



# iPaul

## Saint Paul Scholasticate Newsletter ANTONIO ROSMINI BEATIFIED

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On November 18, 2007 the Venerable Servant of God Antonio Rosmini-Serbati will be beatified at Novara, Italy by Card. José Saraiva Martins, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, on behalf of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. Why do we mention this event? How many holy men and women are being beatified or canonized these years? Rosmini is not a Barnabite; so, why on earth to emphasize his beatification? Simply because it is a historic event, not only for the Rosminians (the religious founded by the new Blessed), but for the whole Church and, in a special way, for the Barnabites, who were considered and really were “Rosminians,” and for this reason had to bear many a persecution.

First of all, it can be useful to recall who Antonio Rosmini was. His figure might not be so familiar in the Philippines, where the religious families founded by him (the *Institute of Charity* and the *Sisters of Providence*) are not present. He was an Italian priest, born at Rovereto, Trent (a region at that time under Austrian rule) in 1797. He studied at the University of Padua, where he got a Doctorate in Theology and Canon Law. He was ordained a priest in 1821. In 1823 he went to Rome, where he was encouraged by Pope Pius VII to undertake the reform of philosophy. So he spent the following years in the study of this subject, especially focusing upon St. Thomas Aquinas. In 1828, while secluded on “Mount Calvary” near Domodossola, Piedmont, he laid the foundations for the Institute of Charity. That same year he went back to Rome, where the Popes - first Leo XII and then Pius VIII - knowing his talent, encouraged him to continue his philosophical studies. The latter told him: “God wills that you attend to write books: that’s your vocation! You handle very well logic; and the Church at present needs writers able of commanding respect. In order to influence people, no other means is left today but handling them by reason and through it lead them to religion. Depend upon it you can benefit your neighbour much more writing than performing any other work of the sacred ministry.” In 1830 he published his first great philosophical work - *New Essay on the Origin of Ideas* - wherein he presented a new “ideology” that, although well-founded in the great philosophers of the past, moved away from the traditional Aristotelian theory of knowledge: in order to know, the images coming from senses are not enough; there is need of a “light” innate in the human intellect - and for this reason somehow “divine” - the “idea of being” or “ideal being.” In 1832 he founded the Congregation of Sisters of Provi-

dence; while in 1838 the Institute of Charity was approved by Gregory XVI. In the following year, after the publication of *Treatise of Moral Conscience*, a controversy was aroused by the Jesuits. To stop the dispute, in 1843 the Pope imposed silence on both parties. In 1848 the Piedmontese Government sent Rosmini to Rome as plenipotentiary to Pius IX. The Pope welcomed him kindly and announced to him the cardinal's scarlet; but, before the consistory, he was forced by the Roman revolution to flee to Gaeta, asking Rosmini to accompany him. In bad odour with the papal entourage and the Bourbon government, he left Gaeta for Stresa, Piedmont. In 1849 two little works of his - *The Five Wounds of the Holy Church* and *The Civil Constitution according to Social Justice* - were put on the Index. Because of the ever increasing charges, the Pope ordered a thorough examination of all Rosmini's works. The decision was rendered in 1854: all the works were to be dismissed ("*dimittantur*"), because they did not contain any-thing worthy of censure. So Rosmini was able to die serenely on July 1, 1855 at Stresa. But attacks continued even after his death: in 1887 the Holy Office issued the decree *Post Obitum*, whereby forty Rosminian propositions, mostly taken from some posthumous works, were condemned inasmuch as they did not appear to be in harmony with Catholic truth.

What have the Barnabites to do with Rosmini? There are various connections between them. First and foremost, Rosmini studying philosophy ran into some Barnabite authors, among whom the great philosopher Card. Hyacinthe-Sigismond Gerdil (1718-1802). Secondly, Rosmini had numerous personal contacts with the Barnabites: in 1826, during his first stay in Milan, he frequented the church of Sant'Alessandro and chose a Barnabite as confessor. In 1836 he was a guest of the Barnabites at Turin for two months. In 1848 he was lodged at Sant'Alessandro, Milan for three weeks. Even the correspondence between Rosmini and the Barnabites was frequent: we keep thirteen letters written to seven Barnabites.

Several Barnabites can be considered "Rosminians," as admirers of the Philosopher and supporters of his doctrines. The most important is Father Aloysius Maria Villoresi (1814-1883), who in 1841 was a guest of Rosmini at Rovereto for a month and then kept in touch with him by letter. He founded at Monza, Milan a seminary for poor young men, where he also taught philosophy according to the Rosminian system. For this he became the victim of several attacks to the extent of being forced to retire from teaching.

