

Paolo Riso

**The Blessed
John Mary
Boccardo**



On the cover:
The Blessed's photograph.

On the back cover:
S. Cajetan rest home.

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John Mary
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Original title of the work:
"Il Beato Giovanni Maria Boccardo"
San Paolo s.r.l. editions, 1998

Authorized translation

Translation and prints: Maja printing works
for the "Poor Daughters of St. Cajetan"
Turin - Italy

Printed in June 2010 - 1000 copies

INTRODUCTION

Letter of a parish priest to the country blessed parish priest John Mary Boccardo.

Pancalieri, land of industrious people with its mill and parish church, with the square where every day's tale flows and from the countryside that surrounds it an exciting perfume of mint rises.

Now, the perfume of Heaven rises and it's you, dear country parish Priest, who in these hours we contemplate together with the Saints in Heaven.

“How much effort in sowing...”.

You have not used your theological learning to stand out with the words, the people could have said: how wise is our parish Priest! Not even those who flocked to have advice, and they were important people, led you away from looking in the eye, reading in the heart of your worshippers. You have been with them, because you have discovered in your parish priest's life those who were not seeking you, but Him. “They are all seeking you” the apostles were telling Jesus. This you have done.

You have led to Jesus all those who were seeking him, and also, but especially, those who weren't thinking about it. As He did you spent the nights praying.

You have told your Daughters, the poor Daughters of St. Cajetan: “give them food” and with your faith and their faith they have found a plate, a loaf. With your faith and their faith you have given a home, clothing, warmth and joy to whom had never had any. As Jesus you have paid in suffering (how long have been the 31 months of ordeal) the abandonment. Your Daughters have been next to you and in the day of your beatification they tell you: Thank you. Continue to guide us.

Don Carlo Vallaro
Parish of Jesus Crucified
and Our Lady of the tears
Turin (Italy)

The training

A resourceful child

1848, year of the revolutions that have upset Europe once again. On the Testona hills of Moncalieri (Turin), in a nice country house, Gaspare Boccardo and Giuseppina Malerba, married couple, are tenant farmers of the “Ca’ Bianca” (White House) estate. Their most precious wealth is the bright and strong faith that lights up their life.

Humble and simple people, engaged in hard work, who nevertheless had a fair human and religious education which allowed them to dedicate themselves to the parish and to Charitable works, to be sensitive to the debates of the time and to the problems of society.

The 20th November 1848, in their family, Giovanni (John) was born, to whom will follow, one after the other, other nine between brothers and sisters. A real tribe. John seems right from the beginning a handsome child, with his big golden locks, lively and intelligent, and grows up right from the start asking many questions.

Very attentive, he feels a great joy, when within the family and the parish he is taught catechism and he is told the “sacred history”, the history of God who goes towards the people up to the point of sending for them his Son Jesus.

He receives his First Communion, at nine years of age, the Easter day of 1857, with the commitment of avoiding sin and of reciprocating Jesus' love with much love and faithfulness. On 16th July 1858, with the Confirmation, he becomes, as they used to say at the time, "*Christ's soldier*".

In the meanwhile he has moved with his family to the farmstead of the Demonte's country house, near Castelvechio of Moncalieri and from the hill where he now lives, to go to the village school, there is quite a fair walk to do. John with his friends forms almost a party and seizes right away the opportunity to play and enjoy himself a world and also to stop and pray.

Student

Very rare are the children who continue to study. John's parents instead enrol him in the Real Collegio (Royal College) of Moncalieri, established by king Charles Albert in 1837 and entrusted to the Barnabite Fathers, a school that promotes serious studies and an intense Christian training.

John applies himself with commitment and manages well in everything, superlatively distinguishing himself by mathematics. At the Barnabite school, he receives an excellent culture and grows up within a very great love for Eucharistic Jesus, often stopping to pray in front of the Holy Sacrament displayed for worship on the altar. He also undertakes some actions that come from the heart: coming and going to the gymnasium, he goes and gives a little help to a lonely and abandoned blind man.

He, in such a way, has in his heart a great wish: become a priest. Between the age of 15 and 16, he clearly says so at home: "*I want to become a priest*". His parents point out how many sacrifices this will cost

them, but agree. His father replies: *“But shall you be a priest entirely of God, a real priest, not only of black cassock, but of deeds”*.

At the end of the fourth year of gymnasium, he is admitted to wear the cassock, according to the good custom of the time. A dog gets him the required amount of money.

Seminarist

In the August of 1864, one day John passes in front of the Savoy castle in Moncalieri. A dog, escaped from a gate, bites him and tears his jacket. The princess Maria Clotilde, daughter of Victor Emanuel II at the time guest of the royal castle, is informed of this and, in order to make up for her dog biting the dear boy, she gives him a large sum of money as a gift.

It's exactly what's needed to buy John his cassock, overcome the fright, he comments ironically: *“Here, my first cassock has been given to me as a present by a dog!”*. The 8th September 1864, Virgin Mary's nativity's celebration, in his St. Maria della Scala (St. Mary of the Ladder) parish in Moncalieri, John receives the cassock from his parish priest, don Martini.

That day there was a celebration in the Boccardo family. Among the tribe of smaller brothers and sisters, there is Luigi, only three years old, who looks at John a little surprised, asking himself why ever did he wear those black clothes. In the evening, John notes: *“Do everything to please God and remember that every day that passes a step towards eternity is done”*. And it's with these ideas in mind that one becomes priest, saint and apostle.

At the beginning of October, he joins the Seminary in Turin. Also in the Seminary he is very enterprising, as he had been at home and at school. In the hours

he has free, instead of playing and conversing, he teaches catechism to the youngest. He helps his fellow students in the studies and, for the poorer clergymen who were not able to buy themselves the books, he prepares big exercise books with the resumé of the professors' lessons.

Within two years he ends the studies in philosophy (the high school we would say nowadays) and by the 1866-67 school year he starts the theological studies. He studies and studies, reads many books, besides those of the school of theology. The diary he writes, quite regularly, lets one have an insight of the training work he was carrying out on his soul so to model himself in the likeness of Jesus: for everyone, and all the more so for a priest, this is what matters.

“I will rise to God’s altars”

John, a seminarist on the way to the altar, experiences a great joy when the town of Turin is able to have, also thanks to don Bosco’s mediation, its new Archbishop: Mons. Riccardi di Netro. He does everything he can to talk to him, kiss his hand, glad to approach Jesus in him, but with a wish to make himself known, to draw his attention to him... After all, he is only a little more than a boy, but how much seriousness!

“I want to become a saint - he writes in 1869 – it’s you Lord who has given me this holy wish, give me also the strength to do so”. He seeks assistance from Our Lady, from the saints his models of life: St. Joseph, the two Johns, the two Francis, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Saverio, St. Thomas of Aquino and St. Luis Gonzaga, and the Saints of Turin... They are all “friends” of his and from them he expects much for his priesthood. As he sees the day he will rise to the altar getting closer, he strengthens his resolve to holiness.

During the 1869 holidays, staying at home, he behaves as an apostle at home and in the parish. His day starts early, with an hour of meditation, with the Mass and the Communion. He acts as a catechist among the youngest of the parish, making himself much loved for his kind heartedness and his cheerfulness, for his extremely intense fondness for Eucharistic Jesus toward whom he draws his pupil's enthusiasm.

He has not laid down the books, but studies the Holy Scriptures (by heart!), dogmatics, moral, history of the Church.

As he returns to the Seminary, he follows the 1st Vatican Council, which Pope Pius IX opens on the 8th December 1869, with the object of answering to the many mistakes of the times in regards to Truth, the only Truth which is Christ. John becomes even more aware that one has to take part prepared, very prepared.

He is often with Don Bosco who gives him an extremely clear vision of the times, the refusal of naivety and of the credulity in respect to people and also an enormous love for the souls to be saved, an unlimited trust in God's action, the loyalty to the Pope and to the Church.

On the 19th April 1870, he receives the tonsure and the four minor orders. Writing about it to his Parish priest in Moncalieri, he appeals to the his prayer's charity. *"May God make me be a holy and learned priest and therefore comfort our Mother Church in the days of her great sorrow"*.

On the 24th July 1870, John receives his subdeaconate. *"I must not be content of a negative holiness, but positive and perfect... As soon as I will know what is liked by Jesus I will do it"*. *"The most required virtue for a priest is chastity"*. Really that summer, he lives the holidays as a real apostle, without sparing himself. At

home, his brother Luigi, nine years old (it's his "god-son" of christening) looks at him lost in reverie.

Jesus' priest

"Many people slave away because of the priest's ignorance and laziness: if I think about it, I will want to study so not to be a lazy priest, because such seminarian, such priest". So he writes as the studies start again, the last year of theology, before being ordained. He has an intense and brief wish to be part of the Jesuits, but the archbishop, to whom he went to confide in, sends him back to the seminary to study, so not to think about "novelty" and in order to prepare himself to soon become an excellent diocesan priest.

He finishes his training with the studies and even more he models himself in the likeness of Jesus, starting of joy only thinking about the moment when the archbishop would have laid hands on him. He is young and feels as if he can conquer the world to Christ. But mons. Riccardi of Netro, on 14th October 1870, after only three years of episcopacy in Turin, suddenly dies. During the years of the difficult relationship between the State and the Church, after the seizure of Rome on 20th September, no little time probably was to pass in order to have a new shepherd.

On 25th March 1871, Annunciation, John Boccardo becomes deacon, with a great joy: *"Nothing in the world is sweeter than the sacrifice for Jesus"*. The great day, awaited and wished for ever since he was a boy, is now getting closer and closer. He offers to God "holy" intentions:

"I intend with all my commitment to become holy, because the Ordination does not make us saints, but requires holiness. I want, my God, to wish for what you wish and to want what you want".

The 3rd June 1871, Whitsun Saturday and Holy Trinity eve John was ordained in Turin's seminary's chapel, by mons. Balma, Bishop titular of Tolemaide.

