier's hallmark. Despite Giberti's influence on both works, they approach the issue of female monastic life from very different angles; this is due not only to each author's different religious sensibility, but also to the different historical context from which each work springs –one at the beginning of the reform process and the other when the process was all but normalised.

In this context, the *Recollections left to nuns* springs from a deeply felt need to provide support for Giberti's *Constitutions for nuns*, aimed at the direct beneficiaries of the reform and offering, through the simple and immediate formulas of educational prose, a behavioural model for everyday life.⁴⁶ In light of these considerations, it is not surprising that, whereas Crispolti devoted an entire chapter to monastic seclusion,

⁴⁴ Tullio Crispolti, *Alcune cose sopra li voti et costumi delle Monache ad instruzione loro, utili anco a tutti christiani che sono sotto il voto del battesimo ad obedientia di Iesu Christo nostro Salvatore, raccolte da Tullio Crispoldo da Riete* (Vinegia: per Stephano da Sabbio, 1539).

⁴⁵ Cf. Zarrì, «I circoli spirituali femminili della riforma», 36-37.

⁴⁶ The work of the priest from Rieti sprang from the sermons taken by Giberti during the pastoral visit of 1530. Ever since Crispolti pledged himself to transfer on paper the teachings orally transmitted by the Bishop during sermons. Thus the *Sommario de Messer Tullio Crispoldo de le prediche fatte ne la visita di Verona del MDXXX* (Summary of Messer Tullio Crispolti of sermons of the visit of Verona in 1530) was born. This work, which allows to understand the main programmatic lines of Giberti pastoral action, contains three sermons dedicated to the *renovatio* of religious life of nuns. It is just within these sermons that we can find the original core of the work *Alcune cose sopra li voti et costume delle monache* (Some things above them vows and costumes of nuns). For an analysis of the contents of the work: Paola Pavignani, «Tullio Crispoldi da Rieti e il suo Sommario di prediche», *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 28 (1974): 536-562; Paolo Salvetto, *Tullio Crispoldi nella crisi religiosa del Cinquecento: le difficili pratiche del viver cristiano* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2009), 192-205.

explaining the various reasons for its necessity,⁴⁷ Valier gave it a nod of only a few brief words,⁴⁸ and chose instead to commence his discourse on the monastic state, presenting it, in the first instance, as the condition of female life with greater freedom; because —as he explained— «nun means solitary, means isolated in order to cry for her own sins and those of others»,⁴⁹ away from the miseries of world, completely immersed in prayer and focused only on the health of the soul. The monastic state, therefore, was described as:

an escape from the world, a port in the dangerous sea of this life, a school of peace, a place of good spirits, a house of faith, hope and charity, a room for prayer, father of contemplation, refuge for the people, a defence of city, a fortress of the Holy Church, adversary of the Devil, a friend of silence, a teacher of discretion, an owner of humility and obedience, a companion of angelic nature, very grateful to the heavenly Father, who prefers to dwell in the cells of monks much more frequently than the palaces of kings and great lords.⁵⁰

Given these characteristics, monasteries could not appear to be other than «fortresses of the world», which thanks to the prayers of the religious people hosted within, tried to hold «open the door of the mercy» of God for mankind. Within these «bulwarks of Christian people»,⁵¹ then, it is not difficult to imagine —as Valier suggested— the cell of the nun as the «room of Christ», or the cross as a «banner against the temptations» or the choir as the «semblance of Paradise». ⁵² For the Bishop of Verona, every single room of the convent was a place capable of training the mind to the contemplation of God, because —Valier explained to the readers of the *Recollections*— «the convents exist for no other reason and the holy cloister does not exist if not for ardently loving God», and for removing

⁴⁷ Crispolti, *Some things above the vows and costumes of nuns*, fol. 43r-56r.

⁴⁸ In the treaty Valier speaks specifically of enclosure only in chap. X, in which describes the institute as a «gift» that keeps away from «the madness and miseries of the world» and allows to live in the monastery as in a «spiritual garden». Valier, *Ricordi lasciati alle monache*, fol. 19r-21v.

⁴⁹ Valier, *The Way of life offered to maidens who are called Demesse*, 14.

⁵⁰ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 9v-10r.

⁵¹ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 8v.