Father Alexander Piantoni (1811-1892) also corresponded with Rosmini and met him in Milan, during one of his stays. He rushed to his bedside at Stresa at the end of June, 1855: on June 30 he asked him for a remembrance; and the dying Philosopher answered: "There is need of only one thing: may God be ever present to us." Rosmini died on the following night; so we can consider those words as his precious legacy to the Barnabites.

Father Michelangelo Manzi (1809-1898) also met Rosmini three times and considered himself a close friend of his. He taught at Lodi and Milan. In 1890 he was accused of maintaining "erroneous and scandalous propositions about the Rosminian doctrines condemned by the Holy See."

Father Caesar Tondini de' Quarenghi (1839-1907) never met Rosmini: when this one died, he was just 16; but at that time he was a student at the Barnabite College in Milan, where Father Piantoni was Rector. He became one of the most convinced supporters of the Rosminian philosophy. He once wrote: "Rosmini's philosophical writings are for the Church a treasure not inferior to the writings of St. Thomas."



Fr. A. M. Villoresi

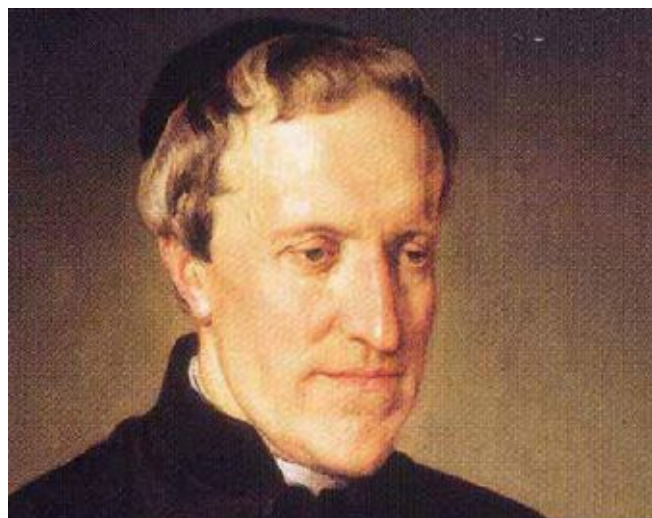
Other Barnabites, though non-Rosminian, had to do with Rosmini. For instance, Father Charles Vercellone (1814-1869), a great biblical scholar, visited Rosmini at Stresa in 1851 and, as a consultor of the Congregation of the Index, had to examine a booklet published against him.

When, in 1880, the encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, whereby Leo XIII promoted the restoration of Thomism in the ecclesiastical studies, was published, the Order immediately declared its public and full support; nonetheless, the Pope ordered the transfer of the philosophical scholasticate from Milan to Rome, where the Barnabite students would have attended classes of Thomistic philosophy (among the first students there was the future Father Giovanni Semeria).

After the publication of the decree *Post Obitum*, the Barnabites were denounced as supporters of Rosminianism. For this, in 1889 the Holy See suspended the celebration of the General Chapter and appointed by authority the new superiors of the Order (the previous ones were considered too feeble). Moreover, some Barnabites under suspicion of being "Rosminians" were removed from their positions.

How come this spontaneous reciprocal attraction between Rosmini and the Barnabites? Maybe because both of them had in view the same purpose: the restoration of philosophy. Rosmini had received this mission from the Popes; thus he interpreted it: "If philosophy is to be restored to love and respect, I think it will be necessary, in part, to return to the teachings of the ancients, and in part to give those teachings the benefit of modern methods." For their part, the Barnabites felt themselves heirs of Card. Gerdil, who had been a leading exponent of Christian philosophy in 18<sup>th</sup> century. As soon as they knew Rosmini, recognized in him the man chosen by Providence to renew philosophy and became his enthusiastic followers. For this choice they incurred, as we have seen, misunderstanding, suspicion and open attacks. This prolonged hostility, along with the subsequent sentences brought about by charges of Modernism, eventually forced the Barnabites to abandon their loved philosophical and theological studies.

Now the Church has taken her first step: she has acknowledged Rosmini's *holiness*. The Barnabites have always been convinced of that (witnesses on this subject are countless) and cannot but rejoice. But they hope that sooner or later the Church may acknowledge also his *intellectual greatness*. Even though the attitude toward Rosmini these past years has changed, certain mistrust persists (suffice it to read what John Paul II wrote in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*). But the Barnabites fervently hope that the prophecy of their confrere Father Tondini may be soon fulfilled: "God himself will see to reveal what ends he pursued, by supplying in good time the Church with so wonderful a philosophical catholic encyclopaedia, such as Rosmini's writings."



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