It's a great celebration at his home and in his parish in Moncalieri. The following day, 4th June, at S. Maria della Scala in Moncalieri, he officiated his first Mass. His relatives take part and, near to him, among the altar boys, there is Luigi, his brother just ten years old, who looks at him thinking that one day he might resemble him.

The 30th September 1871, it's known that the Pope has chosen the new archbishop for Turin, mons. Lorenzo Gastaldi, transferring him from Saluzzo. On 26th November 1871, mons. Gastaldi starts his ministry in Turin.. Even before the official entry, he had already given instructions to the seminaries, appointing their father superior for Turin, Giaveno, Bra and Chieri.

The young don John Boccardo – who wasn't yet 23 years old – is appointed “to the very important office of assistant to the Seminary of Chieri”. He starts immediately his service, approaching the father superiors and the clergymen. Extremely precise and alert in his duties, he is meek, good hearted, understanding – an elder brother – who is helpful towards everybody not only with the right word, but also with the concrete help for who is in need.

In the meanwhile he ends his studies at the Consolata boarding school, and practices his ministry among the people, with eagerness of giving all himself to all and “*to bring the souls to God*”.

Sacerdotal ministry

Guide for the “called ones”

“In this office as an assistant – the future Montefameglio Canon, at the time his student at Chieri, will say – I had the chance to admire his work and his more and more fervent zeal... He was all eyes for keeping watch and all kindness for saying the right word at the right moment, of warning, of comfort for this or that seminarist who may needed it. He was put forward as a model, of uplifting example for all clergymen”.

During the hours when the seminarists are following the lessons, don John attends the Course of practical Moral at the “Consolata” boarding school. During the 1873 summer holidays, he makes friend with don Leonardo Murialdo, residing, while he is free from the engagement with the Seminary, at the Artigianelli boarding school for about a month.

The 29th October 1873, the Archbishop mons. Gastaldi, informed about the good work he had done as an “assistant”, appoints him spiritual director of the same Chieri Seminary.

He accepts the new office with joy and trepidation, always keeping nevertheless an excellent relationship of esteem and friendship with Murialdo, with his first collaborator don Reffo and their work in favour of the youth. Immediately he makes sure to send them some good callings.

He exercises the vocational apostleship also within his family. He had understood very early that his brother Luigi, thirteen years younger than him, wishes to become a priest... During the summer of 1875, with simplicity and determination, don John speaks about Luigi's calling to their father, taking on personally the task of helping him in every way. The father grumbles, but consents and Luigi enter the seminary in Giaveno.

Immersed in many tasks, don Boccardo doesn't forget about himself. From 1874 to 1877, he attends the Faculty of theology in Turin and, passed the exams, the 1st February 1877 he is granted the degree in Theology. Ever since he was preparing himself for being ordained, he had never laid the books down and now he is really rich of theological and ascetic science so that he can walk steadily and help those who have been entrusted to him to walk towards holiness. He has all that is needed to be a learned and holy priest and apostle in any field the Lord may send him.

“May he continue like this”

His room, in the Seminary, is always open, at any time to receive the clergymen, listen to them, guide them... But even more open is his heart which welcomes them with the charity and skill they need, especially in the most difficult moments. They come out enlightened, encouraged, with a new desire to restart for higher and more beautiful goals. He is much loved by them and very respected by the Archbishop mons. Gastaldi.

And it's exactly this respect which moves the Archbishop to appoint him, in 1881, spiritual director of the theological Seminary of Turin, where he meets again the clergymen he had already guided at Chieri,

when they were attending the high school (“the philosophy” – as they used to say in those days). They are all very happy: and Luigi Boccardo more than the others, because, as at Chieri, the elder brother is still there to lead him to priesthood. In the same year, 1881, don John is appointed Honorary canon of the collegiate church of S. Maria della Scala in Chieri.

At the beginning of September 1882, his clergymen learn that their “Father” will soon leave the seminary to become parish priest, and experience a great suffering for the imminent parting. And he much suffers of this... The 10th September they organize a solemn “academy” in his honour and they present him with an album in which each one has written the words he has read during the farewell party.

The “Father” replies with simplicity: *“Dearest sons, I thank you for all the affection... I have always loved you... I have very much loved living among you, willing to spend there all my life... It’s God’s will that we shall part... I bear you in my heart and shall you continue to love me... I will pray for you, may God make you holy... Pray the Lord I shall be able to represent Him in the town where He is sending me”*.

Parish Priest

One morning of the summer of 1882, at Pancalieri, large village 30 kilometres from Turin, in the plain here the Po and the Pellice rivers flow, don Boccardo, incognito, goes and explores the parish that has been entrusted to him. As soon as he enters the church, he finds the sacristan, Nicolao Fontana, intent on dusting... He sees the nice and large church, surrounded by a village populated by hard-working people engaged in agriculture. He even discovers

that every week a market is held with wheat, maize, vegetable, wine and cattle trading. There is also a mint and hemp production in which many girls and women are engaged in.

On 24th September 1882, don John Boccardo makes his entry in Pancalieri surrounded by the most illustrious priests of the Curia and of the Seminary, come to accompany him.

The day after he starts his apostleship, committing himself and the parishioners to the Virgin Mary. Every day, early in the morning, so that those who go to work can take part, he celebrates the Holy Mass. Before, while he starts his day praying, he is already willing to listen, to confess. After, he lingers in front of the tabernacle thanking God. In the evening he is once again there at his place.

Therefore he is a priest who stays in church and stays there with pleasure, for God and his people. He looks around and starts to get acquainted with his people, his “sons” one by one. There are about threethousand inhabitants in Pancalieri and they live mainly of the work on the land, of silkworm breeding, of hemp. At the silk mill the cocoons are processed and the girls with the seasonal work earn something for their families and themselves. Each week the people, from Pancalieri and the villages nearby, go to the market and... also pay a visit to the church to see their priest.

Don Boccardo understands at once that they are mainly honest people, of the traditional Christian observance: he thinks straight away to make his people more aware of their Christian life, richer of love for God and for His Son Jesus Christ. He immediately shows he loves them very much, starting from the poorest and the little ones.

His style is the one outlined by Jesus for the apo-

stles He sends out to His people, the style that the Vatican Council II illustrates in the following way: *“The Parish priest... shall preach the Word of God...with a catechetical instruction appropriate for each one’s age, lead the parishioners to the full awareness of the mystery of salvation... Shall he take care that the Holy Mass will be the centre and the climax of the whole life of the Christian community; shall he be engaged so that the parishioners will feed their spiritual life devoutly and frequently approaching the Holy Sacraments... Shall he remember that the Sacrament of Penance is of great benefit to the Christian life: Therefore shall he always show himself willing and ready to listen to the parishioner’s confessions...”* (Christus Dominus, 30).

Don Boccardo is a parish priest just like that: at the centre of everything he places the Sunday Holy Mass and the religious teaching at sermon and at the Vespers each Sunday, as real school of faith. He is very much listened to. He favours the children, the elderly and the ill. He is always willing for the confessional, at day and at night, for the most hardened sinners, for whom he prays and offers penances carrying out conversions. He enters in the families and he makes himself loved. He has a goal: lead everyone to live in God’s grace.

3.

The founder

From a little seed...

He preaches much, indeed getting close to his people. He answers to the objections against the faith and against the Church, which someone, soaked in Enlightenment and God's denial, has started to circulate in order to unchristianize the people. In the Seminary, he had always aimed at becoming a learned and holy priest and now, although through much work, he continues to read and study (St. Thomas of Aquino, St. Alphonso of Liguori, the issues of *Civiltà Cattolica*, to keep himself updated about the current matters...), to pray much, so that God may enrich his work.

For the children he organizes the catechism and charming meetings and seizes every opportunity to draw them. He asks the mothers to bring their children still very small to church, because "*Jesus has many things to tell them*". He calls the little ones leaving the kindergarten: "*Pass by the church and make yourself be seen by Jesus!*". He invites the children who already can do so, to follow often and well the Confession and the Communion. In the same way he asks his parishioners to learn from God's forgiveness, to come to confess at any time, during the day as well as at night.

His project, very clear and declared, is that his

parishioners may all live by God's grace: for this reason he goes and seeks for them, as a good shepherd, in their homes, especially those further away and most confused.

He supports with great zeal the confraternities and associations he had found at the parish, the third Franciscan Order, the companies of the Virgin Mary and of the Holy Sacrament, Mary's daughters, asking the members to become real models of life for the others and to cooperate with the parish priest to bring many to a more intense Christian life.

Almost immediately, after arriving in Pancalieri, he sees among Mary's daughters, a group of girls who live a certain ordination commitment, without having a precise rule. Those – he thinks – could be a good yeast for all the parish, if properly helped and guided. He gathers them around him – they are about fifteen – and proposes them simple and great commitments: frequent and regular confession, the spiritual guiding, the Communion every Sunday, and then every day.

The girls accept and meet every Sunday in school classroom, letting the others believe that it's a Sunday school class. Don Boccardo calls them "*La Pia Unione*" (the Pious Union): in 1883 they are already thirty, and then forty. Other girls come to take part, glad to live a more intense Christian life, with every day meditation, the ever more frequent meeting with Eucharistic Jesus, an exemplary and contagious style for the sake of the others.

Some guided by him, offer to God the vow of virginity: now there's only Jesus in their life. That group is really a small seed bound to grow and expand, God will say how...

...the flower in the blizzard

In 1884, in Piedmont there is a new outburst of cholera. Also at Pancalieri in July there are the first ones affected by the illness. Two lazzarettos are opened to receive them. Don Boccardo is on the front line, as in a war front: He asks the bishop of Pinerolo mons. Sardi to send him eight St. Joseph's sisters, to serve the cholera patients and the poor. He calls the young of the "Pia Unione" to dedicate themselves for the ill. He organizes the aid, without fear of the contagion and redoubles the initiatives to help everyone, without sparing himself the most disgusting duties, as when, personally collects in his arms a little old man hit by the cholera and carries him to the lazzaretto.

For a woman who, had lost her husband by the disease and who was dismissed with he child, from the house where they were sharecroppers, he finds a job and accommodates the son with the Doctrinarians at S. Damiano d'Asti, where he will study and become a good priest.

