

Congregationum Oratorii Sodalibus

*Procura Generalis
septuagesimo a sua institutione anno
et sexagesimo a Confoederatione instituta*

D.D.D.

Anno Domini 2002.

This year marks the **LX Anniversary** of the founding of
the Confederation of the Oratory,
established at the 1942 General Congress and called the “Institute
of the Oratory” and approved by the Apostolic See on April 12,
1943 with the new Constitutions.

The Procura Generalis
intends to offer the Community and individual members an
occasion to reflect on the history of the institution that in the last
sixty years has defended and safeguarded the nature of our
Congregation, and at times its actual survival. It also wishes to
commemorate in a special way the figures of two Servants of God
whom we hope to see elevated to glory :

Fr. Giulio Castelli,
of the Turin Oratory and founder of the Cava de' Tirreni Orat.,
and **Fr. Giovanni Battista Arista**,
of the Acireale Oratory,

who in agreement with a small group of Fathers who distinguished
themselves for their work in favor of the resurrection of the
Oratory houses in particularly difficult years. They worked and
suffered so much to create a great project that they are considered
as the “Fathers” of the Confederation of the Oratory.

The significance of the words of the Holy Father John Paul II
echo at the General Congress of 2000:

*“Your Congregations, faithful to the autonomy desired by their
holy Founder, are particularly linked to the reality of the
particular Churches and to local situations. But the importance
in the life of the Communities and their members of the bond of
fraternity with the other Congregations that make up the
Confederation must not be forgotten. It is through this bond that
the characteristic autonomy of the individual houses is opened to
the gift of active charity and the confederated Communities find
effective help to grow in fidelity to the Oratorian charisma”.*

And also the words pronounced at the same Congress by the
Card. Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of consecrated
life and the Society of apostolic life:

The Confederation.

“In the past when the Apostolic See established the gathering of your “Domus sui iuris” into a Confederation, it did so to offer an ideal instrument for fraternal communion [...] Love this instrument of communion which is the Confederation and exploit its organisms, so that the Oratory will grow strong in the Holy Church of God, “circumdata varietate”.

Edoardo Aldo Cerrato, C.O.
General Procurator.

If the origin of the Oratory lies in the ministry of Father Philip, and if he is evidently also the founder of the Congregation from which the Oratory is both established and constituted, it cannot also be affirmed that it was in his mind to form a federation of Congregations outside Rome which was either an initiative of priests who had come into contact with the Roman Oratory and were fascinated by the new method of evangelization or an initiative Roman Congregation itself¹.

The original intention of Father Philip regarding the priesthood community of his spiritual sons reflects the nature and the guidelines of the Father, whose inclination was that of neither planning nor organizing anything but rather that of relying on the Holy Spirit for an orderly communion.

It was more the initiative of his disciple priests than that of the Father himself, which led to the path that brought about papal recognition in 1575 of that Community which Father Philip had founded and developed with his own hands.

It was certainly the apostolic desire of Father Philip to see the Oratory spread and with it the Congregation that was to serve it. There is significant proof in a letter written by Father Philip on January 13, 1580 to the Archbishop of Fermo Mons. Domenico Pinelli², where we can read that he would have willingly sent some priests to start activities in Fermo, but he lacked the strength needed in relation to the intense activity of the Oratory which was organized in an orderly succession of sermons for which not all the Fathers had adequate capabilities nor the time necessary. He was probably also held back by his intimate original conviction of a

¹ There was an attempt of founding in Milan, which lasted a few years when some individuals were sent by Fr. Philip ; the House at S. Severino in Marche region (1579), in Fermo (1583), in Naples (from 1584), the Abbacy of S. Giovanni in Venere, impetrated and obtained by Pope Sistus V (1585), the Roman Community of S. Giovanni dei Fiorentini.

² San FILIPPO NERI, *Gli scritti e le massime*, a cura di A. CISTELLINI, Morcelliana, Brescia, 1994. Quoted from this point on: S. FILIPPO NERI, *Gli scritti e le massime*, 52-53

family of priests gathered around him whose identity and apostolic strength was not bound to organizational structures but to the spiritual relationship of progeny that had generated it and continued to characterize it.

This relationship of close spiritual dependence on the Father did not impede anyone from following a different orientation in the spread of the Congregation. Fr. Philip let things be, trusting God and continuing in his incessant apostolic activity that did not give him much time for questions of ecclesiastic organization. However, this intention of Fr. Philip did not mean that he was indifferent towards the rising surge of oratories but on the contrary he was interested in a modest way, quite typical of his spirit, and allowed other Fathers primarily to handle the matter.

The constitutional texts preceding the *Instituta* of 1612³ clearly present a centralized structure of the Houses, according to the intentions of Fr. Talpa, Fr. Tarugi, Fr. Bordini, Fr. Baronio and others, more than a real conviction of Father Philip who accepted the ideas of his progeny. Consequently he and his first successors starting from the Constitution del 1583 received a special title which was also present in the constitution of 1588, revised and expressly approved by St. Philip himself. The title that was granted was that of General Provost⁴ whose function is exerted on

³ In *Collectanea vetustiorum ac fundamentalium documentorum Congregationis Oratorii S. Philippi Neri*, A. CISTELLINI documenta collegit et illustravit, Brescia, 1982, 75-208. Quoted from this point on “Collectanea”.

⁴ In the Assembly of the Congregation of June 17, 1587, as described in the Book of Decrees with the complete approval of Fr. Philip, the following query was proposed and voted: “Approvate voi che il R. P. Ms. Filippo, nostro Preposito Generale sia confermato in Preposito nostro e Padre Generale perpetuo [...]?”. Fr. Philip in the dispositions undersigned in February 1585 affirms: “l'intenzione e desiderio e volontà mia è che quando al Nostro Signore Iddio piacerà di chiamarmi a sé, i miei figli della Congregazione eleggano per Preposito Generale in luogo mio il Padre Ms. Francesco M. Tarugi, al presente Rettore, che giudico atto a questo governo...”(San FILIPPO NERI, *Gli scritti e le massime*, a cura di A. CISTELLINI, Morcelliana, Brescia, 1994,108).

a few associated Houses through some visits to some of these.⁵ This practice lasted for only the time in which the Constitution, according to the Congregation Bull, was elaborated and the aspect of the Institution was forming with difficulty between the Father and his disciple priests.

The legal ties of the existing Oratory Houses faithful to the original intentions of the Founder were, for the most part and the definite Constitutions codify this choice, what Gregory XV reiterated with his Breve “*Ex iniuncto Nobis*” of July 8, 1622⁶.

If this is the history of its origin how was the “Confederation” established?

The idea matured only in recent times and under the thrust of historical situations that have induced the Congregations to seek an organic tie among themselves, in respect of the autonomy desired by whom is considered to be in every right the general Founder. The Confederation was founded about sixty years ago and though not created at its origin, it has revealed itself during its more than half a century of existence as the safeguard of not only the identity and original autonomy of the Oratory Congregations but also of their actual survival.

Desired by many and seen with suspicion by others, the new institution goes beyond the historic circumstances that have been determining factors and sets its roots in the bond of charity that right from the beginning have united the Congregations of the Oratory and have spread very rapidly all over the world despite the difficult means of communication of the past centuries and have never failed to be considered a moral unit in respect of the principle: “unaquaeque domus aut familia [...] se per se regat et moderetur”⁷. They have never failed to create among themselves

⁵ The first Visit was decided by the General Provost Fr. Cesare Baronio, with his Document dated April 22, 1594: “abbiamo deciso di mandare alle Case della nostra Congregazione il P. Pompeo Pateri [...] e gli abbiamo dato ordine che, di nostra autorità, indagini e visiti quanto presso di voi si fa...”.

⁶ *Collectanea*, 73-74.