⁵² Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 26r-26v.

all those obstacles and distractions arising from the century's tumults, vanities, and anxieties.⁵³

Within this frame Valier placed the «portrait of the perfect nun»,⁵⁴ which he initially sketched with the help of the three main titles traditionally attributed to her, namely, that of «sister and bride of Christ», «Queen» and «Partner of the angels», for each of which the author gave a specific explanation. Valier thus took care to clarify that the «good nun» could be defined as «the sister of Christ», because she was able to recognise «the same God the Father, the same Holy Mother Church», and to consistently achieve «the honour of the same house of God», i.e., the convent. He also explained that the nun could claim the title of *sponsa Christi* thanks to the observance of the «holy vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty», maintained by «the most excellent virtue, which is called *latría*, [... which] means sacrifice made through the heart and offering of the self's will to God».⁵⁵ Finally, the Bishop of Verona recalled prayer and meditation as the conditions which allowed the nun to be called «Queen of her feelings»,⁵⁶ and as a «Queen», free from the service of world and filled only by the «strength of good works and [...] good examples»,⁵⁷ the good nun could thus be defined as a «Partner of angels».

At a second descriptive level, the Bishop of Verona noted that the nun had to be a «good disciple of the Holy Fathers Benedict, Augustine, Francis, and Dominic», i.e., those who he then defined as «the fathers, givers of the Rules»,⁵⁸ and proposed a dense summary of titles and definitions arranged in an erudite crescendo of intensity, through which he depicted the fundamental virtues of the perfect nun:

teacher of humility, obedience, charity, patience, prudence, chastity and other Christian virtues, lover of silence, fasting and poverty, enemy of property and curiosity, accompanied by the mother of all virtues, the discretion capable of fleeing speakers out of turn; poor in spirit, meek, used to sprinkle her prayers with

⁵³ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 10r.

⁵⁴ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 14v.

⁵⁵ About the condition of *sponsa Christi*: Zarri, *Recinti*, 267-282.

⁵⁶ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 37r.

⁵⁷ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 22r.

⁵⁸ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 14v-15r.

tears, and through them to perform a cleansing, through which the Lord God washes away ugly thoughts of her convent and also those of all the world; not indulgent, but eager that souls be healed with medicine of penance, nevertheless compassionate, pure of heart, far from any fraud, and free from every stain, which could make her less grateful in the eyes of God, peaceful, not responding to every word, but tolerating all for the love of God, ready to tolerate being despised and to tolerate gossip and hatred for God's sake, not obstinate, not gossiping, not contentious, not a tattler; not a tell-tale, mortified, zealous for the glory of God as well as for the honour of the monastery, and the health of her soul, enemy of idleness, occupied more by listening than speaking, not used to laughter, quick to sigh, dead to the world, united with Christ.⁵⁹

At the end of this portrait and the short chapter devoted to it, Valier introduced a significant exhortation, which clearly shows the fundamental educational role he assigned to the *Recollections left to nuns*.

Addressed specifically to the female religious women of his diocese, the Bishop invited them constantly to keep their eyes trained not only on the Rules of their order and the Constitutions –clearly referring to Giberti's *Constitutions for nuns*– but also the newly presented portrait of the «perfect nun», describing it as a kind of mirror, to which each nun was invited to turn her eyes often, «endeavouring to resemble him» as much as possible, because, as Valier clarified,

Rules frequently include punishments, as do constitutions, as cures for disobedience and other errors; these punishments are often how fathers control their children, but they feel greatly consoled if they see their children naturally inclined toward the good; it is thus my great desire that, after many visits I wanted to give each of you this portrait, so that you may seek to purify yourselves and become perfect, so that you will be found worthy brides of Christ on that day upon which you will be judged.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 14v-15r.

⁶⁰ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 15v-16r.

Valier had therefore made a direct appeal to his personal pastoral experience in writing *Recollections left to nuns*, so as to offer to women who had chosen the cloister a work that was truly educational, i.e., that engendered in a religious woman a complete, conscious adaptation of her actions and thoughts to monasticism, so as to better prepare her for the inexorable appointment with the afterlife and particularly with the Day of Judgment. In this regard, Claudia di Filippo Bareggi has correctly observed that in the *Recollections left to nuns* «the reflection on monastic life is carried out mainly in the negative»,⁶¹ because the argument focuses on the topic of the Novissimi developed through meditation on the Day of Judgment and the «miseries of sin».⁶² In this work, we note that as many as six chapters are focused on the «dreadful day» of the final judgment, which is described using the image of the terrible tribunal of God, called to scrutinize every aspect of the life of the nun. The composition of this «awful court» deserves some attention. In the face of opposition, Valier of course ascribed a prominent place to the devil, but also placed here the «father-givers of the Rules» and Jesus himself, as an example of the speeches that each member of this relentless group of accusers would give on the day of judgment, finding the nuns guilty of having strayed from their Rule.⁶³ For the defence, Valier pointed to a single person who was willing to ask for clemency for the negligence and sins of his «sisters», he being «their loving father», namely, the Bishop.⁶⁴ Even for this latter Valier proposed a simulation of the final speech, but in different tone, because the Bishop invoked the infirmity of the female gender, the madness of the world, and, finally, mercy from heaven. However, he also demonstrated that there is faint hope of salvation when the nuns are guilty «of not paying some parts of their debt».⁶⁵