During that very summer, arrives to work together with him, as vice-parish priest, the brother Luigi, just ordained priest. Don Luigi, just 23 years old, set himself to serve the ill for any assistance, glad to give his life for them. Don John accompanies with wisdom his first steps of his ministry.

When in the Autumn the cholera disappears, the parish priest realizes that many are the wounds left over: there are lonely poor and elderly, to whom no one sees to. There are families that have to find again a job and security, children and boys to whom give love and education. He has seen that the "Pia Unione" had well worked during the cholera. He wonders: *"now that there is still much need, what could these girls do? And if from them, with the help*

of God, a new religious family shall be born?”.

The first idea that came to his mind, in the very lazaretto. Now, that idea gets clearer and, thinking about the saint priests such as don Cottolengo, don Bosco, don Murialdo, similar in need, have given life to their institutions, he also thinks of a more stable institution.

In the meanwhile, he must do something for two men and a woman who, after the cholera, have no one to take care of them. For them the parish priest, in October 1884, subrents from the miller (tenant farmer himself of the lawyer Clara) the village's old “spinning mill”. In a few days he turns it inhabitable, while from some more generous he receives a little furniture – very poor – to furnish it. On the 6th September 1884, he already opens the home hospice, celebrating the Mass and personally serving the first meal to the three inmates.

He now wonders: *“Who will take care of them?”*. For the first days, some women of the village think about it while a 14-year old girl, Carlotta Fontana, sister of the sacristan, is really glad to do the washing and the cleaning for the three poor ones, in whom she sees Jesus. But then?

Don Boccardo makes a proposal to the young women of the “La Pia Unione” (the Pious Union): *“I ask you to donate your life to Jesus, serving him in our poor. What do you think about it?”*. Two sisters Domenica and Lucia Libra, accept with joy to go and live with those of the home Hospice. And on the 21st November 1884, celebration of the introduction of baby Mary to the temple: in Pancalieri a very beautiful flower has blossomed, it will soon be a new Congregation.

Carlotta, very young, is extremely caught by what she sees. Ever since don Boccardo had arrived in

Pancalieri, she, little more than a girl, had opened to him her soul, with the weekly confession, very loyal to the meetings with the youth. The parish priest had seen in her the signs of God's predilection: immediately he had made her fall in love with Jesus and made her and her brothers sense a great ideal of gift to Him. Carlotta has started to approach every day to the Communion. Now, she senses that maybe God wants her there at the home Hospice, to consume herself for the last ones.

Her parents would be happy if she accepted a good marriage proposal, but she doesn't agree. The parish priest supports her and makes her understand that God wants her for himself only. In fact he asks her: "*Would you come to the home Hospice to serve the poor for ever for the love of Our Lord?*". On the 2nd October 1886, Carlotta Fontana enters the humble home, by then to her very dear, to give herself to Jesus as the poorest. She will become Mother Gaetana of the Holy Sacrament, the first General Mother Superior of the nascent Congregation of the Sisters of St. Cajetan.

A month later, in the small community, Giovanna Chiattonne enters, a 32 year old learned lady, from a rich family. The Father starts to form those young women to the religious life educating them to the prayer, the charity, the poverty, the sacrifice, concentrating their attention on Jesus alone. The day Giovanna enters, he gives the "*Daughters*" the first uniform. "*A black and white striped smock, with on a side the rosary's crown*".

On the 7th December 1886, Carlotta and Giovanna offer to God their first vows of obedience, chastity and poverty. Soon other girls arrive to tread the same path of ordination to the Lord. Don Boccardo, moved by charity, has become founder.

“Lord, You have run after me...”

But don Boccoardo has not forgotten he is parish priest of Pancalieri. He has become founder exactly so not to fail his duties as a parish priest.

First of all, he continues to give himself to his parishioners heart and soul without a break. By now he knows them one by one, as a good shepherd his herd, with the problems and joys of each one and all. They also respect him and they love him and come in greater and greater number to listen to him, at the Sunday Mass and at the education which comes from the Vespers.

He spends many hours in the confessional and there he weaves many stories of pardon and love between Jesus and people of every social status: little ones and grownups, young and married. He asks the best ones, first of all to the parents, to the mothers of a family, to help him in good deeds, to lead the others to the Lord. *The first seed of the “Azione Cattolica” is born.*

Despite the great work he undertakes in Pancalieri and the havoc of the cholera, the parish is no longer sufficient for his eagerness as an apostle and he also goes elsewhere to bring the Gospel. In the very 1884, having just been the cholera, don Boccoardo, goes to preach the *“missions to the people”* in San Damiano d’Asti. In the years to come, he will continue to do so, in other countries, never repleted of sowing Jesus in the souls.

In the same way, having very vividly in his heart don Giuseppe Cafasso’s example, who had spent his life for the convicts and those condemned to death, he often goes to Saluzzo to speak and confess in the prisons. *“His sermons – the sacristan who accompanies him will say – provoke great tears in the prisoners”.*

To his parish vice-priests he asks a great pastoral commitment: *“Together we have a same end, which we always have to have in front of our eyes: the sanctification of the souls”*. He entrusts all and often his great work to the Virgin Mary:

his celebrations and the month of May have to change the life to all.

After the first intense ministry years where he has really donated everything to God and to his people, he fears it's been him who has deviated from the great ideal of holiness which he has always aimed at: *“I have fallen into the abyss of tepidness”... “Lonely, inexperienced, I had almost only taken care of the other's salvation, forgetting about my poor soul”*. But he realizes that, after all, he has only passed from the regular life in the seminary to the one broken by all the strains of the parish. He renews his intentions: *“Lord, you have run after me, with the reproaches of my friends, my brother, my mother and with all the remarks of my confessors”*.

He must not fear, because, with God's grace, he will be holy and will help many to become holy, among the parishioners, the poor ones of the home Hospice and those “Daughters” of his with the black and white striped smock, who have already completely offered themselves to the Lord. He will become holy, also because all those who God gives into his care as Master, Shepherd, Father may become so.

He will be heroic for his personal holiness, also with the penance done for God's love, as when at the home Hospice, bareheaded in sign of reverence, he dines with the leftovers of the poor inmates, in whom he sees Jesus, imitated in this also by Carlotta Fontana... He's content of very little food and clothing, up to the point of skipping lunch and supper so that his poor ones may have it. The young nuns

who call him “Father” and who serve at the home Hospice, follow him in the same sacrifices.

Model of life

He’s who teaches the “Daughters” to live as devoted in full faithfulness. He hands over to them as a rule the text “La monaca in casa” (The nun at home) by don Giuseppe Frassinetti, very much well-known and used at the time. His life is interwoven with prayers, work and sacrifice, from morning to evening. An so also the life of the “Daughters”:

“The Father – Carlotta Fontana will say – demanded that in the poor we shall see Jesus. He demanded it from the others and he demanded it from me. He wanted us to kiss the feet of the inmates, before and after having washed them, saying: My dear daughter, those are the feet of Jesus”. Every morning, they also – as the Father – get up at 4,30 a.m. They go to Mass at 5 a.m. They are content with frugal food, work much to serve the inmates, taking care of everything.

To live, he entrust them to the Providence and sends them begging in the village, for the inmates and for themselves, dragging an old cart behind them. Some laughs at them. The Father explains that in this way they will grow in humbleness and in spirit of sacrifice, in obedience. He explains to them how to cooperate with the Providence: they will cultivate the kitchen garden, they will breed rabbits and hens, they will keep pigs. How to overcome the personal weaknesses and the other people irony especially of the young men of the village? *“For the love of Jesus, Husband and Lord, they will do this and more”.*

It’s this the “novitiate” he offers them: a practical

and hard school, “*the royal way of the Holy Cross*” of which *The imitation of Christ* talks about.

One morning of March 1885, the lawyer Clara, owner of the “spinning mill”, had invited the “Daughters” and inmates to clear out of there as soon as possible. Don Boccardo entrusts the matter to St. Joseph. A few days later, he comes to know that a man in Barge, owner of a building in Pancalieri, is ready to sell it. He writes to him immediately and the man replies telling him that he is happy that his house will turn, from an inn, to a place of charity.

But the parish priest is without money. A good parishioner offers him two thousand lire (of the time) as a loan so that he can buy. The deed is done. On 10th August 1887, the removal from the “spinning mill” to “casa San Rocco” (the house of St. Rocco) – as the house just bought is called, which becomes the new seat of the Holy Hospice. Carlotta and Giovanna themselves, with the help of some goodwilling man, carry their “things”, with sweat and tears, while some are laughing at them.

The Father, at the entrance of the house, enthrones St. Joseph’s statue to thank him for the help and to ask him protection for the future. At once he gets the room converted to give hospitality to the poor and for the “sisters” who are committed to them. After a few weeks, on the 4th September, from Turin Mons. Richelmy arrives, to bless the chapel: he celebrates the Holy Mass and leaves Eucharistic Jesus in the Tabernacle. With Him any sacrifice will be possible: in front of Him, Carlotta, Giovanna, Lucia and Domenica will spend many hours in prayer, feeding their joy and charity at the Saviour’s inexhaustible spring.

Don Boccardo sees that the daughters are ready for the final step.

“Poor Daughters of St. Cajetan”

“Get ready a simple and plain, poor, without ornament dress. It will now be your religious dress...”. “Rather instead of buying the cloth, alter your used clothes so not to take away the bread from the poor” – the Father says one day. Carlotta, to give the example, dies black a dress given to her as present by her relatives. “You will be called “*Povere Figlie*” (Poor Daughters)” – the Father explains.

On the 3rd May 1888, in the chapel, in front of the Virgin Mary, the Father holds a simple and short speech in which he praises “*that dress which is yes poor, but that will have to stay pure, without the least stain of guilt or unfaithfulness*”. He blesses it and hands it over to Carlotta, Giovanna, Domenica e Lucia, as “*the holy dress*”.