⁷ *Instituta* 1612, chap. IV, in *Collectanea*, 220.

spiritual relations and collaboration. The oratory art and culture with its specific connotations bear witness to this and another documentation is also found in the letters and the reciprocal aid that the Houses have given in favor of new foundations and in some cases assistance to those with problems. The National Archive of Spain, to quote an example has conserved vast correspondence that the Congregations of America had sent to the Mother Congregation in Rome and to the Spanish Congregations, requesting legal counsel, advice and other types of communication on various subjects.

It is from this practice that the note of the Author in the “Excellency of the Congregation of the Oratory” refers to in the III Chapter when it speaks of the “the dear correspondence circulating through the *Congregations of St. Philip*”: “*This Excellency of Charity unites very closely so many Priests and Brothers in a sole House, uniting also all the Congregations of St. Philip in a very close bond of love. Whenever in exterior matters there is a lack of communication or no participation of temporal Goods, it is a consequence of what the Holy Father wanted in the separate governing of each individual House, each one distinct from the other [...], nonetheless there is great affectionate correspondence among all the Priests of the Oratory, even if they have never met and they exchange genuine love and charity. This close bond of charity, says Fr. Consolini in a letter to a Father from another Congregation, unites all our souls and hearts to God with such a bond that facit utraque unum: and this reciprocal love is not diminished by different genes, great distances, national diversities unfamiliar to us or Houses greater than ours or individuals with superior qualifications [...] It follows from this Charity that when God favors a Congregation with the gift of glory, decorum or holiness every other one rejoices as though it were their own. [...] We recognize each other all as Brothers, because we are all sons of the same Father, practicing the same rules and habits; and when a Congregation can serve the other in some manner, it*

*always does so with pleasure nor are there any differences but there is always unison in emulating the Virtues of others...”*⁸.

The Steps of the Way.

The way that led to the founding of the Confederation was long and with many obstacles that helped it to advance prudently and with maturity. Through the following historical notes we intend to trace the development by tracing the steps and remembering **the men who** were involved in this endeavor.

1. 1893 -1918.

The first official step towards “*Institutum⁹ Oratorii S. Philippi Neri*” was taken by the Decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Religious *ex Audientia Sanctissimi* March 21, 1933, that instituted the *Visitatio Generalis Oratorii* and nominated an Apostolic Visitor for all of the Oratory Congregations and namely a claretian Fr. Arcadio Maria Larraona¹⁰. In Rome the function of the Procura Generalis had already begun its work under the guidance of Fr. Carlo Naldi¹¹, of the Florence Oratory, designated by the

⁸ “*Pregi della Congregazione dell’Oratorio di San Filippo Neri, opera postuma e prima d’ora inedita d’un prete dell’Oratorio di Savigliano in Piemonte...*”, 2 tomi, Venezia, 1825, I, pp. 156-162.

⁹ The term “*Confoederatio*” became official only in 1969.

¹⁰ FRISON B., *Cardinal Larraona*, Instituto Teologico de la Vida Religiosa, Madrid, 1979; ABBATE C., *Il Card. Arcadio Larraona e l’Istituto dell’Oratorio*, in “*In Aevum*”, XXXI (1953) nov-dic.; *L’Istituto dell’Oratorio ed il Cardinal Larraona*, in “*L’Oratorio di san Filippo*”, XVII (1960), 9, 3.

¹¹ Fr. Carlo Andrea Naldi (1892-1957), from Florence. Entered the Oratory of Florence and was ordained to the priesthood in 1905; he gave examples of piety and availability to community works and was dedicated untiringly to the ministry of preaching. Being a very kind and gentle person, he was able to enter easily into the aristocratic and bourgeois society not only of Florence, which he used to help many charity initiatives. During the period when he was Procurator he normally spent only half a month in Rome, setting up the head office of the Procurator in the house next to the Church of Sts. Nereo and Achilleo, after a brief period spent in San Girolamo della Carità.

Convention of the Provosts celebrated in Bologna in 1932 and named “General Procurator of the Oratory”¹² by the Apostolic See in February 1933.

But the way that brought about the configuration of a new bond among Congregations had already started a few decades beforehand, when everyone had begun to perceive the dramatic situation that had developed during the course of the XIX Century and which needed remedy.

Massacred by the policies of Napolean in Europe, the revolutionary laws of the Italian Risorgimento and the political movements that involved some of the Houses in Latin America, the Oratory Houses found themselves in a serious state of support to the point that a great number of them, even if glorious in their history and tradition, ceased to exist and others were in serious danger of closing.

“At the end of the 18th Century –writes Fr. Carlo Gasbarri¹³- due to the various Jacobinian, Masonic and anticlerical regimes in the various European countries, there was a great crisis that in just a few years reduced the number of Congregations from 182 to 56. This also happened because of the very autonomous juridical structure of the Congregations that made every House very isolated from the others with little or sporadic general communication”.

At the end of the 19th Century the problem was faced seriously and work took place with a sincere love for the Oratory, in particular

¹² CISTELLINI A., *Di revisione in revisione*, in “Memorie Oratoriane”, n.s. II (1981), 5-6-7-8, 72; ID. *Intorno all’indole della Congregazione dell’Oratorio*, in “Memorie Oratoriane”, giugno 1992, n.15, 75 ss. The author refers to his essays on this matter to the “*Diario*” of Fr. Naldi, which he quotes.

¹³ GASBARRI C., *L’Oratorio Romano dal Cinquecento al Novecento*, Roma, 1963, 205.

14 But already in 1847 the Roman Provost Fr. Carlo Rossi during the visit to Rome of J.H.Newman encouraged a moral union among the Houses “to have greater strength and influence”. This idea was not shared at all by the new convert, who lived at Santa Croce in Jerusalem and was training for oratory life. (Trevor M., Newman, 1962, 418-419).

with the servants of God Fr. Giovanni Battista Arista¹⁴, from the Oratory of Acireale who later became Bishop of the same diocese and also Fr. Giulio Castelli¹⁵, from Oratory of Turin and founder of the Congregation at Cava de’ Tirreni.

His Holiness Pope Leo XIII supported this intention because he had had close ties with the Oratory from the time of his thirty year episcopate in Perugia and Pope St. Pius X, while he was Patriarch of Venice, was among the first Italian Bishops to express his approval for the initiatives to find an adequate solution¹⁶. There was also the support of some convinced members of the Oratory – and primarily Cardinal Alfonso Capecelatro¹⁷, of the Oratory of Naples, at that time Archbishop of Capua and Librarian of the Holy Roman Church – but there was also some aversion on the

¹⁵ Giovanni Battista Arista (Palermo 1863-Acireale 1920). The diocesan Process was celebrated between 1946-57, the Cause for Beatification was introduced at the Sacred Congregation of the Rites of 1969. CRISTALDI G., *Il cuore di un vescovo*, Roma, 1950. IACEN. *Canonizationis Servi Dei Ioannis B. Arista. Positio super virtutibus*, Romae, 1992.

¹⁶ Giulio Castelli (Torino 1846-Cava de’ Tirreni 1926). Started the Informative Diocesan Process in 1927, it concluded on November 20, 1941, and the cause of beatification was introduced at the Sacred Congregation of the Rites. MAZZA F.M., *Il servo di Dio P. Giulio Castelli*, Badia di Cava, 1950. CAVEN. TYRR. *Beatificat. et Canonizat. Servi Dei Julii Castelli. Positio super introductione Causae*, Romae, 1953.

¹⁷ The Procura Generalis conserves in its head office the autographed text of the Patriarch of Venice.