The intense scenes outlined in the chapters devoted to the Day of Judgment, which were painted by Valier as a sort of «memorial» to be read daily in order to renew in religious women the desire to view the convent

⁶¹ Cf. di Filippo Bareggi, «Le donne nella chiesa borromaica», 171.

⁶² Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 21v.

⁶³ In the *Recollections left to nuns* there are six chapters on the issue of judgment (from chapter 8 to chapter 13) and seven on the topic of sins (from chapter 15 to chapter 21). For the quotation see *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 17r and 27r.

⁶⁴ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 24r.

⁶⁵ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 25v.

as the «image of the holy Heaven», allowed the Bishop to introduce the delicate, fundamental subject of sins, which he dissected by proposing a specific list of all vices which the «good nun» had to flee in order to maintain the health of her soul. He therefore invited them to keep pride at a distance, calling it that «satisfaction» and «pleasure in surpassing others», that «mad desire for praise», evanescent as smoke and flimsy as straw.⁶⁶ He recalled that the soul of the «good nun» could not contain the terrible «moth» of envy and nor could it house the «seeds of greed». The Bishop then recommended that the tongue be mute and the ears deaf in the face of any kind of «defamation, gossip and slander».⁶⁷ Finally, he exhorted them not to let anger, which he felt easily «takes root and becomes hatred», disfigure the face of the religious.⁶⁸

One must emphasise that Valier devoted an entire chapter of his work to those «unhappy nuns», who turned away from the «rules of religious life», to which he addressed himself directly, showing all his «fatherly love» and «particular care», as consistently proven by his «frequent visits which —as the Bishop recalled— I have made, and caused to make, and many signs of generosity and charity that I have shown with you». One could conjecture that in writing this chapter Valier was inspired by the nuns of St. Christopher, who had given many problems in the early years of his Episcopal governance.⁶⁹ It should be noted, however, that the main purpose behind Valier's work was not to trace the profile of the «bad nun»; to the contrary, the presentation of behaviours to be avoided was needed to introduce, through a classic literary trope, the vices in contrast to the virtues, i.e., the features that characterised the «perfect nun», the treatise's actual main focus.⁷⁰

The Bishop, therefore, true to the educational aim of *Recollections left to nuns*, did not neglect to provide useful advice for those in pursuit of the perfection of the soul and to facilitate the achievement of inner unity with Christ, the primary goal of a religious person. He particularly encouraged frequent meditation on the life of Jesus, giving great importance to the

⁶⁶ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 28r-28v.

⁶⁷ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 29v.

⁶⁸ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 32v.

⁶⁹ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, c. 39r.

⁷⁰ Cf. Pozzi, «Occhi bassi», 103-117.

image of Christ's body suffering on the cross, which he painted with a vibrant palate which enabled him to evoke an emotional impact of rare intensity:

If you think —the cleric suggested to the nuns— two or three times every day, that you could really see the passion of Jesus Christ, and if you have compassion for those bitter torments which he sustained for the safety of the world, and recount to yourselves what were the pains which the King of the World has borne, my husband, for my sake, while those holy feet and those sacred hands were pierced by nails, while that tender and virginal flesh was torn by scourges and stretched on the cross unto the dislocation of bones and nerves, here you may recall that verse of David: *Foderunt manus meas, et pedes meos, et dinumeraverunt omnia ossa mea.*⁷¹

This passage is one of the most effective applications of the aforementioned linguistic «visual register», very common in pedagogical treatises and in devotional literature, as well as in prayer manuals and collections of sermons of the time, especially in reference to the episodes of Jesus' life, and particularly in those devoted to the sufferings of the passion and death.⁷² In this specific case, Valier exploited the mimetic potential between language and painting, drawing on the meditation technique proposed in one of the fundamental texts of the history of Catholic spirituality which was very dear to him, the *Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius of Loyola.⁷³

⁷¹ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 12r-12v; Ps 22(21), 17-18. The biblical quotation is from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

⁷² For the issue of the relationship between words and images in the post-Tridentine culture see: Marc Fumaroli, *L'école du silence. Le sentiment des images au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994).