In front of the people of Pancalieri now they are really nuns. Giovanna Chiattonne is appointed mother superior and Carlotta, despite her very young age, she’s 18 years old is her deputy and novice’s teacher, because they all hope that other young women will soon come to wear that dress. As, in fact, happens on the 22nd November 1888 when, Agostina Bessone, from Vigone, first postulant arrives and to whom others will soon follow. How will they be called?

On the 7th August 1889, the parish priest, early in the morning, is saying “the matins” from the breviary in his church: he starts the reading of that day’s saint’s life, St. Cajetan from Thiene (1480-1547) and he gazes up towards his statue in a niche of the church. While reading, he is struck by that saint’s style, the same style he is trying to give to his Institute: *Jesus at the centre of everything, poverty and dedication to the Providence, love for the poor, the whole life for Jesus within the poor.*

As soon as he finishes the “matins”, he goes to the

Daughters to invite them to make friends with him, to pray him for their problems, because St. Cajetan is ready to answer to the prayers. Together they decide: *“He will be the patron and the model for our Congregation”*. His statue, by order of the parish priest, is taken from the church to the home Hospice and it’s enthroned the 4th September 1889. Now the Congregation has also found it’s final name. *“The Poor Daughters of St. Cajetan”*.

Seven months later, the Father gathers the nuns to let them know that he has decided to change their name: it will be the full separation from the world and the beginning of a new life. Carlotta Fontana becomes sister Gaetana of the Holy Sacrament, Giovanna Chiattonne becomes sister Maria Giuseppina of the Good Shepherd, Domenica is sister Maria Teresa of the Introduction, Agostina is sister Maria Marta of the Divine Providence, Maria Bonaudi, the last to arrive, is sister Maria Consolata of Crucified Jesus.

He explains them: *“From this moment you will no longer be the childhood friends but sisters of the Congregation and so this may be more evident you will be addressing each other formally”*. He ends: *“A new life starts now”*. From that moment, the house in Pancalieri will be the Main-Home of the Poor Daughters of St. Cajetan’s Congregation and it will do a long progress beyond Italy, on the other side of the ocean to serve the poorest and announce Jesus to the world.

In poverty and gladness

It’s the heroic times of the origins, where all is absolutely centred around Jesus. “The Daughters” listen to their Father’s the instructions and don’t forget a word of what he tells them.

From now on, by order of the Founder, they will breed more hens and rabbits and they will have meat and eggs for the celebration days. They will keep more swine, that will turn out to be very useful. Giovanna, who is now the “mother superior”, takes them grazing, bearing the ironical smile of some, for the love of God.

But they experience – almost unnecessary to be said- the real poverty. To Carlotta who one day was complaining: *“Father, we have no more money left and we are lacking of bread to give for the meals ”*, don Boccardo replies: *“The Providence knows this and other things... you may go and I will see to it”*. Only late in the morning he remembers about this and goes to the home Hospice to see. A person then arrives with a great basket of fresh bread and an offering of money. After lunch, another woman comes with a second basket of bread..

The clothing for the inmates is lacking. The Father turns to a brother of his in Chieri... and thirtyfive meters of cloth arrive. A few days later, he has other 35 meters of cloth in his hands and the money to pay for everything. The village women will take care of making the clothes. This is almost always the case for him and for the “Daughters”, concerning the bread and the food, the clothing and the other needs. His faith makes miracles...

As that day in the winter, in which it's so cold and there is only a faggot of dry sticks that the nuns carry in front of St. Joseph's image, saying: *“Take care of this”*. Just a farmer arrives with a cart of firewood. Or as when they don't have anymore wheat nor flour and the Father invites them to turn once again to St. Joseph. A young man arrives with two sacks of wheat saying he had just been to the miller to have more wheat ground and to the baker to have some

bread baked. all for them, free of charge!

In this climate of obedience, faith-trust, poverty and dedication to God, work and prayer in front of the Tabernacle, the family of the Poor Daughters of St. Cajetan is born. Not even they get discouraged when Carlotta, very young novice's teacher, falls seriously ill: it's tiredness, exhaustion, rather it's typhus... The Father calls everyone to pray for that creature he considers the most faithful expression of his spirit. After long months, during which Carlotta stays between life and death, finally Jesus heals her. In the small community joy and enthusiasm is recovered.

During 1889, the number of those helped grows and at the same time also the debts to "carry on" grow: the "*puff*", as don Boccardo says in good piedmontese. Is has not yet been able to pay for "St. Rocco's house", bought ever since 1885, but he has the courage to ask for another loan to the man of Barge who had sold it to him.

Parish priest in Pancalieri, don Boccardo could have worn a nice cassock, shoes with a silver buckle, live in a more pleasant and comfortable priest's house. Instead, he only wants what is strictly needed to be consistent with poor Jesus, he even takes out of his mouth his own to give it to the most in need, to his "Daughters", to his parishioners who can always count on him for any necessity.

He never stops recommending this style to his "Daughters" so they shall not shut the Providence's doors wasting what it sends. It's the real evangelical poverty style. "*Our train moves on puffs (= debts)*", he was used of saying about his work. When new guests to be assisted and new callings for the religious Family arrive, he, with "crazy" courage, buys the little houses next to the home Hospice, which

free up. His work grows in length and the nuns will call it the “*goods train*”. But it’s a train that speeds along well, with God’s grace. The serenity, the joy of living and loving is never missing.

“It’s Jesus that does everything”

In this environment, the girls of the “Pia Unione” have become real nuns, with the religious dress, real vows and a new name, as we have told, looking at God as a goal, and bowing down on the miseries of the ones most suffering for whom the others, the intellectuals, the politicians and the like, as usual, carry out many discussions or empty words. It’s Christ alive in action with the strength and warmth of charity.

“Our home – Carlotta, now sister Gaetana, will say – is not pretty, but it’s come up with many sacrifices... one sacrifice after the other... First companions, then daughters, then sisters, then nuns... So also the uniform: first a striped smock, a veil and a little crown, then the cloak and the veil, then the present religious dress and a name devoted to God. With much enthusiasm, virtue was put into practice, at the cost of any sacrifice... Obedience without delay, without deferring, without grumbling or questioning the reason of the orders. If we had not behaved in this way, we would have felt great remorse and we would not have had the courage to go for the communion”. Any warning of the Father was taken seriously and no difference was made between important and less important. So obedience required, so it was done”.

Sister Gaetana and the other sisters were satisfied with the essential to live with. They have Jesus among them and thanks to Him also the hard bread

and the leftovers of the poor even seem too much. From Him comes a joy that makes poverty beautiful and sacrifice delightful, also when heroism is needed. The Father, with his extremely great faith, infuses courage: he never lacks of a good smile for everyone, reassuring. Also the other sisters smile willingly to whoever needs them.

“Then yes – sister Gaetana continues – we really loved each other. If one of us was suffering, her pain became the pain of all of us. No sacrifice was dodged to relieve the work of the sisters”. It’s the founder who has brought them up like that: “The Father – sister Gaetana also says – used to talk to us on spiritual topics. He used to explain us our duties, informally, adapting to our ability. His word inspired us holy intentions, transformed, and reinvigorated our will to carry out our duty, arousing the desire to become holy at any cost”.

One day, the Father invites sister Gaetana to write an act of ordination in these terms: “I, unworthy bide of Jesus, offer and devote all the good I will be able to do in my life and the one that will be done for me after my death, I give up everything for Jesus’ love, to love him from now on with greater perfection and charity pureness”. She signs it with a drop of her blood and hands it to the “Father”, to be placed in the Tabernacle for ever. On the 28th November 1892, he also does the same gesture, he signs it with the blood and places it next to Eucharistic Jesus as an everlasting offer of life.

An ever greater gift

It’s 1893: The Institution is only eight years old. A friend of don Boccardo’s, the can. Fedele Savio, asks him to send some nuns to Saluzzo. The Father

gathers the “Daughters” and gives them the news. Sister Giuseppina Chiattonne with a small group of nuns is sent to manage the new “shelter” for the elderly in Saluzzo. The same day, towards the evening, the founder appoints Sister Gaetana as mother superior of the home hospice of Pancalieri and General Mother. On the 27th November 1893 don Boccardo and sister Giuseppina open a new home in Saluzzo, with the approval of the diocesan bishop.

In July 1894, the town council of Piasco negotiate with the Daughters of San Gaetano to entrust them with a old people’s home and a workshop for the girls. Don Boccardo, although expecting that the starting period will be very poor, on the 8th August he sends his nuns there. They can stay for only one year, but they will come back in 1911.

At the beginning of November 1894, the founder, from Ivrea writes to Mother Gaetana: “*On the 19th November you will leave for Verzuolo*”. It’s the third home he opens up outside the diocese of Turin: the first periods are extremely hard and there is nothing else than a bit of fire to warm themselves, during the winter. But God’s Providence looks after it together with the charity and inventiveness of the nuns and of their Father, beyond every expectation.

In extreme poverty, in 1896, another small group of nuns starts the service in Manta... New callings come to bring energy and enthusiasm... Sister Giuseppina and the sisters are even willing to joke about their poverty, despite they break their backs all day long working for their assisted, “for God’s love”. They get to the point of making do of only one bed – they have given the other to the poor – and for a while they sleep in turns, while one is in worship in front of the Tabernacle.

They live the Gospel to the letter, exactly as the



Painting of the Virgin Mary in front of which young John spent the month of May with his parents

House in Moncalieri where the Boccardo family lived





John as a child with his father Gaspare and mother Giuseppina

The blessed's basin





Interior of St. Nicolao's parish Church in Pancalieri

Sarcophagus where the Blessed John Mary rests





Closure of the informative process in Turin in 1978



St. Cajetan from Thiene
Patron Saint of the
Congregation

Father urges to do on the 6th March 1896: *“The Congregation’s spirit is a kind of gladness, making every effort to chase away the melancholy, and when it can’t be banished, suffer of it in peace for Jesus’ sake, without ever showing yourself gloomy or in a bad mood, so not to make others bear you own cross”*.

