

MOTHER MARIA OLIVA'S
LETTER
TO
DON CIRO SCOTTI



Bangalore - 2008

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DON CIRO SCOTTI

Presentation of Igino Giordani

Reverend and beloved Daughters of the Church,

I have read with much commotion and admiration the letter of our Mother M. Olive, which you gave me. You know what veneration I had for her, knowing her virtues of piety, humility, wisdom, self-giving; she was an extraordinary woman totally given to God.

In this letter, I have discovered the secrets of a soul made one with Jesus in the Eucharist and with the Church, his Mystical Body. It has disclosed to me other aspects of Maria Oliva's holiness.

You know well how I considered her a holy creature from the first time I encountered her, approximately 40 years ago. And for the conviction – I would say for the experience – of her holiness, I preserved the letters she wrote to me from the very beginning. This I did, against my habits of disorder as regards papers, just with the idea that they could be of use in the process of beatification and canonization. I was convinced of it; and therefore guarded as best as possible her letters, which I read many a time for meditation. M. Olive was one of those persons,

in whose presence one would perceive the presence of God himself and experience the need to be holy

Personally I received numerous gifts of wisdom from our Mother, even though, I remained a mediocre “son of the Church”, whom she, on my request, accepted spiritually in her infinite charity among her own disciples, so much so she gave me the name “Igino of the Church”.

To you Daughters of the Church, formed from one such Mother and Mistress, I express my gratitude without limits. It is she who taught me the first lessons of how to live a holy life in the world, as much as possible, according to the thought of the Fathers of the Church, which I was earnestly studying at the time of my first encounter with her. Our Mother (pardon me if I say “our” considering myself spiritually part of your community) M. Olive seemed to me a “Mother of the Church”, a humble copy of Mary. For this, I preserved and have given to you, Daughters the letters she wrote to me. I owe her much even though I humbly acknowledge my poor response to her solicitations to lead a holy life as is evident from her letters.

I apologize for making you lose much of your time with these recalls of mine. But I can never

cease to thank God for giving me the privilege of meeting in the midst of my political life, a Saint, who reminded me of the values of the spirit. She helped me to live an ecclesial life.

United in prayer and requesting you to remember me as a devoted son of the Church,

*Igino of the Church**

Rocca di Papa, Centro Mariapoli
12 February 1977

*Igino Giordani (1894-1980) is an Italian Catholic journalist who contributed to the establishment of the Journal of Catholic Action in 1944 and became its Director. He is distinguished as a man of faith who promoted universal brotherhood and worked tirelessly for the welfare of people, in keeping with the Social teachings of the Church.

Before reading this letter it is good to go through the pages 48 to 50 of the Story of a Charism where the first meeting of Maria Oliva with Don Ciro Scotti is described.

LETTER TO DON CIRO SCOTTI

Pederobba, 29.01.1932

Venerable Brother in Our Lord,

With great effort I asked my Rev. Mother Superior of Treviso the permission to write to you and receive a reply, once, without being subject to control, and it was granted. Praised be the name of the Lord.

May God reward you for your last letter and the following note as well as for the communication you gave me on the many adherents to the «Florilegio».¹ I await also a sacerdotal relic of

¹ *Florilegio* means “spiritual bouquet”. It was a small project launched by Maria Oliva and sent to many priests, religious and lay people to manifest their communion in the Church and to console the heart of

your holy Brother and his life history.² Do not neglect this work, because there is a need, in fact, a great need for biographies of holy Priests who totally belong to God, and are totally detached from the world and their own selves.

Before confiding my soul's desires I respond again to one of your questions.

Rev. Fr. Oddo Stocco³ to whom I often spoke of you, wrote to the parish priest of Barano simply to know if you are alive or dead, and did not ask for any other information as far as I know. Keeping aside my anguished doubt and knowing that our Holy Rules do not permit other correspondence than for duties and strict necessities, he wanted my service for the purpose of investigations that need explanations. He was provoked by your silence following the loss of some of my letters, certainly.