⁷³ The affinity of Valier with Ignatian spirituality is proved by a text, remained manuscript, that he wrote on instance of Borromeo. We refer to *De oratione* or *De arte meditandi* that Valier composed between 1582 and 1583, to paraphrase a series of schemes, or rather *arbores*, relating to the techniques of meditation, elaborated by the Archbishop of Milan on the base of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. The work is currently available in a modern edition, edited by Carlo Marcora: Carlo Borromeo, *Ordo tractationis De oratione* (Milano: Gentrino Italiana, 1968). The edition features a reproduction of the synoptic tables of *De oratione*, taken from the manuscript F. 204 inf. of Biblioteca Ambrosiana, combined to the paraphrase of schemes, taken from the Ambrosiana manuscript D. 259 inf. In the introduction to the edition (pp. XI-XXII) a reconstruction of the main stages of *De oratione* writing is proposed.

The scenes of the passion were evoked by the Bishop of Verona with vivid and intense images, in an emotional climax whose purpose was to allow the religious woman to relive all the sequences of Christ's agony on the cross, leading to an «emotional contemplation», whose goal was to exhort until identification/empathy with the described suffering was achieved, so as to facilitate a process of meditation which, passing from the «eye of the imagination» to the heart, allowed a deep understanding of the infinite divine mercy, nourishing the nun with God's unconditional love.⁷⁴ Continuing the description of this path of improvement developed for the spiritual advancement of religious women, Valier introduced the matter of the meditation on God's benefits, especially those arising from being «made in the image and likeness of God», and living in the state of «Christian and religious women, largely free from earthly travails and harassment». At this stage of meditation, it followed that «all the kinds of tribulations, poverty, disease and orders given against their will», were intended to inculcate within the nun a desire for Christian virtues, particularly those of charity, patience, and prudence.⁷⁵ These instructions demonstrate that Valier had taken the lessons of *Spiritual Exercises* to heart and sought to transpose them to his *Recollections left to nuns*, resulting in a text meant not merely to be merely read but also «practised»; in which theoretical instructions alternated with concrete suggestions to be applied during those exercises of inner examination, which were to accompany the daily existence of a nun.

If, on the one hand, the Bishop reminded his readers of the importance of the traditional pillars of convent life, such as fasting and keeping «vigils», prayers and «disciplines», silence and charity, but also by measured industriousness, i.e., manual and domestic work, conscientiously balanced with the main activity of individual and collective prayer;⁷⁶ on the other hand, in the last chapters of *Recollections left to*

⁷⁴ Cf. Bolis, «Tra concilio e postconcilio» 174 for the quotation; for the analysis of the structure, sources and spread of Ignacio's text, see Guido Mongini, «Devozione e illuminazione. Direzione spirituale e esperienza religiosa negli Esercizi spirituali di Ignazio di Loyola», in *Storia della direzione spirituale*, ed. Giovanni Filoramo (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2006-2008), vol. 3: Gabriella Zarri (ed.), *L'età moderna*, 241-288, in particular 246-266.

⁷⁵ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 13v-14r.

⁷⁶ For an initial approach to the topic of *ratio temporis* applied to life of convents, with the related implications on the side of self-discipline of nuns, see: Mario Rosa, «La religiosa», in *L'uomo barocco*, ed. Rosario Villari (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2005), 222-229.

nuns, Valier emphasised the benefits derived from frequent sacraments, paying special attention to the practice of examination of the conscience. In this regard, Valier was careful to caution that one must approach the «spiritual nourishment» of the Eucharist with a soul free from sin, because it could be transformed to poison if it were consumed with the weight of vices or faults, whether secret or hidden «either for shame or malice». ⁷⁷ The Bishop, therefore, advised approaching this sacrament only after confession, which —he warned peremptorily— should in turn be prepared for through a meticulous examination of conscience which, if carried out with care, should lead to the compunction of the heart, or to that the «memory of sin [...] accompanied by pain», which did not disdain to cry the tears, which —the Bishop clarified— are «pleasing to the angels» and are useful to «mitigate the wrath of God». ⁷⁸ This is a critical passage of the work as the spiritual preparation required to approach these sacraments harkened back to that path of inner knowledge which represented for the Bishop of Verona the foundation of the experience of faith of any believer and particularly of the monk.