At every home they open up, new callings come, so that there is a wish to open at least one home each year. In 1896, they are in Caraglio, in the diocese of Cuneo, where to cover themselves at night, they use as blanket also the “the holy dress”, such is the poverty. Also there they carry out “miracles”. The bishop of Cuneo writes to the fonder: “The elderly are well kept, and happy, the parish priest and the village are very satisfied of your good nuns... I can’t avoid to highly praise you for these excellent girls”.

On the 31st January 1897, the Father goes to see them at Caraglio and encourages them to set up a small hospital to care for six. These all have a cough due to the overwork faced and he gives them as a present a five lira coin (a small fortune at that time): it seems to them to see Jesus in him.

The same year, the Daughters of St. Cajetan “take wing”. The Can. Savio has a brother who is prefect at Ascoli Piceno, who is looking for some good nuns for the hospital in Petritoli. The priest suggests don Boccoardo’s nuns, who, on the 24th February 1897, sets off with three of them, Giuseppina, Celestina and Agnese, to start a new foundation. At Petritoli nothing is lacking, the Father informs those remaining in Pancalieri, but especially there is the chapel with the daily Holy Mass and the Holy Sacrament in the Tabernacle.

He is so happy that he grants himself a few days

holiday or rather of pilgrimage. Going he had already passed by Bologna and Loreto's sanctuary; returning he stops at Assisi and goes to Rome, where he meets twice pope Lion XIII and he goes down to pray on St. Peter's tomb. From every place he writes to the "Daughters" assuring prayers for each one of them and mentioning their name. Sister Giuseppina replies to him: *"Shall you have the goodness to bring to the Pope's attention the very fervent wish we share with you, Father, to soon go to the Missions among the infidels, and shall ask him for this a special blessing"*.

Therefore they already think "big". After Petritoli, don Boccardo and the Nuns between 1898 and 1899 open up a small hospital in Porto san Giorgio and a home for girls in Fermo. They are getting on so well that they can give presents to the founder and the "sisters" who live in poorer conditions.

Missionaries?

Right from the first years – as we have just said – Father and Daughters are thinking about the missions. Many decades will have to pass by before the will be able to leave for Argentina, Brazil, Africa.

In the mean time the Father wants to bring the sisters to Turin, where it's easier to expand their action. At the same time the canon Giuseppe Allamano is giving life to the Istituto dei Missionari della Consolata (Institute of the Missionaries of the Consolata) and with him, at the Consolata sanctuary and at the Boarding School, is working don Luigi Boccardo, don John's brother. In 1900, the canon Allamano asks don John Boccardo his nuns' assistance. In October 1900, three of them, along with the Founder and with Mother Gaetana, start their service in the

first house of Consolata Missionaries, in corso Duca di Genova. They are not yet missionaries, as they would like, but they cooperate with the missionaries.

There is everything to be done in the new house and the work never ends: for twelve years they will help, as sisters and mothers, the nascent Consolata Institute. The missionary ideal takes root in them: *“The nuns – don John Boccardo writes on the 30th March 1902 – as soon as possible will be learning English or French they are already learning how to make shoes, as they have learned to print books, so that they will soon be prepared to go to Africa”*.

They have learned to make books after Rosmunda Caramagna, a 23 years woman capable of many initiatives, had entered the Congregation in 1901: one morning the Father had asked her: *“What would you think if we had to set up a printing works?”*. She immediately replies: *“If you order me to do so, I will dedicate myself with all my good will. Obedience makes miracles”*. The founder gets the equipment and Rosmunda, having become Sister Redenta, in very short time learns the craft. Their printing works engages some nuns day and night, because the work is never lacking: also printing is a tool for being missionaries and for bringing Jesus further than one can think.

During those months at the beginning of the twentieth century, one day don Boccardo meets in Saluzzo don Marino, parish pries of Sampeyre, who confides him that the elder and the poor of his parish are neglected. Don Boccardo replies immediately: *“Find a house free for me and I will be sending you my nuns”*. And he specifies: *“There is no need to pay them or to support them. It’s the Lord who takes care of supporting the poor, he will also think of sup-*

porting the nuns". On the 4th November 1900 at Sampyre, don Boccoardo opens up a new charity deed.

He takes all these decisions together with the "Daughters", in full agreement with them. He never deserts them and it's he who continues to educate them as a good father to the complete gift of themselves.

"Good spirit", vivid rule

By means of the frequent meetings and the letters, with a simple and concrete talking, he leads them with his good fatherly image and healthy catechism for being vivid images of Jesus.

"You have uplifted me with your obedience... Your obedience was perfect and great your sacrifice. I can assure you that your sacrifice cannot avoid attracting plentiful blessings on our poor Congregation" (27th Nov. 1893, to the nuns who left for Saluzzo in *Scritti*, vol. III, p. 7).

"There are painful moments, but Jesus loves you... I take part in your sorrows and I have sent the Mother General to comfort you. It's long time, you were praying the Lord so to have your heart suffer great pain, Jesus loves you and answers you... God is with you and from everything he knows how to obtain his greater glory. Here we are all praying for you" (to a nun in difficulty, *Scritti*, vol. III, pp. 14-15).

He has always the heart of a father and of a mother together: his an ascetic who does not dismay, but calls to loving, to do everything for love for Christ and for the poorest who represent Him. He wants them to be sisters and mothers for those who are most in suffering: they will have to serve on a tray even a glass of water for sensibility towards the poor "your masters". He is always very caring towards his nuns:

“For the food do no wrong to each other... To be able to work, sufficient food is needed” (12th May 1898). *“To come home (from the Marche), it’s better that you take the second class, where there are the radiators and soft seats...”* (17th Nov. 1899, *Scritti*, vol. III, p. 178).

“Do you often ask pardon?” – “When you arrived, didn’t you have any pain? And now how do you feel?” – “To go to the hospital, did you take the short cut?”

He is really the man of Christ’s charity, lived and offered in the everyday big and small things. In the Institute’s rule, which he had written praying in front of the Tabernacle, he has spread the same charity. In 1897, Mons. Riccardi, Archbishop of Turin, approves this rule for him, for the first time; in 1905, it’s approved by Card. Agostino Richelmy, who declares about his Congregation: *“It’s a very poor community, but of good spirit”*.

Having written the rule, to which the nuns have taken part in by praying intensely, it’s not difficult to live that Rule, born with them and that they have seen alive in the Father’s life and speeches. The Institute, thanks to the calling which never lack, develops rapidly. Only ten years from its birth, it’s already known in all Italy: when from 9th to 13th September 1895, the XIII Italian Catholic Congress was held, his name and his religious family, have been praised as an example for all the Italian Clergy. On the 12th September, the speaker had recommended: *“In the small centres, shelters are established based on the one set up in Pancalieri thanks to the work of the very zealous can. John Boccardo”*.

Newspapers, such as the *Unità Cattolica*, have spoken about him and his work ever since 1892,

when it already gave hospitality to 65 poor people of whom some orphan children, *“served with great charity and meekness, all happy and satisfied”*. It all could be born and grow well, because a real priest who believes in God’s Providence and in charity is engaged, just like the “giants” of the Piedmontese holiness: don Cottolengo, don Cafasso, don Bosco, don Faà di Bruno, don Murialdo, don Allamano... He was raised at their school and he is one of them, with his good and serene face rich with joy and even capable of innocent jokes, of merriment.

The priest of charity

First of all the parish

The commitment for the congregation doesn't, nevertheless, reduce the parish priest's activity.

Ten years after arriving in Pancalieri, don Boccardo plans a great repairing scheme for his parish church, according to the advice of lawyer Berteia and architect prof. Caselli. The debts he already has for the home Hospice don't make him surrender, he wins the distrust of some people in the village and, trusting in the Providence, he undertakes the works in his "parish church".

He has the floor, the nearby square and road lowered, according to the former church design, he has the floor redone, he enriches the high altar and the balustrade with polished mosaic steps; he returns the pulpit to its original beauty, replaces the no longer reparable pews. He gets the parish priests' remains, which for centuries were buried in the church, to be collected in a burial niche on which he has written: *"...so my parishioners shall not forget the efforts borne for many years by many holy men"*. In the cemetery of Pancalieri, he has a tomb built for the priests.

Finally, in 1896, he can be pleased of the repairs now completed and he writes about it to a friend of his, can. Martini, rector of the Seminary of Pinerolo: He is very happy to have made very beautiful the Lor-

d's house so to offer Him a worship worthy of Him.

Within the Parish's territory there are other seven minor churches of which he takes care of, providing that for each one there shall be the regular Mass celebration and that the religious ceremonies shall take place: they will be places for gathering his people in prayer, for educating, for evangelising, for sanctifying the souls. Among these churches, he favours the ancient sanctuary of the Virgin Mary of the Hermit and transforms it into the centre of devoutness to the Virgin Mary within his parish. On the way back from Lourdes, in 1908, he will have a cave, similar to the one where the Virgin had appeared, made.

Personally he lives in poverty and would like his home to be very modest, but thinking about the parish vice-priests, to the passing-by guests, to the parish priests who will come as successors, he promotes the repair of the "priest's house": in order to increase the number of the inhabitable rooms, he reinforces the weakest walls, changes the stairs and the balcony of the front... He spends thousands of liras, an enormous amount in those days, but he almost always sees about it with his own pocket. For these merits of his, is decorated by the authority with the title of "earl of the St. Maurizio and Lazzaro". He cares only about being a holy parish priest who brings Jesus to all the souls who have been entrusted to him.

For the young he redoubles his cures, according to the great examples he has seen in don Bosco and in don Murialdo, great friends of his. For the children and the youngsters, he personally holds the catechism, he stimulates the "Luigini" association for the boys and the Figlie di Maria association for the girls. He would like a great oratory for the youth: doesn't make it, but he doesn't leave any stone unturned to reach every single one of the youngest.

Jesus-Host in the first place

Since the very first day of his ministry in Panca-lieri, don John Boccardo is the first to show up as much as he can in the church, not only on Sundays, but also every day Very early in the morning and again in the evening, in prayer, talking to God, willing with everyone. He is a real man of God, a genuine man of Church. His parishioners see him praying with the Breviary or the Rosary's crown in hand or collected in contemplation in front of the Tabernacle.

The holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the centre of his day, of his life, and wishes it may be so for all his parishioners: really the "the apex and the spring" of the whole Christian life, because the Mass represents Christ's Sacrifice on the altar, the Sacrifice which gives the greatest glory to God, expiates mankind's sin and spreads the heavenly grace in the souls. Follows from this that the first duty of the priest is to celebrate the Holy Mass every day, with faith and ardour, exactly as don Boccardo does, and to call everyone to take part. To those who complain that he takes it a bit long in celebrating, he replies "I don't take the Mass by the piece. It's the most sublime act on earth and it has to be performed with the greatest gravity".

After the Mass, he lingers for a long time thanking the Lord just offered and received. He continues to stay in the church saying the divine Office, he returns to "pay a visit" to Sacramented Jesus. But he is not satisfied, because he knows that Jesus is there and is all. He would always be with Him, if his Lord would not send him to serve Him in the brothers, to carry Him. But as soon as he can he returns in front of the Tabernacle.

It's exactly there that his parishioners come to see

him: to confide in him, to confess, to ask him advice, to listen to his word which is light and comfort in every occasion. He makes the most of this to spread Jesus' Gospel in their lives, to exhort them, – personally, one by one – the frequent and regular confession, and to prepare them to receive Eucharistic Jesus in the Communion. When at the night comes and usually no one more comes, he continues to linger in front of the Tabernacle.

One day he goes to Turin to see his friend don Murialdo, he misses the train back and has to stay the night in his Institute. At the hour when he usually carries out the night eucharistic adoration, he goes down to the chapel and there he finds don Murialdo. The friend, arrived before him, never gets up to return to bed. Don Boccardo waits a little and then says: *“If you continue like that, you will wear out all the saints in Heaven”*. Don Murialdo replies he doesn't have a bed for the guests and that he had given his... So they both continue the adoration until dawn, when don Boccardo leaves for Pancalieri.

The inhabitants of Pancalieri, try to imitate him at least a little with the dedication for a better Christian life. The parish thanks to his payers and his example, flourishes again. Knowing that the grace and the most truthful renewal of faith and life come only from Eucharistic Jesus, he promotes several times a year the *“Forty hours”*. He wants the *“Corpus Christi”* procession to be the most solemn.

“Go and pray in front of the Tabernacle – he invites those who tell him their problems – and you will see that it will all be settled”. They believe him and see very difficult cases easily get solved. He continues to repeat: *“If we really loved Jesus, we would know how to seize every odd moment to stay with Him and we could not, if not reluctantly, grow away*

from his feet. He is the first to do so, so that his parishioners can say: *“We have seen him in tears in front of the Blessed Sacrament”.* Or: *“It was his special contentment to stay in front of the Tabernacle”.*

On the way with Mary

One year due to the excessive rain, the rivers Po and Pellice, overflown the banks, were threatening destruction in Pancalieri. The people terrorized rush to the church, called by the ringing of the bells. The parish priest takes the Monstrance and goes out in procession with his people, going to the spot where the water is most menacing. Many kneel down in the mud, they all pray with faith, in front of Jesus-Host. The waves calm down and the water goes away.

Everyone was crying it was a miracle.

In the same wake of the saints, those of Turin his friends, he has a great faith in the Virgin Mary. As soon as he arrives in Pancalieri, he lead his parishioners in pilgrimage to the Consolata, to the Ausiliatrice, to the “Selvaggio” near Giaveno. In 1908 he will go himself to Lourdes. Among his intentions he writes: *“After Jesus in the Sacrament, I will seize every opportunity to encourage and increase the devotion for the Holy Mary in which devotion I myself will make sure to progress day by day, seeing in it delight and comfort”.*

Simple as a child and great as the saints, he always carries with him the Rosary’s crown, the miracle medal, the Carmel’s dress (the confraternity of which he has joined) and keeps the intention done at the time of the Seminary: *“Every day and at all costs I will say the whole holy Rosary (15 tens) and the Angelus”.* Among his notes, he writes: *“The*

priest must develop and prove himself within the greatest devotion for Mary and always have for her the most loving, filial and affectionate intimacy... More than a duty it's a need very close in the priest's heart, because it's impossible to be a holy priest, without being devoted to the Virgin Mary".

He spreads among the parishioners the devotion and the reliance in Her, the Marian prayer, the celebration of her feasts, the commitment to imitate her virtues. he is convinced that there is nothing that can lead the souls to Jesus more than the devotion for the Virgin Mary. He attaches great solemnity to the month of May, and to the Consolata's novena (20th June) patron of Turin and diocese. He writes on behalf of the can. Allamano, a short volume of prayers and meditations for the observance of the "*Nine Saturdays at the Consolata church*" which, printed in thousands of copies, will enter in almost all the families in Turin.

"All his sermons were all very nice – one of his parishioners will say at the diocesan enquiry for his blessing – but they were nicer when he used to talk about the Virgin Mary". "In those days in the village they used to swear at the Virgin Mary. The parish priest had set up the Court for Mary and now swears anymore". In fact, having established the observance of the "Court for Mary", the church gets crowded with people, many confess and change life.

Don Boccardo himself likes to remember that the nicest dates of his life have been signed by the Virgin Mary's presence: He was baptized the 21st November, Mary's introduction, he had first worn the cassock the 8th September, Mary's nativity; he was ordained deacon the 25th March, Mary's annunciation; he entered in Pancalieri the 24th September, Virgin Mary of the Mercy... He knows that the Virgin Mary has always fil-

led him with graces, the Virgin Mary he had invoked every day for his holiness, for the good outcome of his charity and apostolic deeds, for the needs of the parishioners and of the Sisters of St. Cajetan...

To everyone, to the inmates of the open Rest Homes, to those who come to him to confess, to the parishioners, to those in suffering he recommends, in an urgent way, the affection of the Virgin Mary, the daily Rosary for all the intentions, for the parish, for the needs of the body and of the spirit, for the conversion of the sinners and of those far away from God, for the Church and the priests. To those who tell him about difficulties and pain, he repeats: *“Do you feel lonely? Each time we want, the Virgin Mary comes to spend the day with us!”*. *Is it difficult to enter Paradise? Be devoted to the Virgin Mary of which she is the door, and you will enter!”*.

To someone who points out that he is really a holy man he replies: *“It’s impossible to be a holy priest, without being a priest devout to the Virgin Mary”*. But he immediately specifies: *“Have you seen my signature? C. G. B. (can. Giovanni Boccardo)? It means: “Che gran bunomb! (what a very good man)”*”.

The priest of charity

He condemns sin in any form, but he is of a endless sweetness in welcoming the sinners, in having them to hear God’s mercy which urgently calls to change life, to be reconciled with Him. For this reason, he is always willing to Confess and never stops inviting to learn from God’s pardon. Endowed with a strong character and a little impulsive, he is engaged in becoming meek and humble in heart, like Jesus.

One day, in the occasion of a funeral, he doesn’t

allow the flag of those who fight God and the Church to enter the church, and he does so with rather strong words. The following Sunday, being the church crowded, although reaffirming the need of the act done, he asks pardon for having done so in too lively a manner. He causes such an enormous impression that the man responsible of the fact tells his wife: *"I want to be reconciled with that holy a priest"*.

On the occasion of the political elections, he opposes with all his strength the candidature of a member of parliament because of his speeches against God and the Church. But this man, soon won by his goodness, becomes his friend and confidant and, after his death, comes to hold his funeral oration, describing him as *"admirable example of how to operate, to live, to suffer and how to die"*.

The day of the dead, as they were accustomed to in Pancalieri, he hands out the bread to the poor. A boy queues up to receive a loaf of bread from the parish priest. As his turn arrived, don Boccardo looks at him and tells him: *"You have more bread than I have!"*. But immediately, fearing to have offended the boy, he calls him and tells him: *"Take it I will give you the biggest loaf!"*.

There is a very ill nun who confides him she would like to eat two fresh figs, although it's not the season. "The Father" travels thirty kilometres to find them, but without success. The nun is moved to tears.

Around him and his nuns, real charity prodigies flourish.

In the surroundings of Pancalieri there is a certain "Bibi", well known for letting himself go to good drinking with very sad consequences. He is a poor man who goes backwards and forwards from the prison to the fresh air because of the overbearing behaviour he has when he is drunk. Don Boccardo

meets him one day at the prison in Saluzzo where he had been , as usual, to confess, and is able to bring him to the home Hospice, where he invites the nuns to treat him with every care. But the drunkard, one day threatens to kill the mother superior. Don Boccardo then orders to transfer him to a room on his own where the nuns, always in couple, would have brought him food and care. Won by the goodness of the parish priest and of the nuns, bit by bit the elderly man changes life and asks to confess and to take the Communion.

Another one, left the prison almost blind, consumptive, rejected by all, is welcomed by don Boccardo at the home Hospice. Himself often spends time with him and shows him God's world, still unknown. In occasion of a celebration, the poor man is entrusted to address the parish priest with a greeting in behalf of everybody. *"Father – he says – it's you who has saved me... Thanks to you, I have found my dignity again as a man, my Creator, my God... I am a shipwrecked person who you have taken to shore, a dead man to whom your priestly and fatherly charity has give new live... How can I thank you?"*. And he bursts out crying.

An other man, used to swearing from morning to evening, despite the parish priest's rebukes, nevertheless accepts to accompany don Boccardo to visit the "Cottolengo". The man is impressed by those people, both inmates and nuns, who pray, work, suffer serenely and blessing God. He proposes not to swear anymore and becomes a good Christian.

A child was left orphan of the mother and without father. Don Boccardo welcomes him in his home, oversees him for several years, then he entrusts him to don Rua, the successor of don Bosco as guide of the Salesians. He will become Salesian coadjutor.

There is no accident that doesn't find the parish priest ready to bring aid and comfort. Once a very serious fire breaks out in a farmstead where the wheat harvest was piled in the farmyard. All the farmers rush to desperately put the fire out, but without success. Don Boccardo turns up inviting all to pray. They all kneel down and pray. Suddenly the sky darkens and a thunderstorm with pelting rain puts the fire out.