I too, my Brother in Jesus, find the meeting with your Rev. nephew providential; he is

Jesus who suffers in the heart of his Vicar, the Pope. It consisted of offering prayer and reparation for nine first Fridays of the month for this intention.

² Maria Oliva here refers to Bishop Giovanni Scotti, the brother of Don Ciro Scotti who died unexpectedly on 16 October 1951. He too led a saintly life.

³ Parish priest at Pederobba till 1931 and then at St. Zenone degli Ezzelini, Sanctuary of Madonna Rosa.

already my younger brother in the heart of God, together with our Holy Archbishop⁴. More over I find all that happens between us providential: our understanding each other fully beyond the distances of time and place, the rare correspondence, the limitations imposed by my Holy Rules to our reciprocal sharing.

It is in the sweet mystery of communion of Saints that we are intended and understood, only with the supernatural means: prayer, suffering, love; only for holy goals: i.e. our sanctification and the sanctification of others. Certainly now, more than in the past, the intervention of the Divine providence in our spiritual relationships is clearly sensible and visible.

You want to know the grace Jesus has given me. What I had asked Him always with an obstinate hope was *love and suffering*: nothing more, my Brother.

I have never seen the Lord, I have never heard his voice, but my desire had been exuberantly repaid, and in love and in suffering I have experienced Paradise.

What a great Love! I don't dare to analyse, because I feel incapable. I have experienced Life, Strength, Light, Sweetness, Humility,

⁴ Mons. Longhin, Bishop of Treviso from 1904 to 1936.

Purity and Charity, above all the Charity in the form of consuming Zeal for the expansion of Divine Love in the world, for the sanctification of all the members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

What an amount of suffering! Even here any attempt at explanation is impossible. I have experienced what only the damned souls can suffer; I do not believe that in this valley of tears one can bear anything more.

Till 1930 I only lacked the pain of misunderstanding; and St. Therese of the Child Jesus (if it was not merely a dream) promised me that too on 4th April of the same year of grace. I had frequent attacks of bile. It is only after four X-Ray tests that my dear religious family was convinced that I was suffering not from neurasthenia but from chronic tuberculosis; and I was sent here, so that I could find rest, affection and peace.

I feel only tenderness towards those who, not voluntarily but only to fulfil God's design, have caused me some suffering; because I always asked Jesus the treasures of his sorrows. He himself passed on to me his thirst of suffering for the salvation of the world. This indeed was the most beautiful grace. I was a novice when one morning, half an hour before

the rising bell, I was suddenly awakened by an outpouring of life. I felt that the soul of the Divine Saviour precipitated into my soul to quench his longing for suffering in my ability to suffer and his “Sitio” (I thirst) was my torment from that time. For about half an hour I felt as if burning with love, with suffering, with thirst; and from that day my chalice was continuously filled and overflowed to the brim.

I spent ten years alternatively in this «loving suffering» and «painful loving», and I never refused the Lord the sacrifice of my will. It cost me much, it cost my life, but I am happy, most happy to be consumed for doing the Will of my Father in heaven.

In the crucifixion of my being, my holy Archbishop did the part of the Father as in the Crucifixion of Jesus. He wrote to me on 1st January of the same year (1932) these consoling words: “*I understand well the disposition of your soul, in full, total, complete uniformity to the will of God*”. I savour them in the peace of heart for the glory of God.

I have confided these confidential matters as per your desire, venerable Brother, but I would not have done it had I not been constrained and enabled by a higher motive that surpasses my little self. I must confide to you another secret of

love and of suffering bound to the preceding one as effect to the cause.

When I came to know you, I had been just converted to the Divine Love since few years. The God whom I was not loving entirely but offending much had pushed me to profess publicly my faith during the procession of the *Corpus Domini*. After this victory over human respect, Grace had conquered me reaching me in the middle of the Castlefranco Square during the solemn singing of “Tantum Ergo”.