The plan of advice, directions, and warnings developed by Agostino Valier in the *Recollections left to nuns* ends, in circular manner, where it began, i.e., returning to its starting assumption as well as the central motif of the work, i.e., the equation for monastic *lifefuga mundi*. The Bishop, starting with the assumption that «we truly live, when we die to the world and live for God», ⁷⁹ in the final passages of his treatise reminded the nuns that they, by virtue of their role of *sponsa Christi*, were called to be free from «the mouth of the world», living their «vocation» in prayer, in order to maintain a constant dialogue with their bridegroom and to be an instrument of intercession for the peace and welfare for all the faithful, including the Bishop, who did not neglect to request the prayers of his «beloved sisters» to succeed in the difficult task of «serving well, and procuring in all cases the salvation of souls» committed to his care. ⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 43v-44r.

⁷⁸ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 41v.

⁷⁹ Valier, *Recollections left to nuns*, fol. 36v, 44v-45r.

⁸⁰ On the «function of public utility» attributed to monasteries, see Zarri, *Recinti*, 63-70.

CONCLUSION

The Council of Trent imposed on the religious world of women the observance of a rule and fidelity to the religious profession, whose cornerstone was a life lived in isolated convents, protected from incursions by the outside world. But the restoration of discipline did not only require enclosure and grates and walls erected in its defence. Rather, in the first instance, it required guidance through a process of education and adjustment for religious women, who could no longer be held to the customary transmission of rules, as in the past; such discipline could not be achieved with simple adherence to the disciplinary rules contained in *de regularibus et monialibus*, such as verification of freedom of the profession, respect of the minimum age for novitiate and profession, and checks on the methods of monastic recruitment. Such a restoration of discipline required definition of the actual means of professionalisation, so as to prepare new religious women and to «re-educate» current ones regarding the work and the peculiarities of monastic life. In this regard, the flourishing of a specialized printed literature, promoted and gradually perfected by the post-Tridentine Church solely for consecrated virgins, played a key role. On this point, Gabriella Zarri pointed out that bishops and superiors of religious orders pledged to «make, print, and translate into the vernacular the rules and constitutions which were to be the main tools to introduce and make uniform the monastic discipline»; so much so that —the same scholar specifies— «in a few decades it produced not only editions and reissues of rules, in simple form or with commentary, but more and more specific tools to guide the religious towards an awareness of the obligations and prerogatives of monastic life».⁸¹

The *Constitutions for nuns* by Gian Matteo Giberti and the *Recollections left to nuns* by Agostino Valier, as analysed in the previous pages, provide the key points of this process of professionalisation relating to convents in the Sixteenth Century. If Giberti's work established the rules to be complied with, Valier's treatise influenced the awareness of the meaning of those rules and such inner and outer practices which, if followed, would lead to full compliance with them. Both works had a single goal: to inject

⁸¹ Cf. Gabriella Zarri, «Dalla profezia alla disciplina (1450-1650)», in *Donne e fede. Santità e vita religiosa in Italia*, ed. Lucietta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2009), 216 and 208-222 for an overview on the process of professionalization which involved the convents after the Council of Trent.

into the community of the time a precise knowledge of the requirements and peculiarities of the monastic state, in order to realise the restoration of a rule that had already been advocated and pursued vigorously by the reform movements of the Fifteenth and early Sixteenth Centuries.

Giberti and Valier's works were essentially intended to convey and translate into rules and recommendations that were easily comprehensible and readily applicable a regeneration project, which had old premises and of which the Tridentine reform decree had captured only a few aspects, leaving open many questions, which were then answered at different times and in different ways within each individual diocese. As a result, the Tridentine regulations did not have a uniform impact on the Catholic world—in many instances their application to enclosure caused problems or resulted in heavy restrictions on the freedom of female religious communities; in other cases, it was implemented with less rigidity or was even «called into question».⁸² In fact, the Council did not put an end to women's social mission, which was able to find new paths and outlets, often due to the support of the post-Tridentine ecclesiastical class, as the same diocese of Verona was able to testify, through the significant experience of the foundation of the Company of St. Ursula, promoted by Agostino Valier after the example of Carlo Borromeo in Milan.⁸³ ■

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⁸² Evangelisti, *Nuns*, chap. I.

⁸³ For a first approach to this topic, see: Gianpietro Belotti, «La Compagnia di San'Orsola dalla crisi al consolidamento», in *La sponsalità dai monasteri al secolo*, ed. Gianpietro Belotti and Xenio Toscani, 441-455; Patrizi, «For good education of my beloved people», 99-116.

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