18 Alfonso Capecelatro dei Duchi di Castelpagano (1824-1912). Entered the Oratory of Naples in 1840 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1847. For many years he served as Provost and became Archbishop of Capua in 1880 was made Cardinal by Leo XIII in 1885. He was nominated Librarian of the Holy Roman Church in 1893. He was quite a famous man, he wrote on subjects like history, sociology, hagiography and politics. In the Conclave of 1903 he had the probability of being elevated as Pontiff. MOLA C., *Vita del Card. Alfonso Capecelatro*, Napoli, 1913; DE FEO F., *Alfonso Capecelatro, oratoriano, cardinale, scrittore*, in “Memorie Oratoriane”, 14 (1984), 55-70; RUSSO A., *Convegno Nazionale di studi su “Alfonso Capecelatro...”*, in “Memorie Oratoriane”, 14 (1984), 86-89.

part of Oratory members who feared the loss of the characteristic of autonomy of the single Congregations.¹⁸

A letter from Fr. Arista to Fr. Castelli, dated August 13, 1893, can be taken as the first step along a very long way:

“... And now since I have the fortune of finding in you, Reverend Father, great compassion, I would like to express a thought which has been bothering me for a long time for which I would need some advice from you to understand whether it is feasible or it must be totally rejected.

In his Constitution St. Philip established that each House of his Congregation be independent from the others and that the observance of its Rules be recognized.

Now I am wondering if it would be straying from the teachings of the Holy Founder if we attempted to tie all the Houses together to form one Body but allowing each one enough liberty to be independent in fact? [...] My Father, whose wisdom is enhanced by counsel and prayers, think about what I have expressed, and in due time I expect a charitable response.”

In December 1889 Fr. Giulio Castelli – went from the Congregation of Turin to that of Rome, after a dramatic appeal addressed to all the Oratories in the world already in 1881 and reiterated in the following years by the Provost of Vallicella, Fr. Scaramucci¹⁹. He was well aware on his part of the need for a commitment in favor of not only the Roman Congregation which was not the only one in a sad situation. In Rome Fr. Castelli started working with the same zeal that he had used in Turin, and made such a great impression on the mind of thirteen year old Eugenio Pacelli, an altar boy at Chiesa Nuova, who never forgot his old master and once he became Pope with the name of Pius

¹⁹ TIMPANARO G., S. E. Mons. Giambattista Arista, *il filippino di oggi dai vasti orizzonti*, in “In Aevum”, XX (1948), suppl. al n.5.; CISTELLINI A., *Intorno all’indole...*, cit., 55-107

20 Giovan Carlo Scaramucci (1821-1897), from Rome; Provost from 1878 to his death, he sustained the Congregation in very difficult situations stemming from very serious external and internal causes. Cf. GASBARRI C., *L’Oratorio Romano*, Roma, 1960, 125-131.

XII, said²⁰: “I am glad to see the introduction of the case for beatification of such a worthy son of St. Philip. When he came here to Rome, I was just over thirteen years old and in Chiesa Nuova he was also my catechism teacher. Everyone considers him a saint and I will bear this in mind. He was tall, frail, very silent, humble and his eyes were always lowered like this...”, and his hands were always folded on his breast, in the habitual gesture of Fr. Giulio.

With great sacrifice and without the necessary economic means, Fr. Castelli managed to establish a small College to train candidates for the Oratory for those Houses that had requested it and on the III centennial of the death of St. Philip, he published a “Collectio Constitutionum et Privilegiorum Congregationis Oratorii a S. Philippo Neri fundatae”²¹ with the express intention of inviting a revival of the Oratory and the life of the Congregations.

What Fr. Arista confided in a letter to Fr. Castelli was later sent by the young Father of Acireale to another Oratory friend, Mons. Jourdan de la Passadière²², who replied on March 19, 1895 declaring his full support for the ideas expressed and he communicated that several months prior to this he had already spoken about the matter on his own initiative to the Holy Father Leo XIII.

In the meantime, Pope Leo XIII wrote a Breve full of admiration for St. Philip and his work to celebrate the centennial. In the audience of June 6 granted by the Pope to the Fathers present in Rome for the occasion²³, Leo XIII expressed his love for the

21 Audience of December 18, 1941, granted to the Bishop of Cava Mons. Marchesani – who reported the evidence to a group of Oratory Fathers.

22 Brixiae, Typographia et Bibl. Queriniana, 1895.

23 After having passed through the Roman Oratory as candidate, he started from 1870 an Oratorian Community in the South of France, in Draguignan (Var), suppressed by the government in 1880, and he also collaborated in establishing other Communities in Rouen (1893) and Reims (1895, approved in 1897, and lasting until 1905); he then became auxiliary bishop of di Grenoble and later in Lyon.

24 “L’Osservatore Romano”, 6.6.1895

Oratory and his ardent desire to revive it. He also convoked those present the following day under presidency of Card. Capecelatro, to find the means of binding all the Congregations into a fraternal bond of active, efficient charity.

This meeting, the first of its kind, came to a practical conclusion but its proposals failed to offer anything in response to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, to whom Card. Capecelatro referred. He sustained, however, the hope of those who believed in the need of finding a solution: Fr. Giulio Castelli, for example, wrote on August 6, 1895 to the Provost of Perugia Fr. Enrico Bondi: “*We trust in the Lord. A new horizon is opening for the Oratorian Institute. The Congress held by order of the Pope has already borne its fruit. We continue to pray, struggle, sow and water*”²⁴. Fr. Arista, now aware that his desire coincided with that of the Vicar of Christ, continued to work fervently and during a personal trip to Italy, France, Spain and Belgium he took the occasion to contact as many Congregations as he could, arousing the interest of many Oratory members in this initiative and also causing some perplexity.

On December 31, 1895 Fr. Castelli left the Oratory of Rome, exhausted by the opposition of older brothers, to go to Cava, upon invitation of the Bishop of that Diocese. In 1899 in the imminence of the beatification of the Ven. Fr. Antonio Grassi, planned for the Holy Year 1900, he sent the Provosts a circular inviting them to Rome for the occasion in the hope of a possible new encounter.

In the meantime, the situation of Oratorian Houses in Italy worsened to the point that the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on orders from the Pontiff Leo XIII himself²⁵, with a decree dated May 29, 1900 nominated Fr. Clemente Benedettucci²⁶

²⁵ The autographed letter was donated to the Procura Generalis with other historical documents and is in the head office.

²⁶ The love of Pope Leo XIII was demonstrated in many ways. It is for this reason that in the commemorative painting of the Congress 1948 – see cover page 3- the great Pontiff extended his arms towards the sons of St. Philip, in the gesture of embracing and protecting them, he blesses them in an ample gesture.

²⁷ Clemente Benedettucci (1850-1949). Graduated from law school in Rome, entered the Oratory in Recanati which closed when he died. He

Apostolic Visitor of the Oratorian Houses, for both existing and extinct Houses in the Italian regions of Marche, Umbria and Emilia.

The report of the Apostolic Visitor resulted in the intervention of Pope Leo XIII and as a sign of his paternal love²⁷, the Pontifical College of the Oratory was erected with Motu Proprio in Perugia on September 30, 1900, –“*ut ex eo, recte posito tirocinio, operarii prodeant digni in spem decusque Oratorii*”- and the Rectors were Fr. Paolo Recanatesi, of the Osimo Oratory and Fr. Ercole Salvatori of the Recanati Oratory²⁸.

The same year an initiative on the part of Fr. Giovanni Battista Tonella of the Biella Oratory resulted in the establishment of a Magazine called “*San Filippo Neri. Monitore delle Congregazioni dell'Oratorio*”²⁹. At the same time a circular from Fr. Arista to the

left many learned writings and a rich library, now open to scholars. Cf. FINI C., *Clemente Benedettucci oratoriano*, Ancona, 1991; ADORANTE R. (a cura), *La vita e l'opera di P. Clemente Benedettucci*, Recanati, s.d. [ma 2000].

²⁸ Cf. *Leone XIII. Suo Pontificato, suoi rapporti con la Congregazione dell'Oratorio*, in “*San Filippo Neri. Monitore delle Congregazioni dell'Oratorio*”, Biella, IV (1903), 4, 91-96. Henceforth: “*San Filippo Neri. Monitore...*”.