It was not a grace of love, but as for Apostle Paul on the way to Damascus, it was an extraordinary grace of strength and light. In a moment, I understood the entire mystery of Christianity. The Sacred Host gave me an intuition of the ineffable secrets more than what the six years of studies in a religious college gave me.

I felt the need for spiritual direction and I was directed to a Monsignor of Treviso⁵ who for 9 years tormented my life. Eager to obey, I surrendered to his counsel and made the vow.

When I met you, Brother, I was already bound, and only God knows how much it costs me to be faithful to the silence that was imposed

⁵ Mons. Beniamino Fabrin.

on me. To you I would have opened my heart, I felt as if to die when I heard you say: "You can neither be a Visitation nor a Canossian Sister." I can never forget these words of yours.

A few months before 8th December 1918, the day on which I received the Holy Anointing of the Sick, fearing that you might esteem me too much, I made certain hints regarding my past life as a lost sheep, and you replied me with a very long letter.

Jesus gave me a strong urge of mortification and I did not want to read it without the permission of my Director. Thus determined I sent it to him but was returned to me with these freezing words: "*You may read it, it is a good man whom you have deceived.*" I felt like fainting and in order to make a complete holocaust to the Lord, without reading I threw it into the fire. Jesus soon rewarded me for my sacrifice and gifted me a supernatural love for you, most delicate, beyond all earthly vicissitudes and human judgements, an ardent desire of sanctity, an inexpressible need to do great things for the glory of God and for the salvation of the souls.

With the grace of conversion soon Jesus gave me also the gift of vocation to religious life and with this great gift a dissatisfaction towards

all the Institutes that were proposed to me, and the secret need - always repressed and re-emerging - to offer to God the first fruit of a Work that gathers in itself the perfumes of all others: the spirit of prayer of the contemplative Orders, the spirit of mortification of the penitent Orders, the spirit of poverty of the mendicant Orders, the apostolic spirit of the modern Congregations but above all the spirit of love, of obedience, of attachment to the Church of the Jesuits.

In opening my heart for the first time itself on this point, my Rev. Director responded me rigidly without giving me any possibility to speak further. "God wants other instruments for such works". Then allowed myself to be guided by obedience first to the Visitation Sisters, then to this my holy Institute⁶. Here God sent chosen confessors, but faithful to my vow I never opened myself to anyone. However, before making the Profession I felt that it was my duty to get counsel even though my Director would be against it. For this I was helped by the rubrics of the Canon Law on the freedom of conscience of the religious. Desiring to imitate St. Therese of the Child Jesus I did not ask such counsel to

⁶ Canossian Institute.

anyone else than to my ordinary confessor⁷ who, by the providence of God, happened to be the secretary of the Archbishop. He, a pious, learned and prudent person, had pity on my soul and directed me to his Excellency. It was hard for me to obey, I made up my mind only after four years of persuasion and following the unexpected (for various reasons) and inspired counsel of my Superior: *“Jesus the King has made me to understand that you, Sister, must allow yourself to be guided by our holy Archbishop”*.

This obedience cost me a true martyrdom, because my Director was also the Superior of our Institute. I prepared myself for much humiliations because the Canossian Sisters were generally content with the confessor that the Providence sent them. However, it brought me a great peace which human beings cannot take away anymore even when the daily sufferings were on the increase. I presented myself to my new, holy Director with the written general confession. Later I revealed to him all the graces I received from Jesus, and only three years back I disclosed to him the secret of my continuous, human repugnance towards the kind of life I embraced contrary to my will, out of obedience.

⁷ Mons. Corazza, confessor of the Canossians.

He replied to me: *“What you dream is ideal; your vocation is extraordinary, but you must remain where you are”*. Thus I pronounced the most holy perpetual Vows (24.Oct.1928). Only God knows what I suffered that day! And without the hope of dying. My Superiors gave no importance to the small but frequent autumnal haemoptysis I had since 1926.