We could continue for along time. Don Boccardo is really the priest of charity, who with his enormous faith, does real charity prodigies. His parishioners try it out and look at him as a saint.

The charity of truth

But surely the first charity a priest has to offer his brothers is to tell them the Truth about God and man, about life and death, announce Jesus Christ who is precisely this truth, without discounts, in all its beauty, in all its requirements, even those that cost.

It's this the greatest charity that don John Boccardo offers to all those who he approaches. At Pope Pius X's election, on the 4th August 1903, he particularly has his same line of thought, on one side condemning modernism with the encyclical *Pascendi* (1907), and on the other recalling the Clergy to a strong commitment of holiness and opening the Tabernacle to the little ones and to the adults with the frequent Communion. Don Boccardo, in his spiritual guide had already urged for a frequent communion and had seen holiness flourish even among the most humble people.

In the same way, as a priest in love of God, he preaches the Gospel without sparing himself, in every occasion. He educates on all the truths of Ca-

tholicism, on God's commandments, he raises his voice against the mistakes, the vice, the swearing, the world's falseness. He defends the family, the youth's pureness, the holiness of marriage, the life of the Church, the Pope's work. He preaches in the parish and outside the parish, even called from far away to preach "missions to the people".

With the tenderness of a mother, he rushes at daytime and at night to see the ill, he listens to them, he comforts them, he brings them the Sacraments... He want his parishioners to have the opportunity to freely confess and for this he often calls other priests to the parish for the confessions.

He pays attention to the problems of the workers and starts up in Pancalieri the Worker's Mutual Aid Associations. He circulates the good press such as the *la Voce dell'operaio (Worker's voice)* [which will later become the *Voce del popolo (People voice)*] founded by don Murialdo and hinders the errors spread by the newspapers hostile to the Church.

He is a good shepherd, who to Jesus' image, defends the sheep of his herd from the wolves and doesn't yield to in his service for the Truth, always in front line, faithful to Christ, for his Gospel, right to the end, priest and apostle even when he will be loosing his strength.

In 1908, don John Boccardo is sixty years old: he has been priest for 37 years, parish priest for 26. He has founded a religious Family, now thriving, with more than thirty homes, which takes care of many elderly and poor people and children. He has tilled his parish and has sown the Gospel. Even the places far away know about the holiness and the apostolic style of this man of God. In that year, in August, almost as to seek comfort from the Holy Lady and the Heart of her Son Jesus, and regain the strength according to

the example of the clergy's great models, he goes for a pilgrimage to Lourdes, to Paray-le-Monial, to Ars. From the letters sent to the nuns, we catch the joy of the peculiar experience made, his renewed commitment to holiness.

“I am always among you”

On the 8th August, from Lourdes, he writes: *“Here I am no longer able to describe the spectacle of faith... Everyone, men and fellows with the Rosary in their hands... If you could see the ill... it makes one cry and I have much cried”*.

On the 22nd August he is still in Lourdes and he writes with his great faith and great heart: *“One can't hold the tears and here one often has a cold at the eyes. Almost impossible to get close to the cave, where there are always from eight to tenthousand people. There is no more accommodation... It's impossible not to cry and, while I am writing, I have the tears to my eyes. At the procession, more than sixtythousand people: it was pouring down and no one moved”*.

He was impressed by the miracles he has seen with his own eyes: *“There were miracles: a boy jumped up healed, a 35 year old paralyzed lady, walked off with her legs... A boy who had a leg ten centimetres shorter in a moment, had both legs the same... Today and tomorrow, who knows how many more miracles! During the Italian pilgrimage, he healed a 21 years old young woman from Grugliasco. Having the opportunity to enter, he went again to the Immaculate's cave and prayed for all the Congregation. Pray much so that this journey to Lourdes shall be epoch-making for my life”*.

On the 26th August, don Boccoardo, very happy,

is in Paray-le-Monial, where in 1675, Jesus had revealed if endless love to St. Marguerite Mary Alacoque, turning her into the apostle of his Sacred Heart within the Church and the world. He experiences in himself a great joy and writes:

“Here we are in Paray. What can I tell you? Literally, I feel as if I were in Heaven. I have prayed and prayed and I have made all and each one of you pass at Jesus’ feet... Shall we become saints, really saints, all saints and great saints”.

In Paray, he enjoys a unique surprise: *“It occurred to me – he writes – an extraordinary case which I am not able to explain The nuns’ chaplain wants to talk to me... Here no one knows me and he greets me as a superior, he talks to me about the elderly, of the Congregation, he recommends himself to the prayers, he wants to take part to the good things you do... and I wasn’t able to know how he knew about it. He gives me twenty francs of alms. What do you think about this fact?”.*

The good things don Boccoardo has started to do in his parish, have brought his name beyond the Italian borders: even abroad they know him as a parish priest and founder.

He also goes to Ars, in the parish of St. John Mary Vianney, who he considers one of his models. From Lion, he writes:

“At Ars I have listened to three Masses and then I have celebrated at the Curate’s altar... still uncorrupted and looking as if he was sleeping. We have stayed until 2,15 and we have always prayed. I have celebrated the Mass for you, parishioners and Congregation. It seems as if we see the blessed Vianney everywhere preaching and teaching catechism. Having been only 49 years since he died, there are still many people who have known him”.

He visits the town of Lion, *“where – he says – during the persecutions 19 thousand martyrs were killed and where during the French revolution, hating the faith, a great number of Christians, priests, men and women were killed...”*. He ends, as a good father, as he is: *“But My heart is always in Pancalieri. I am always among you. I am lost of everything and everyone”*.

The experience made has been very beautiful, but he can no longer put up with being far from his people who he really loves as dearest children. Finally, in September 1908, he is back again in his parish: teacher and father of the souls, to the very end.

Saint?

By then at Pancalieri and where he passes, don Boccoardo enjoys a fame of holiness. One day at the Consolata boarding school, some priests are talking about him. Giuseppe Allamano, now “blessed”, says with certainty: *“After his death, it will be possible to promote the process for his beatification”*.

To this fame of holiness many episodes, which bring to mind miracles, help.

Two girls from Carignano, have their mother seriously ill and, walking on foot from their village, they go to see him to ask him for the blessing. He leads them to pray in front of the Tabernacle, then hands over to them a medal to be placed under their mother’s pillow. *“But first – he recommends – call on Mother Gaetana to eat something”*. When they get home, the mother recovers.

One day, a young woman comes to him weeping and crying out: “I have blinded my girl!” The little girl, affected by a infection to the eyes, had

been cured with too strong a liquid which had burned the pupils. The mother takes her to the parish priest, hoping in a miracle. Don Boccardo takes the girl by hand, he leads her to the Tabernacle where he is used to invite the children to pray, he dips his finger in the lamp's oil and, praying, anoints her eyes by now lifeless. The girl starts to see again!

She will grow up healthy and good and, at thirteen years of age, she will devote herself among the Daughters of St. Cajetan, with the nice name of Sister Agnes: her life will all be for assisting the blind of Corso Napoli in Turin.

Therefore, who considers don John a saint isn't mistaken, but his style does not frighten anyone: meek and jovial, he tries to be so all the more when he realizes he still has some unintentional roughness. He loves the others with Jesus' strong and sweet love, and his love is returned.

He is capable of unblocking difficult situations with a joke and to open up hearts closed off to joy.

To a girl, who likes very much whistling like a boy and who other has been told off by others, the good parish priest says, after the confession: *"Stay even merry, that by so doing you don't make the Virgin Mary weep. But if you can get used to not whistling, it might be better and make a sacrifice to offer to the Virgin Mary"*. One day at Borgo S. Dalmazzo he finds the square full of soldiers: he approaches one by one, he gives them some tobacco and gives a little speech remembering God, the souls, the eternal life.

With the people incline to sadness, he explains: *"The bad mood anywhere it may come from is the most terrible devil which can always do us a great deal of harm"*. And to the nuns: *"The spirit of the Congregation is a holy spiritual cheerfulness"*.

This is the way to suffer...

In 1911, don John Boccardo is in full activity on several fronts. But it's getting closer the hour of the cross which will engrave the last stretch of his path of holiness.

On the 26th May 1911, ended the preaching at S. Maurizio Canavese, on the way back he goes to Turin to catch the tram for Saluzzo. Nevertheless, in via Nizza, he falls to the ground, muttering incoherent words. Providentially, at the appointment for the tram there are also sister Tranquillina and sister Virginia. The commendatore Bosso, director of the factory in Polonghera, passing by in his car, puts himself at the disposal of the invalid.

They accompany him to the Consolata Institute, afterwards they take him home at Pancalieri. The brother don Luigi and Mother Gaetana arrive and they urgently call several doctors. But they can only confirm that, struck by hemiparesis, he will remain paralyzed as long as he will live.

Everyone, parishioners, friends, nuns, pray asking God the miracle of healing. For a month he continuously stays in bed and there is no way to convince him to change his poor straw sack with a more comfortable mattress. Moments of improvement and of worsening alternate: he is in need of many treatments, of continuous assistance, limited as he is in the movements. But he remains lucid and is able to talk, albeit with effort.

One day, he sees a nun distressed for the death of a dear person, he is moved and tells her: "*Tomorrow you will no longer cry*". And orders that the three Masses celebrated in the parish shall be in suffrage for the deceased person and he celebrates himself, assisted by a parish vicepriest, for the same purpose. It's the last time he manages to do so.

Later, he will no longer be able to get up to the altar. *"But I am a priest!"* he sighs crying. He is left with the great joy of being able to receive Jesus every day, in surplice and stole, in the Communion, and to tell his beads to the Virgin Mary many times, remembering everyone in his prayers.

This will be his life for 31 months. But he is extremely happy when they bring him in his wheelchair among the ill and the elderly of his home Hospice, having now become one of them. He still spreads a little goodness, for as long as he manages to talk. He becomes for them a marvellous example of goodness and endurance, of resignation and love for the Cross. They all pray together: he cries for comfort as a child.