²⁹ The institution did not last long; in 1907, on advice of the Fathers from Perugia, with the consent of Pius X and through Fr. Benedettucci, the Leonian College was transferred to Rome in the rectorate of St. Tommaso in Parione, but in 1910 to the great dismay of the Pope, it was definitively closed. It would now have to await the pontificate of PIUS XII, another great Pope tied to the Oratory, before an International College in Rome was reopened, and named after the Pope himself. This one too, would not last long.

³⁰ The Magazin, started as a monthly publication and then from 1905 published quarterly, came out with its first issue in May 1900 and continued to publish until 1907. It was very dignified in its presentation and rich in subjects treated also featuring a section called “*Cronache filippine*” which attempted to create a connection among the various Communities. Right from the editorial of the first issue (I, 1, 3) there is a declaration of the intentions: “*to unite in only one heart and in only one soul the different Congregations, some of which have been newly founded and others have been re-established to ignite the charity that is the solid bond that unites all of the Congregations*”. In the September issue there

Provosts prospected the idea of presenting a plea to the Holy Father requesting intervention with His authority to block a stalemate that had started in 1895 without anyone being able to solve it.

Card. Capecelatro, perplexed by the bad mood of many, was of the opinion of delaying the matter but in those days Fr. Benedettucci solicited the presentation of the plea and he wrote to Fr. Arista: “*I believe the petition will be presented shortly. In these days Fr. Recanatesi has had a special audience with the Holy Father for our matters and the Pontiff was moved by the benevolence of the cause.*”.

The plea reached its destination on February 8, 1901, was signed by the majority of the Provosts and recommended by numerous Bishops and Cardinals³⁰, but those who were against it started a fierce battle which is proven by the letters printed by Fr. Calenzio and Fr. Lais.

Even the supporters of the stalemate around the plea recognize, however, that it is due once again to the transciency of the project which was surely determined by the respect and the prudence with which Fr. Arista treated such a delicate matter while on the other hand as Fr. Recanatesi suggested, “*it is necessary to present Rome with beautiful well formed projects otherwise Rome will not move*”.

The response of Card. Gotti, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on March 13 was in keeping with the aforementioned: “*This Sacred Congregation received from His Holiness Pope Leo XIII a printed document requesting the establishment of some bond among the various Congregations of the Oratory of St. Philip, respecting the autonomy of the regulations of the Institute. This Sacred Congregation, which praises the intention of those who have signed and recommended the plea, desires that these individuals, collatis inter se consiliis, propose a practical plan or project in order to put their requests*

is a letter published from Fr. Arista: “*I bless the Lord who inspired undertaking a similar task, that could pave the way for the desired union*”.

³¹ *Precedenti storici del Movimento Federativo Oratoriano*, in “L’Oratorio di S. Filippo Neri”, XVII (1960), 11, 11-12.

into practice. Will the Reverend Father strive to this effect and remit the results to this Holy Congregation so that it can be taken into proper consideration”.

Following the advice of some friends Fr. Arista thought of presenting the ministry with some information on the state of the existing Congregations believing that the Apostolic Authority would intervene directly and so through some Congregations he sought the necessary information. In so doing he clashed with the reservedness of some of the Houses that did no respond perhaps in line with the circulars of the Provost of Rome.

After the death of Leo XIII, to whom the Oratory members felt gratitude equivalent to the admiration the Church nurtures for its Pontiff³¹, the interest of the new Pontiff Pius X, who was elected on August 4, 1903, for the Oratory matter is documented in a letter from Fr. Recanatesi to Fr. Arista. In November 1904 the latter had accepted in obedience to the Pope the nomination of Auxiliary Bishop of Acireale, after succeeding in 1901 to elude the nomination of Bishop-Prelate Nullius of St. Lucia del Mela: “*I visited the Holy Father and after a lengthy discussion about our Congregations, I also realized that he has the intention of doing something for them [...] He concluded by asking Your Excellency and I to draft a plan and to send it to him*” (21.11.1904).

As requested directly from the Pope, Mons. Arista went back to work undertaking a wide range of consultations witnessed by his correspondence recording the contribution given to the study of the project given by Fr. Castelli and Fr. Colletti of the Oratory of Genoa, and also Fr. Recanatesi and Fr. Benedettucci. Fr. Arista, however, was still seeking advice when Fr. Recanatesi³² wrote to him on il 12.19.1904: “*Your writing is filled with much wisdom that I would not know what to add or remove [...] it would not seem right to me to go about seeking consent [...] Your Excellency*

³² *Sollecitudine del Sommo Pontefice Leone XIII per i figli di S. Filippo*, in “*San Filippo Neri. Monitore...*”, II (1901), 4, 106-108.

³³ An interesting article by Recanatesi, discrete in its terms but very clear in its comments, describes the torment of these years: RECANATESI P., *Due parole ai lettori*, in “*S. Filippo Neri. Monitore...*”, Quaderno 31 (1905), 1-6.

knows only too well how many enemies any movement can have that brings about a better...". Despite solicitation the prepared plan was to wait for several months before being presented and it reached the Holy Father³³ only in September 1906.

Some meddling in Rome by members of the Curia succeeded in slowing the process, if credit is to be given to what is implied by Fr. Recanatesi in a letter to Fr. Arista dated August 20, 1907.

When Bishop Genuardi died, Mons. Arista was called as his successor as Bishop of Acireale, his commitment to the Diocese which had increased enormously, did not leave him much time for the Oratory, a cause which he had taken to heart.

He was in turn succeeded by Fr. Giuseppe Timpanaro³⁴ of the Oratory of Acireale, who was tied to him by a bond of deep devotion and syntony. In 1910 he had occasion to make fraternal visits to numerous Italian Congregations, continuing the visits in 1912 in the company of Mons. Arista, completing it during the period of his military service (1917-1918). He collected some reactions but he also received some criticisms from eminent Fathers who induced him to greatly modify the plan in 1906.

In those years even Fr. Castelli continued to show interest in the matter. Between 1913 and 1914 he succeeded in being received by the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Religious, Card. Cagiano de Azevedo, and presented him with a unification plan. Having heard about this, Fr. Lais, Provost of Rome, immediately intervened with the Cardinal, but the serious situation of the House in Rome with its many unresolved problems, painfully intertwined along the path that brought about the constitution of the Institutum,

provoking an Apostolic Visit to the Roman Oratory which was later extended to the other Italian Congregations. Mons. Melata was in charge and after two years he was succeeded by the Abbot Arcangelo Lolli, of the Lateran Canon, who in the attempt to find a solution to the intricate questions promoted a Congress of Provosts, called in Rome at the Apostolic See on November 20, 1918.

2. 1918-1932

The era of the Congresses started in 1918, uniting the Provosts in legitimate assembly according to a Pontifical³⁵ direction thus constituting the first stage of organic unity.

1918. Sixteen of the nineteen Houses existing in Italy participated at the Congress of 1918 and among those present was Fr. Castelli and Mons. Arista. During that meeting Fr. Timpanaro revealed all of his dynamism and passion making it clearly understood that the way had been paved for an exponent, among the most convinced and hard working of the movement for unification. It was he who presented Abbott Lolli a memorandum of the project he had modified and he also presented a typed version to the participants. The Congress established triennial meetings and concluded the session with a reiterated appeal to the Congregations to send some individuals to the House of Rome.

Fr. Calenzio died in 1915; Fr. Lais was in very poor health and in 1919 he retired to private life. From that moment on there was a continuous turnover of Fathers characterizing the life of the Roman Community.

1921. At the end of the three year period the Holy Congregation of the Religious Order called for a new Congress with a Circular

³⁴ *Schema d'unione fra le Case della Congregazione Filippina in Italia*, Acireale, Tip. Umberto I, 1906.

³⁵ Giuseppe Timpanaro (1888-1953) had a lively temperament and a strong oratorian spirit. He was an enterprising animator of various initiatives, all of which were set on reviving the cult of St. Philip and the vitality of the Oratory. In 1931 he re-established the Congregation of Palermo which had become extinct.