Meanwhile the Project was alive in the depth of my heart suppressed as a temptation and re-embraced always instinctively again and again especially on the days saturated with Divine Love. I did all that is possible and impossible to keep my mind away from this dream. In 1929, on the feast of St. Peter, with the consent of my venerable Archbishop, I made the vow to remain forever as a Canossian Sister and offered this painful immolation for the Holy Father and for the Church.

Later I asked and obtained the permission from the Holy See to deprive me of the small property (patrimony) inherited from my father in favour of a convent for our Institute in Trieste. Finally I threw myself into the Canossian Work till I became dissipated in spirit. But to the surprise of all, Jesus told me: “Enough, you rest now”, and he gifted me a blessed rest of sickness. I was happy in my solitude. Happy in

being inactive! Oh yes, Brother, because finally, I can be not only a Canossian but also a Daughter of the Church and I can go around the world from my bed, from morning to evening in order to bring the souls to the Love of God.

Returning from Milan after the defence of my thesis around Christmas 1930 I was bedridden, and in the long hours of meditations in my room I could re-visualize the insistent design of the Project. The lack of understanding of my beloved Mothers induced me, for the sake of charity, to renounce my spiritual relationship with the Archbishop; he recognized it a very opportune decision. But he had compassion on me and did not hesitate to pour out on me from his saintly heart the affection and counsel on every occasion.

Having decided to remain alone with Jesus, without a Director, I made a last attempt for the Project. Already in June 1930, he (the Archbishop) had told me briefly: "*The Work will come... later*", but then he rudely interrupted me whenever I mentioned it. Last month (December 1931) I forced him for a definite reply. "*Your Excellency, you assure me that the Love which often seizes me comes from God; well, it is under the impulse of this love that I see the Work of the "Daughters of the Church" as a reality; if this*

dream born of zeal is an illusion, then the love that generates it also is an illusion and I have always been and will continue to be a poor woman suffering from illusion...”

On 1st January 1932, 1st Friday of the month, from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I had the reply of my Archbishop: «As a rule, I am always glad to give support and approval of works that will promote the honour of God and the salvation of souls. There are already so many holy Institutions, but the Church is always youthful and always fertile with new works which springs from the perennial root of its essential prerogative which is sanctity. In practice, however, I am very slow, and willingly I play the role of the devil, as they say, pointing out the possible difficulties that could come up. And in your project the difficulties that exist are very grave and of a diverse nature...» For my venerable Archbishop, the insurmountable difficulty is my present vocation. But I am most happy to be in a situation without being able to do anything for the Project than with my sacrifice and sufferings.

“The Daughters of the Church” cannot be born except from the Cross as the Church herself: “When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all to myself.”

Knowing that I am not a worthy instrument for the Work of God I prayed to Jesus with insistence for 14 years for a worthy, saintly instrument and I am convinced that my prayer has been granted, for my Archbishop continues: "...But already in one of your previous letters you told me that if your present vocation is an unavoidable obstacle to your Work, then there is already a person available if necessary; hence you have already replied to this difficulty also, which for me would have been insuperable. As regards other things, this is not the time to speak of them, we shall do so in person... All the works of God have one common characteristic: they leave in the souls who sense the inspiration a very serene and tranquil peace. If it is really God who wants the implementation of those holy inspirations, it is certain that He will direct it to the end. Hence let us abandon ourselves to him with holy indifference. I am sure that you will do so. I know the dispositions of your soul, of full, total and complete conformity to the will of God. May Jesus sanctify you in charity and in total dominion of His Love."

No I did not tell my Archbishop that there is already a person available if necessary. I only wrote to him: "Being convinced that I am an unworthy instrument, I prayed to Jesus and He

made me encounter worthy instruments". It is true, and more than one, but only one knows the secret, and only since eight days. To the least prepared instrument but the nearest, I spoke of the Work, though through a painful sign Jesus had already prepared my heart for a delusion.