...and on the way to meet God

Finally he is struck by the greatest pain: he has difficulty in swallowing and the sister tells him that he will no longer be able to receive the Communion. He cries inconsolable: *"No longer even Jesus... But I was not worthy of Him... Fiat, fiat..."*. But soon the brother don Luigi realizes that he can still receive the Communion and asks the youngest parish vicepriest to administer him the Holy Communion every morning. The father seems reborn.

Many start to hope in a possible recovery. They would like to take him to Lourdes to receive a miracle from the Virgin Mary, but they don't succeed. They lead him to the Sanctuary of the Immaculate at the Selvaggio of Giaveno, where everyone ask for the miracle. He receives new strength for his last stretch of path on earth. They hear him repeat the ejaculation of S. Filippo Neri: *"I thank you, my*

God, that it isn't going my way".

He has a great joy: in Pancalieri the chapel of his home Hospice is inaugurated and the Card. Richelmy, archbishop of Turin, comes and speaks about him, who is among the in-patients, with endless praises.. The cardinal wants him at the table, close to him and serves him personally. A few days later, don Boccoardo meets a poor man who has no shoes: immediately he signals that the have to take his off his feet to give them to him.

On Christmas day 1913, the Father want to go to the shelter where he hands out to everybody images of Infant Jesus, many sugar almonds and very sweet expression of fondness with the eyes full of tears. When he leaves them, they cling to his dress, they grip his hands, as not to let him go. They have to take him away.

Now he is really close to his last hour. He spends the night of the 26th December 1913 in great suffering. The 27th he is administered the ill's unction. On the 28th he seems to recover and in the church during the "Court for Mary", they all pray for him. On the 29th he receives once more Jesus during the eucharistic Communion: the Last Sacraments for eternity. The following night it's agony. In the morning, when is still dark, Mons. Bartolomasi, the auxiliary Bishop of Turin and friend of his, comes to bring him the blessing of the cardinal archbishop and of the Holy Father Pius X. At 6,30, don John Boccoardo sees God for ever. It's the 30th December 1913.

Mons. Bartolomasi, in church, celebrates the Holy Mass as closing of the "Court for Mary" and gives the news of the death of their parish priest to the many people from Pancalieri who are present. Immediately is repeated, banded about: "*A saint has died!*". Some of the priest arrived recalls what was said by the can.

Allamano: *“As soon as he will be dead, the process for his beatification will be promoted”.*

The hour of glory

He has gone, like that, silently, the Father, as the poorest he so much loved, glad to finally go to see and enjoy God for ever, after having loved Him and made Him be loved. In his will, ever since 1898, during the exercises for S. Ignazio of Lanzo, among the rest he wrote:

“I ask forgiveness to God for having answered so badly to so many graces which had to make of me a great saint. I ask pardon to everyone... Willingly I accept death, how and when the Lord will want in penitence of my sins...”. “Having been born poor, I wish to die poor... I exhort my sisters to have the most hearty and greatest charity with each other. I recommend my poor nuns to my brother don Luigi and I trust that he, my brother and godson, will love them as a father... for such a purpose... I elect him for life as general superior”.

In occasion of my burial, I wish that one of the parish vicepriest from the pulpit of my parish church, shall ask for forgiveness to my parishioners, for all the scandals and negligences, imploring them to pray for me”.

On the 1st January 1914 his funeral took place with the celebration of the Holy Mass, as he had decided. The whole of the population of Pancalieri took part, many priests and authorities.

Immediately after his death, sure and intense his fame of holiness started spreading in Pancalieri, in Turin, in Italy and further away. Many started to turn to God for his intercession. Very soon there was talk about graces and single favours received thanks to

him. His fame of holiness became universal, growing as time passes by right up to nowadays.

On the 24th July 1960, at the archiepiscopal Curia of Turin, in the presence of the cardinal Maurilio Foscati, the informative process was started on the fame of holiness of the canon John Boccardo. The process ended on the 11th March 1978, in the presence of cardinal Anastasio Ballestrero, archbishop of Turin, and was passed on to Rome to the Congregation for the saints' Causes.

On the 1st July 1991, to the same Roman Congregation, it was delivered the "Positio super virtutibus" of God's servant whose heroic virtues have been proclaimed by His Holiness John Paul II with the Decree of 6th April 1998.

After the approval of a claimed miracle occurred in Brazil in 1968 by intercession of the Venerable Servant of God, the 24th May 1998, in Turin, His Holiness John Paul II proclaims John M. Boccardo, exemplary parish priest and brave founder of a religious Family, priest in love with Eucharistic Jesus and spiritual father of a multitude of brothers, blessed.

He will be yet another saint of "regal Turin", land of saints. For their intercession we ask God: "Father, give the word a host of holy priests, to donate us Jesus, only Saviour"¹.

For your knowledge: The Church the April 14th 2007, has proclaimed Blessed the brother Luigi Boccardo, who has founded the blinded sisters "Daughters of King Jesus".

¹ The documentation for this booklet is taken from the "Positio super virtutibus" and from the writings of God's Servant (Rome, 1990-1991).

FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE CANON
JOHN MARY BOCCARDO

God's will must be the nourishment of our spiritual life.

Let's not forget we have devoted ourselves to God to do wholly and always at any cost his Holy Will.

Oh Jesus, Jesus, my love... Oh, If only I had a hundred hearts to love You!... A hundred lives to sacrifice!... A hundred tongues to praise You and Glorify You!...

Oh Jesus, my Goodness, set me on fire of a great love for You, so that I may love You for You and all those who don't love You!

Remember to always do every thing... to please and give glory to God only, to carry out His Holy Will.

The real love for your neighbour is a fire that can't stay closed, hidden and idle, but it shows itself outside and takes on many forms as many are man's needs.

The love for the neighbour is a sign that each Christian, rich or poor, carries engraved not on his brow but on his heart and therefore in his deeds.

Never take a piece away from the cross, don't smooth it, don't put wheels on it...

Make sure you always say: "Yes, my God... what You want I also want...".

You receive everything from Jesus' hands... swallow all the bitter pills that God hands out to you, always happy to suffer and to be despised by all for God's sake...

Each morning let's put ourselves on the cross with Jesus accepting everything from his hands.

Each morning let's set out for the Heavens.

It's at Crucified Jesus' feet that the saints grew.

The Virgin Mary, after Jesus, is the most powerful Advocate we have with God, because She sees and knows the needs of each of us.

Is it so difficult to earn for oneself the Paradise? Be devoted to the Virgin Mary of which she is the door, and you will enter.

Every time we wish so, the Virgin Mary comes to spend the day with us.

With Jesus in the heart, any work is undertaken with greater strength and love.

The richness is the virtue of the greatest, the poverty is the virtue of the Saints.

May you always have in front of your eyes Jesus Christ, continuously meditate on His life, imitate His virtues and you will be holy.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1848 – 20th November - John Boccardo was born in Moncalieri from Gaspare and Giuseppina Malerba. He is baptized the following day in the parish church of S. Maria della Scala – Moncalieri (TO).
- 1855-1860 – Primary education in Moncalieri.
- 1858 – 16th July – Christening in the parish church in Moncalieri.
- 1860-1864 – Gymnasial studies at the Charles Albert “Real Collegio” (Royal College) in Moncalieri.
- 1864-1871 – Seminaristic curriculum at Turin.
- 1871 – 3rd June – ordained priest by Mons. John Antonio Balma in Turin.
- 1873 – 8th November – He is appointed spiritual Director of the Seminary of Chieri.
- 1877 – 1st February – he gets his degree in Theology
- 1877 – 19th February – Appointed Honorary canon of the Collegiate church of St. Maria della Scala in Chieri.
- 1881 – Transferred to the theological seminary in Turin as spiritual Director.
- 1882 – 10th May – Canon John M. Boccardo appointed Parish priest of Pancalieri.
- 1882 – 24th September – Parish entry at Pancalieri.
- 1833 – Founds in Pancalieri, the “Pia Unione” (the Pious Union) of young ordained women, from which his Congregation will be born.
- 1884 – July-September – “cholera” Epidemic in Pancalieri.
- 1884 – 6th November – He starts with three neglected little old men the Home Hospice of Charity.

- 1884 – 21st November – He welcomes the first young woman who devotes herself to serving the poor and the Congregation starts.
- 1887-1888-1889 – He starts with the first Takings of the Habit and Professions of the “Poor Daughters of St. Cajetan” among them Carlotta Fontana, the first General Mother Superior.
- 1893 – 27th November – Foundation of the first Congregation’s subsidiary home in Saluzzo, followed by other 42 foundations, 20 in Piedmont and 22 in the Marche. (seven will be closed living the Founder).
- 1897 – 24th July – Mons. Davide of the Counts Riccardi, Archbishop of Turin, approves the Rules written by John M. Boccardo.
- 1905 – 18th January – The Card. Richelmy, Archbishop of Turin, approves with Decree the Congregation of the “Poor Daughters of St. Cajetan”.
- 1908 – August – Pilgrimage to Lourdes, Ars, Paray le Monial.
- 1911 – 26th May – John M. Boccardo is struck by paralysis.
- 1913 – 30th December – After having suffered with faith and abandonment, John M. Boccardo dies in Pancalieri at 6,30 a.m. – 1st January 1914 solemn funeral and burial in the cemetery of Pancalieri.
- 1924 – 23rd March – first transfer of the mortal remains from the cemetery to the Home Hospice’s chapel in Pancalieri.
- 1960 – 24th July beginning of the diocesan process
- 1978 – 11th March end of the diocesan process.
- 1998 – 24th May – Proclaimed blessed by His Holiness John Paul II.

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John Mary Boccoardo (1848-1913) was parish priest of Pancalieri in the province of Turin. Driven by charity, he founded the “Povere Figlie di San Gaetano” (Poor Daughters of St. Cajetan) with the task of taking care of the people in need, especially the elderly. As for other Piedmontese saint priests, he bore witness to the holy Gospel and to his gift of supplying relief to man’s needs. As an acknowledgement of this charisma, on 24th May 1998 John Paul II proclaimed the priest John Mary Boccoardo blessed and introduced him to the worshippers’ veneration.