³⁶ See, e.g., the Letter of the Sacred Congregation of the Religious, of June 13, 1921, in the Archives of the Procurae Generalis - Congressus Generales: "In conformity to what was established in the Congress of the Provosts of the Congregations of the Oratory of Italy in November 1918, this Sacred Congregation reminds all of the Italian Congregations of the obligation to send their Superior or another authorized representative...."

dated June 13, 1921 and through a questionnaire requested that proposals be sent to the Sacred Congregation to expand the Oratory and asked “whether the *Oratorian Institute* should remain the same as it has been up until now despite changing times, or should the prescriptions of the Right of existing Canon Law be applied instead”.

This II Congress of the Italian Congregations was held in Rome on November 23-24 with the participation of 17 Houses.

During the meeting the idea of giving the Houses a more united order through the institution of a Representative in Rome was prevailing. Elderly Fr. Castelli participated at this meeting while Mons. Arista had died in the concept of holiness the previous year. The institution to which the representation of the single Congregations at the Apostolic See was referred, did not impair at all the autonomy of the single Houses, each of which had the right to discuss its own matters with the Holy See through a delegate. It should not present a problem that this delegate was to be elected and was to be the sole representative for all. In addition the Congress approved that the Representative should handle the epistolary relations with the Houses primarily for what concerned the realization of congressional deliberations and that he should handle matters for Communities with fewer than three people and for Congregations that were either abolished or extinct, by either reviving them or at least locating their estates.

The Provost of Rome was singled out as this Representative, who at the time was Fr. Davide Viola, of the Biella Oratory, **who had become assistant of the House of Rome** and entered the Trappist Monastery in 1922, right after the solemn centennial festivities of the canonization of St. Philip³⁶.

He was succeeded by Fr. Timpanaro, who because of the persistent lack of members in the House of Rome and other serious questions, invoked the presence of an Apostolic Delegate,

³⁷ Gladdened by Letter from Pope Benedict XV, they were solemn and memorable. After recognizing the remains of the Saint (see CAPPIO R., *La riconoscenza del corpo di S. Filippo Neri*, in “L’Oratorio di S. Filippo”, 18 (1961), 9, 8-10; 10, 8-10), the urn was carried through the streets of Rome in a procession that was an authentic triumph.

nominated on January 5, 1923 in the person of Fr. Abate of San Paolo fuori le Mura, Dom Ildefonso Schuster³⁷.

1924. The Apostolic Delegate thought it would be wise to invite even foreign Houses to the Congress celebrated in Rome from February 6-8, 1924 under his presidency.

Seventeen Italian Houses , two Spanish ones –Barcelona and Palma de Mallorca- two Polish ones and a Mexican House participated at the Congress; two Fathers acted as secretaries who later played an important role in Oratory matters that followed and they were Fr. Paolo Caresana,³⁸ of the Oratory of Brescia and Cesare Nanni³⁹ of the Oratory of Bologna. The Congregation of Rome was entrusted to that of Bologna, creating some perplexity due to the small number of members in the House in Bologna. Fr. Castelli and Fr. Timpanaro were assigned the task of revising the Constitutions and what the preceding Congress had decided about the Representative of the Houses was confirmed.

Pope Pius XI, received the members of the Congress in a paternal audience, speaking to them of his admiration for St. Philip, remembering that he had always venerated his image in the wax face at the Ambrosiana Library, a gift of the great spiritual son of Philip Neri, Card. Federico Borromeo, who because of his close relationship with the Father had managed to receive the privilege of obtaining this image when he left for Milan.

³⁸ Alfredo Ildefonso Schuster (1880-1954), beatified in 1985; LECCISOTTI T., *Il Card. Schuster*, 2 voll., Milano, 1969; MAJO A., *La personalità spirituale del Card. A. I. Schuster*, Milano, 1980.

³⁹ Paolo Caresana (1882-1973), of Vigevano who entered the Oratory of Brescia in 1912 and from 1934 to 1958 worked untiringly in Rome at Vallicella, making the Congregation re flourish. He was the confessor of Giov. B. Montini (Paul VI) who was very close to him as can be seen from correspondence: P. CARESANA-G. B. MONTINI, *Lettere. 1915-1973*, a cura di X. TOSCANI, Quaderni dell’Istituto Paolo VI, Ed. Studium, Roma, 1998.

⁴⁰ Cesare Nanni (1890-1977) had entered the Oratory just a few years beforehand when he was sent to Rome as Provost of the Congregation at an early age- he was not even forty yet.

This Congress which closed pacifically opened the way for a long and very sad controversy between Fr. Nanni and Fr. Timpanaro. The former had adopted and adapted the ancient texts of the Constitutions preceding the drafting and the approval of the *Instituta* of 1612 and decided to enact the union of some Houses under the Roman Congregation and exercised on them the authority of General Provost while the latter, Fr.Timpanaro, continued untiringly his work as herald of a respectable reform according to the wisdom of the projects of Fr. Arista and Fr. Castelli.

We will not go into this matter which would require a great amount of space. It is only necessary to quote in the context of this short exposition that the heated events of those years provoked the suspension the Congressional meeting that was to be held in 1927. In fact it was in that year that the Apostolic Delegate requested the direct intervention of the Sacred Congregation of Religious Orders which announced a visit to the Roman House by Schuster. The direction of Fr. Nanni was openly retracted and the observance of the traditional Oratory order was re-established.

In 1928 the Abbot Schuster was sent to Milan as Apostolic Administrator and the following year he received together with the purple Cardinal mantle the nomination as Archbishop; the office of Apostolic Delegate was not given a new replacement by the Holy See.

In 1931 through an initiative of Fr.Timpanaro, who was the winner of the dispute against the innovations of Fr. Nanni, a meeting of the Italian Provosts was called in Cava de' Tirreni, where on September 6 in the presence of Card. Lavitrano, previously Bishop of Cava and now Archbishop of Palermo, an old penitent of Fr. Castelli, the venerable remains of the Servant of God⁴⁰ who had died on July 21, 1926 at the Sanctuary of St. Maria dell'Olmo were buried. The Fathers present at this rite had the occasion to speak about the many events that had taken place after the last Congress and they once again assigned the task of revising the Constitution

⁴¹ On that occasion the speech was given by Fr. Ettore Ricci (1866-1946), great Provost of the Oratory of Perugia, pious and cultured priest that the Church of Perugia counts as one of its illustrious sons. RICCI E., *Per il Servo di Dio P. Giulio Castelli*, Tip. Di Mauro, Cava, 1934.

in the light of new Code of Canon Law to Fr. Timpanaro who had already succeeded Fr. Castelli in this in 1924.

Very active and untiring, Fr.Timpanaro succeeded in organizing a new Convention which was set in Bologna on November 15-18, 1932, in the ancient monastery at San Vittore, which belonged to the Oratory of Bologna. Fifteen of the nineteen Congregations⁴¹ participated. The Secretary of the Sacred Congregation assured Fr. Bardellini, who was sent to Rome expressly on the placet of the Holy See, carefully scrutinized the proposals of updating the Constitutions. The resolution of 1924 about the Representative in Rome was recalled which according to the terminology of the Code of 1917 was called "Procurator", and Fr. Giulio Bevilacqua⁴² was elected to this office and Fr. Carlo Naldi if the former would no accept the post. It was established that all of these decisions would be subject to the approval of the new Congress set for April 1934 and the work was concluded at one o'clock in the morning with the signature of the minutes and a memorable Eucharistic adoration conducted by Fr. Caresana. Exulting, Fr. Timpanaro, said: "*What did Fr. Caresana say to Jesus that night? What did he say to his brothers? Inspiring words that were never heard!* Fr. Romualdo Barigelletti, of the Oratory of Osimo confessed for all :

⁴² It was comforting amidst many painful events to remember at least some of the Fathers present, men who made the Oratory famous with the eminent virtue of their life, some of whom died in a state of sanctity and procedures of beatification have begun: Fr.. Paolo Caresana, Brescia; the Servant of God Fr. Filippo Bardellini, Verona; Fr. Carlo Mino, Biella; the Servant of God Fr. Raimondo Calcagno, Chioggia; Fr. Vincenzo Salsano, Cava (the little boy who ran towards Fr. Castelli when he arrived at the station of Cava, and who never left him any more and entered the Oratory of Cava).