The Rev. Fr. Oddo Stocco whom I recommended so much to your prayers welcomed the Project with humble enthusiasm, but as a preparation for its implementation, I asked of him great sacrifices and detachments. But opening the Sacred Scripture I saw the episode of the rich young man, and I began to tremble. I asked Jesus for the repetition of the sign after the Holy Communion if it would be futile further attempts and invitations to sanctity, an indispensable condition for the consistency of the good Works. By chance I opened again the big volume of the Sacred Scripture and my eyes fell on the same episode in the Gospel of St. Mark. My fever and heartache returned.

Now I write to you, but am not prepared for a delusion. My heart makes me hope in you, Brother, the instrument already worked upon and chiselled by Jesus, made ready for his Work. For this I was dreaming of seeing you up here, not for myself, for whom Jesus suffices, but for the Work of Jesus. If I am allowed, I shall mention

your name to the Archbishop when I shall probably see him next Easter. He will surely smile because he told me that you are very dear to him.

The work would consist in the institution of the “Daughters of the Church”(or also, if Jesus so wishes, “Sons of the Church’) with the aim of making known, loved, and served the Holy Spouse of Christ through the practice of the contemplative and active life, according to the proportion lived by the Lord himself: thirty to three. The *three* of the apostolate would have to flow from *thirty* of the interior life; zeal would be only, only, only the fruit of love, of unlimited generosity, of absolute donation to God.

The holy Church is not known, is not loved, because the One who gave birth to her in sorrow is not known and loved. If only you knew what I feel while pronouncing the solemn words of our profession of faith: “I believe in the Holy Catholic Church”; while repeating the verse in the Office of the Blessed Sacrament: “The children of the Church shall be like olive shoots around the table of the Lord”; while reciting the prayer of Jesus after the Institution of the Eucharist and the Priesthood.

The Holy Church is not the yearning of all Priests as it was the yearning of Jesus. I have

studied many, and few of them enthusiastically love the Holy Father and the other fellow members of the Mystical Body. Even among us religious, the Church is not often loved as Mother.

Oh, my little St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, the patron saint of the Work, how she loved this Mother who has generated us in Christ! “I will be love in the heart of my Mother, the Church”. And I will be sorrow, my Brother, because I do not dream of anything else except “to suffer in my flesh that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of the Body, that is, the Church”. The Christians unfortunately resent the indifference of the priests and religious and prefer their own devotions to the liturgical prayers, their own hymns to the solemn Gregorian chant, often a superstitious cult to the living and vivifying cult prescribed by the ecclesiastical year. And how many study the history of the Church, her art, her rites, the words of her Bishops, the words of the visible head which are, so to say, a sacrament of the Divine Word? The Work would like to make the presence of the Church felt through the teaching of religion to children and adults, to bring the children closer to their Mother, to collaborate with the Catholic Action and with the ministers of the Lord in oneness of heart.

In our religious Congregations we welcome all the vocations, even the most imperfect. The novitiate works on them, the profession does the rest or it is left to itself. The little Family of the “Daughters of the Church” should only receive generous souls, the most generous - like St. Therese of the Child Jesus - ready to overcome, with the help of grace, all discouragements, ready for every detachment, to sacrifice oneself without limits: souls inflamed by the fire of Pentecost like the Apostles and the disciples of that early hour; souls disposed to leave the heaven of Jesus for the Church, like the Holy Virgin, “The Mother of the Church”, “The Queen of the Church”; souls happy to suffer contradictions and contempt for the name of Jesus and his Immaculate Spouse, happy to die for it like the Saviour, the Apostles and the Martyrs.

Enough: I am tired. All this I intend to confide to you as a secret entrusted to a priest; no one, absolutely no one, should come to know, even if I should die soon. I have asked Jesus for this silence for my peace. I am a Canossian, I want to die as a Canossian and I intend to rest in the shadows during life and after life. Jesus sustains the Church in the obscurity of the Tabernacle and with the bloodless Sacrifice. I

have asked to be his vehicle of suffering - and often during the Mass I suffer indescribably - and to do good like the Angels, without anyone knowing it. For this I like to labour in suffering from my blessed bed.