⁴³ Giulio Bevilacqua (1881-1965): one of the great Oratorians of the Congregation of Brescia and of the entire Istitute; Paul VI, who esteemed to him and was close to him on friendly terms, made him Cardinal in 1965. He was a man with a broad culture and full of courageous pastoral initiatives, who greatly influenced the spiritual and cultural life of the Italian Church. FAPPANI A., *Giulio Bevilacqua il Cardinale Parroco*, Queriniana, Brescia, 1979. GUITTON J., *San Filippo Neri ed il card. Bevilacqua*, in "L'Oratorio di S. Filippo Neri", 22 (1965), 7, 8-10; CE. DOC. (a cura), *Scritti e Discorsi del Card. Giulio Bevilacqua, nel 25° della morte* (1965-1990), Brescia, 1990.

*"I have never heeded similar words in my life and I have never been to such a suggestive function"*⁴³.

3. 1933 -1958.

Card. Lavitrano transmitted the votes of the Convention to the Holy See and Fr. Naldi, substituting for Fr. Bevilacqua who had declined the charge, referred the results of the Convention to Rome to Mons. La Puma, secretary of the Sacred Congregation. La Puma referred him to Fr. Arcadio M. Larraona, lecturer at the Lateran University and a qualified expert of Canon Law. On April 17, 1933 Fr. Larraona was received in an audience by the Holy Father Pius XI and he exposed the Oratory question. The Sacred Congregation of the Religious called for a General Visitation of all the Oratorian Congregations and nominated Fr. Larraona as Apostolic Visitor.

On May 26 of the same year a circular from the Visitor communicated to the Congregations the decision of the Holy See and the opening of the General Visitation enclosing the Decree of the Sacred Congregation instituting it. It also listed five *Monita et Ordinationes* regarding the primary scope of the Visit which was the updating of the Constitutions to be done at a General Congress where "*it will be necessary to examine those questions that can refer to the general well being of the Oratory*". All of the Congregations were invited to send suggestions. On June 19 Fr. Naldi was nominated secretary of the Visitation and from that moment until 1942 he was to become the closest collaborator of Fr. Visitator.

1933. The new Congress was scheduled in Rome for September 12-16, 1933 and there was a celebration with the participation of about thirty Italian, Spanish, German and English Congregations where they discussed the *Schema correctionum ac variationum quae in Constitutionibus faciendis proponuntur*, prepared by the Visitator himself. The most innovative contribution in this first phase of revision regarded undoubtedly chapter IV of the reformed text, that, when developed further would constitute the Statuta Generalia. There was above all concentration on the analysis given

⁴⁵ TIMPANARO G., *Mons. Arista...*, cit., 108

to the definition of the Congregation: "*The Institute of St Philip Neri, which he founded in Rome by divine inspiration as it is believed, is a clerical society of Pontifical right, formed by priests, secular clerics and lay brothers that live in a community without vows*"; "*it is constituted of various Houses that are called Congregations*" independent and autonomous but "*united among themselves by special moral bonds*".

There were those who regarded this definition with suspicion because if the term "Institutum" was given the value of "Corpus institutum", it would be less faithful to the mens of the Founder and to the dictation of the Bull of establishment of the Congregation de Urbe and of the other Houses. Some also saw in the formula "*Istituto...costituito di diverse Case*" the idea of Fr. Castelli, Fr. Arista and the many others we have encountered along this excursus.

The Congress closed amidst the perplexity of some and the satisfaction of others. The many criticisms that reached the Visitator on the first draft of the Constitutions sent to the Congregations in autumn 1935, determined the task of reorganization which made it impossible to consider a Congress in 1936 according to the triennial cadence. The civil war in Spain and the outbreak of World War II in 1939 resulted in further postponements until the Sacred Congregation suggested not postponing the Congress any longer even if the war in Europe was in full course.

The Congress of 1942. Convened by Fr. Visitator as "*extraordinary [...] not really juridical, but comparable to those that are defined in the new Statutes*"⁴⁴, it was celebrated in Vallicella from April 20 to April 23, with the participation of fifty Fathers.

It opened in the rooms of St Philip on the evening of April 20 with a brief inaugural celebration, it proceeded with the ample reports of Fr. Visitator on the constitutional texts and a subsequent discussion in view of their approval but there was also time for some consideration of significant themes. Fr. Caresana gave two reports on "*Lo spirito filippino ed i suoi caratteri*" and

⁴⁵ Letter of Convocation in Arch.Pr.Gen.: *Congressus Generales*, 1942.

“Apostolato del Confessionale e della Direzione Spirituale”; Fr. Angilella on “Il Collegio Filippino Internazionale Pio XII”; Fr. Cottinelli reported on “Il Sacerdozio e la vita filippina” and Fr. Timpanaro on “L’Oratorio Secolare”; Frs. Mino and Meggiolaro faced the theme: “Vocazioni filippine: selezione, ammissione, formazione, incardinazione”; Fr. Bevilacqua spoke of the “Apostolato filippino e apostolato del Filippino”, Fr. Acchiappati of the “Spirito liturgico e apostolato liturgico”; Fr. Cistellini of the “Apostolato della cultura e dell’insegnamento”, Fr. Gasbarri of “Apostolato filippino e Azione Cattolica”.

The Congress closed with an “Oratorian Evening” in the Oratory of Borromini, introduced by a speech given by Fr. Bevilacqua on “Ideale filippino vissuto” and concluded with the farewell words of Fr. Caresana.

The approval of the new texts for the new organization came on the basis of the “textus emendatus” of the *Constitutiones* and the *Statuta Generalia*, previously sent to the Congregations and from which the Visitator received many criticisms. A Permanent Deputation, as provided in the General Statute, and Fr. Larraona assumed ad interim the office of General Procurator which was rejected by Fr. Naldi who felt a little neglected and was hurt by the decision of the Congress to transfer the seat of the Procurator from the house at S. Nereo, which he had decently adapted, to the uncomfortable residence of S. Girolamo della Carità where Fr. Naldi had already lived at the beginning of his mandate.

On April 4, 1943 Pius XII confirmed *ex Audientia Sanctissimi* the constitutional texts, approved ad experimentum in expectation of the new Congress to be celebrated at the end of the war.

The edited text was subdivided into two parts: the title page of the first part bears: “*Constitutiones Congregationum Institutii Oratorii S. Philippi Nerii, a Paulo V per Breve “Christifidelium” (24. II.1612) approbatae et post diligentem Codicis Juris Canonici accommodationem, a Sacra Congregatione de Religiosis ex Audientia SS.mi (die 12 apr. 1943) ad experimentum confirmatae*”; the second part is entitled “*Statuta Generalia Congregationum atque Institutii Oratorii S. Philippi Nerii a Sacra Congregatione de*

Religiosis ex Audientia SS.mi (die 12 apr. 1943) ad experimentum confirmatae”⁴⁵.

Recognition should be given to Fr. Arcadio M. Larraona not only for the immense work of revising the Constitutions but also for the configuration of the *Institutum Oratorii* as presented by the General Statutes and ratified by the Apostolic Authority.

Even the skeptics of the Oratory who had doubts as to whether the new institutional choice was positive, recognized in Fr. Larraona, not only the highest consideration for the dedication with which he worked and esteem for this wonderful figure of a priest – who was later honored by Pope John XXIII in elevating him to Cardinal- but merit was also recognized for his work on the revision which is a criteria of reverential respect in comparison to the ancient *Instituta* approved by Paul V in 1612.

The critical opinions of the General Statutes⁴⁶ and on the nature of the new institution were particularly strong in the two English Congregations, fearful that in the purview of the Statutes there could also be a “*novum quoddam instrumentum gubernandi*”, but the vast majority of the Congregations accepted the decisions of the Congress as the accomplishment of some very positive matter. Not all of the problems were solved, but the Oratorian Congregations operating in times and situations, even of the ecclesiastic kind, that were so different from the original ones, had at their disposal an instrument of communion which guaranteed the autonomy desired by the Founder and was committed to defending and promoting the life and the identity of the Oratory.

With a Circular Letter dated Corpus Domini 1943⁴⁷, Fr. Larraona communicated to the Congregations the approval of the Constitutions and the General Statutes, affirming that they “*are exactly the revised text of the 1942 Congress, after the renewed criticisms received from the Congregations of several countries*”; and as for the identity of the new institution which “*received the clear and technically suitable formula of the Institute of the*

⁴⁶ Ample comment in ABBATE C., *Costituzioni e Statuti Generali*, versione italiana, note e appendici, Acireale, 1956.

⁴⁷ Cf. CISTELLINI A., *Intorno all’indole...*, 88.

⁴⁸ Arch.Pr.Gen.: Visit.res Ap.lici- Larraona.

Oratory", the Visitator affirmed: "If the concrete sense of this expression can be called in some way new, like the formula of fraternal union that it expresses we could say that it is what Pius XI was telling us about Oratorian Congresses: it is a very nice novelty".

"*The Institute of the Oratory*," continues the Circular, "in its broad, flexible and respectable form, can undoubtedly bring useful advantages of juridical and moral order to all of the Congregations, according to the opinion of the Sacred Congregation. [...] You all remember that we have always had this, and in all of our deliberations, whether personally present or not, no criticism that has reached us since 1935 has been forgotten. We have learned from all of these and they were all weighed, discussed and profited by as though those making them were present".

1948. The General Congress of 1948, convened from October 4th to the 9th, fully ratified the decisions of 1942. The fifty participants this time also represented some Congregations that could not be present at the preceding one and namely from Mexico, England and Germany. Unanimously and conforming to the dictates of the Code of Canon Law, a Visitation of the Houses every five years was introduced for which the Visitator Larraona proposed either an individual taken from an estimated list of designees or the General Procurator or someone designated by the Procura Generalis. The General Statutes, approved ad experimentum in 1942, which were now definitively approved by the Congress did not mention any Visitator and no one mentioned the creation of a special office for Visitation to flank that of the General Procurator.

The most important moments of the Congress were the first elections that gave Fr. Edward Griffith⁴⁸, of the London Oratory

⁴⁹ Edward Griffith (1899-1959), an Anglican who converted to the Catholic Church. CISTELLINI A., *Intorno all'indole...*, cit. p.93: "An amiable man with a broad culture, accepted by all and very open-minded, who dedicated himself immediately and relentlessly down through the years to carry out the congressional deliberations and make things work...He lasted a decade in this post and he outlined the final balance in a long report of 83 pages, sent to all the Congregations before the

the charge of General Procurator and Frs. Matthaeus (England), Casanovas (Spain), Manziana and Meggiolaro (Italy), Gunkel (Germany) and Bustamarte (Mexico) were given the post of Deputies of the Permanent Deputation.

In the mind and heart of Fr. Timpanaro, who was the General Postulator, this Congress had a particular significance because he saw the definite realization of the "*idea of Mons. Arista, who must have exulted in heaven with St. Philip and all of the other Blessed of the Oratory*"⁴⁹. There is also a reminder of this enthusiasm in a painting of Gianbattista Conti who depicts on the bottom of the painting, the Congress gathered around the throne of Pius XII while the Apostolic Seat is surrounded by the Popes who worked in favor of the Oratory, and namely: Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV and Pius XI. In the background represented in medallions are the first Pontiffs connected with St. Philip and his work: Gregory XIII, Paul V, Gregory XV; on the top the open sky shows the Oratory of Paradise gathered around Mary, "Mother and founder" with Fr. Philip and his first disciples, St. Francis di Sales and the Blessed of the Oratory. There are also some Venerable Fathers that during the Centuries have illustrated the Congregations and in the foreground Mons. Gianbattista Arista with Fr. Giulio Castelli and Card. Alfonso Capecelatro, and Fr. Clemente Benedettucci with Fr. Recanatesi and others. To the side and apart from the others there is Card. John Henry Newman, founder of the Oratory in England and put there "only for his name" says an anonymous typed paper, conserved at the Archive of the Procura Generalis, which comments the painting in the style of Fr. Timpanaro, who probably inspired the pictorial composition.

"*Beautiful and consoling,*" wrote Fr. Timpanaro in preparation for the Congress⁵⁰, "*to remember the work done, the triumphs from 1919 to 1924, and even the pain endured, the mortifications received, the injustices suffered, remembering everything to bless the Lord and thank Him for His grace and His favors...*". The

Congress of 1958". He was also the first Visitator elected by the Congress after the decree of the Holy See instituting this office.

⁵⁰ TIMPANARO G., *Mons. Arista...*, 111.

⁵¹ ID., ibidem

prose of Timpanaro, like the painting commissioned from Conti, reveals the temperament of the “noisy director”⁵¹, but also the heartbeat of the Latin heart of a man who fought loyally for the ideal that he strongly believed in and it is right for the Confederation of the Oratory not to forget this.

Quietly but equally enthusiastic in his love for the Institute, Fr. Griffith wrote at the end of his ten years of service and sixteen years from the beginning of the new institution: “*it is a legal transaction...it will take years for it to become spirit and life*”⁵².

4. 1958 - 2000.

1958. The General Congress of 1958, presided by Fr. Edward Griffith, met on October 1st accepting the decision with which the Apostolic Authority with a decree of September 24 had instituted a new office within the Institute: the *Visitator Oratorii S. Philippi* and entrusted the Congress with the election reserving the confirmation for the Holy See. The decision was basically the work of the Apostolic Visitator Fr. Enrico di S. Teresa, O.C.D. (Romolo Compagnone, Bishop of Anagni), who in 1951 succeeded Fr. Arcadio Maria Larraona, who was always more involved in the higher positions of the Roman Curia.

The figure and the tasks of the new office were defined in the decree of institution that after twenty-five years put an end to the Apostolic Visitation. Since the provision regarded the Decree of the Apostolic See, it was not discussed in the Congress. Though unexpected it was greeted with great favor by many who saw in it the end of the non-Oratorian presence in the Visitations to the Congregations of the Oratory. Some, however, underlined that the Decree established a solution without even asking for an opinion, contrary to what had always occurred in the course of Oratory events and it did not even take into consideration the proposals formulated by Fr. Larraona on the matter.

In the Congress, that was received in an audience by Pope Pius XII in Castel Gandolfo in his last days of life, Fr. Edward Griffith was elected to the new post of Visitator and Fr. John Nedley, of the

⁵² CISTELLINI, *Intorno all’indole...*, 75

⁵³ *Fraternal letter to the General Procurator on oratorian life and the activities of the Procura 1948-1958.*

Oratory of Rock Hill succeeded him as General Procurator. When Fr. Griffith died prematurely in 1959⁵³, the Apostolic See, following the indications of the Permanent Deputation nominated Fr. Ugo Oggè, of the Oratory of Mondovì, as Visitator and he exercised his office until the next Congress.