Brother, I have written nothing but a few lines. But if Jesus gives you a sense of the Work, you will also understand the rest. Above all, he will communicate to you an extraordinary strength, the same which tears apart the left side of my chest, to overcome obstacles, difficulties, contradictions and courageously implement the design of God. If it is really from God, its success is certain. Let us pray much, Brother.

Pray Jesus that other instruments who ought to be the initial nucleus of the Daughters of the Church might also respond. Initially I dream of three nucleus: The first would be that of Ischia, (the instrument: Don Ciro Scotti) the second at Emilia at Portiolo (instrument: Don Pericle Aldini, fratello di Tonino Aldini), where nothing is yet known but where all pray and love much the Brother of Tonino Aldini, who died in the odour of sanctity and whose life has been written by the Jesuits. And another in my province (Treviso). Here the instrument would be Rev. Fr. Oddo Stocco. But I fear for him, whether he may repeat the case of the young man in the Gospel

called by Jesus in vain to follow him. You pray, so that he may be substituted by a Saint⁸ whom I do not know so well as yet, but who has worked with so much zeal for the little Work of the Communion of Consolation⁹ and is our extraordinary Confessor. In the diocese he is referred to as “St. Peter of Bergamo”.

I received Jesus a little while ago and I have told him many things for you for the sake of the Work. Here I have traced out only a draft. If you feel moved to accept the invitation, then sooner or later, certainly you will come to celebrate the Holy Mass at the altar which is only two meters away from my bedside. Jesus will make the journey possible for you and will provide you also with hospitality, since our Institute cannot offer hospitality to the priests at night. However the Mother Superior here, is so good that she will certainly help Jesus in all his plans, even though she does not know them at all.

If you do not feel inspired, please write to me and do not be afraid to make me suffer, because my share in the Work is precisely to suffer. The grain of wheat must fall to the ground, that is, in humiliation and must die to be

⁸ Mons. Pietro Bergamo, parish priest of Crocetta del Montello, Treviso. He is indeed the founder of this parish.

⁹ See footnote 1: *Florilegio*.

fruitful, so that its fruit may endure. Jesus has said so and that is the reason why, what I so much hope for, has been, to a great extent, fulfilled. Why did he want me to become a Canossian? Was it perhaps to place my talents at its service as my first Director wanted? Oh! no. It is so true that the day after receiving my diploma, at the cost of an extraordinary sacrifice to the Institute, a cell was opened for me in the infirmary and, it seemed, without any human hope of a cure. Again in 1928, a radiologist of Milan, on examining me at the order of Don Gemelli, gave this response: "This is by now a being of which we cannot make use but a quarter". Why did Jesus take me away from activity just at the moment when it was most badly needed? Why is my part here below is to suffer even in joy, in which, my fellow Sisters believe, I am habitually immersed? Yes, "I am overjoyed in all my afflictions", because, I feel most deeply the need "to complete in my flesh what is lacking in the passion of Christ for His Body which is the Church". Let the prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper, which I never read without tears, tell you what I feel, what I hope for, what makes me so happy here below.

Therefore do not be afraid to make me suffer. I seek nothing except the will of God. I

do not long for anything else except its fulfilment in all creatures, especially in the most beloved. Your letter will be read by no one else, and if a reply is needed, the Lord will obtain for me a new permission for a free correspondence. Let God be glorified in us, Brother; let us ask only this for the present.

Just a word more regarding my baptismal name, Maria Oliva for which you have asked an explanation. It explains the fact that I was born, struggling between life and death on 26th March 1893, Palm Sunday of that year, and my mother wanted to thank the Virgin of the Vigil and remember the feast of Hosanna and the Passion and of Our Lord. I was baptised on Monday of the Holy week. The Gospel reading of the day proclaimed the loving gesture of Mary of Bethany who later was sent to the friends of Jesus with the message of Ascension: “Go and tell my friends that I ascended to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God”. That is: “I ascend now with my true body in order to descend later, on you my Mystical Body” *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am.*

In Him, devoted and affectionate
Sister Maria Oliva F.d.C.C.

Daughters of the Church
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