1969. In 1969 the General Congress⁵⁴, presided by Fr. Patrizio Dalos, Provost of the Oratory of Rome and opened by the report of Fr. J. Gulden⁵⁵, was dedicated to a new revision of the constitutional texts with the declared intent of updating them in the light of the Vatican II Council. The Permanent Deputation and the Commissions instituted for this purpose had elaborated new texts that after having been discussed and approved by the Congress joined the “*Constitutiones seu Instituta Oratorii S. Philippi Neri a Congressu Generali Oratoriano anni 1969 approbatae*” and the “*Statuta Generalia Confoederationis Congregationum Oratorii S. Philippi Neri*”, promulgated “ad experimentum” by the Delegate of the Apostolic See. This was the new established denomination⁵⁶. The Institutum assumed from that moment the name of

⁵⁴ ABBATE C., *Il P. Edoardo Griffith, first General Procurator of the Oratory and first Visitator*, in “In Aevum”, may-june 1960, 75-86; *In memoriam of Fr. Griffith*, in “The Oratory of St. Philip Neri”, XVI (1960), 9, p.7; *Fr. Edward Griffith*, in “The Oratory Parish Magazine” London, 7., 1959. Fr. Griffith, who died in Italy, was buried in the tomb of the Fathers of Mondovì.

⁵⁵ Chronicle of the Congress in “*Oratorium*”, I (1970), 1, 62-63.

⁵⁶ GULDEN J., *Zeitgemasse Erneuerung im Oratorium des hl. Philipp Neri*, in “*Oratorium. Archivum Historicum Oratorii S. Philippi Neri*. Semestrale commentarium de rebus oratorianis, a Congregatione Oratorii de Urbe editum”, hereinafter quoted as “*Oratorium*” I (1970), 5-20. For an ample analysis of the Gulden report, on the basis of incontrovertible historical arguments, see CISTELLINI A., “*Quale Oratorio? Quale Congregazione?*”, in “*Memorie Oratoriane*”, vol. I, suppl. al n. 2, marzo 1975, 3-19.

⁵⁷ General Statute, *Appendix de Delegato Sedis Apostolicae...A 3): “Delegatus Sedis Apostolicae munus Visitatoris canonici Oratorii S. Philippi habet”.*

“*Confoederatio Oratorii S. Philippi Neri*”, adopting a **termineche** that had already appeared in the General Statutes of 1943⁵⁷.

The Congress elected Fr. Paul Turks, of the Aachen Oratory , “Delegate of the Apostolic See” and reconfirmed Fr. John Nedley in the office of General Procurator⁵⁸. The resulting Permanent Deputation was constituted by Frs. P. Dalos and G. Olcese (Italy), A. Fernandez (Spain), F. Sonntag (Germany), J. Rataj (Poland), S. Dessain (England), E. Wahl (U.S.A), V. Ridriguez (Latin America).

1975. The General Congress of 1975⁵⁹, presided by Fr. Edward Wahl, of the Rock Hill Oratory who was primarily dedicated to pastoral themes renewed the appointment of Delegate to Fr. Paul Turks and confirmed Fr. Walter Oddone of the Turin Oratory as General Procurator but he resigned for health reasons in 1978 and was substituted by Fr. Luigi Romana, of the Mondovì Oratory. The following were elected a Deputies: Frs. G. Angilella and L. Romana (Italy), S. Alemany (Spain), W. Muschick (Germany), M. Stebart (Poland), S. Dessain (England), E. Wahl (U.S.A), M. Herrera (Latin America).

The subsequent General Congresses of 1982 and 1988 were once again dedicated to the examination of the constitutional texts in view of their definite approval.

1982. In 1982 the Congress, presided by Fr. G. Cittadini, elected Fr. Michael Napier of the Oratory of London as Delegate of the Apostolic See and Fr. Antonio Dario of the Oratory of Verona as General Procurator. The following were elected as Deputies Frs. L. Romana and A. Cistellini (Italy), J. Mas Dubia (Spain), P. Fischer (Germany), M. Stebart (Poland), J. Robinson (England and Canada), J. Wahl (U.S.A), A. Rios (Latin America).

⁵⁸ General Statute, §3: “*Auctoritate Apostolica confoederatio quaedam [...] ad normam horum Statutorum, creata fuit quae “Institutum Oratorii S. Philippi Neri” iure denominatur*”.

⁵⁹ He resigned in 1971, and the Permanent Deputation called Fr. Walter Oddone to substitute him.

⁶⁰ Chronicle of the Congress in “*Oratorium*”, VII (1976), 1, 67-69. The themes treated: the daily preaching of the Word of God; prayer; common oratorian life; vocations and training; the Oratory and the diocese.

1988. In 1988 the Congress presided by Fr. Turks, confirmed the appointments of Fr. M. Napier and Fr. A. Dario and the following were elected to take part in the Permanent Deputation: Frs. L. Romana and V. Tyka (Italy), F. De Llanos (Spain), P. Turks (Germany), M. Stebart (Poland), P. Price (England and Canada), J. Hinchey (U.S.A), A. Martinez (Latin America).

The new texts of the Constitution and the General Statutes were approved in a definite manner with a Decree of ratification of the Sacred Congregation of the Religious Order of November 21, 1989. They were published under the title: “*Constitutiones et Statuta Generalia Confoederationis Oratorii S. Philippi Neri*”.

1994. In 1994 the General Congress presided by Fr. Giulio Cittadini of the Oratory of Brescia, discussed and approved the text of the “*Directory*”, entitled “*The Oratory of St. Philip Neri. Spiritual Path*”, and elected Fr. Antonio Rios Chavez of the Oratory of Mexico City as Delegate of the Apostolic See and Fr. Edoardo Aldo Cerrato of the Biella Oratory as General Procurator. The Permanent Deputation consisted of Frs. P. Zanutel and C. M. Magnano (Italy), A. Serramona (Spain), F. Fischer (Germany), M. Stebart (Poland), I. Harrison (England), D. Corrado (U.S.A), L. M. Cano (Latin America).

The Congress celebrated from October 2nd to October 7th officially commenced the festivities in Rome of the IV Centennial of the dies natalis of St. Philip Neri, with a solemn Mass at 7 P.M. in S. Maria in Vallicella, presided by Card. Camillo Ruini, Vicar of His Holiness, and with the participation, among others of the Archbishop of Florence Card. Silvano Piovanelli, during which the Cardinal Vicar handed over to the General Procurator the Pontifical Letter⁶⁰ that offered the sons of St. Philip a reflection on some of the fundamental aspects of the experience and the teachings of the Saint. In the course of 1995 the centennial in Rome was marked by artistic and cultural events of great importance⁶¹ as well as religious events such as the X World

⁶¹ In “*L’Osservatore Romano*”, 19 ottobre 1994.

⁶² Catalogues of the Roman Exhibitions: Palazzo Venezia, maggio 1995-gennaio 1996, *La regola e la fama. S. Filippo Neri e l’arte*, Electa, Milano, 1995; Biblioteca Vallicelliana, 24 maggio-30 settembre 1995,

Youth Day, celebrated in Rome in April with some very memorable moments in "Paolo VI" Hall where at the presence of His Holiness, the prayer vigil centered on the figure of St. Philip Neri through scenic and musical action "*Paradiso, paradiso*" by Marco Frisina⁶²- and in the great Pentecost vigil with the youths of Rome. The celebrations in Rome closed on the liturgical feast of St. Philip in 1996 in the Church of St. M. in Vallicella, honored once again by a new visit by His Holiness John Paul II, who celebrated Mass⁶³, on Sunday May 28 with the participation of numerous Fathers of the Oratory coming from various countries. Celebration events were also held locally in every Congregation and contributed in reviving the interest for the spiritual proposal of Father Philip as well as for the choice of secular priests in the spirit of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri⁶⁴.

2000. The General Congress of 2000, after many assizes on legislative texts, returned to the pastoral nature and treated the theme: "*The Secular Oratory in the III Millennium*". For this reason the session of study preceding the canonic session was characterized by the presence of more than sixty laymen, representing the various Secular Oratories of different countries, and also by representatives of the various Oratorian Communities in training.

Fr. Edoardo Aldo Cerrato was elected to preside the Congress; Fr. A. Rios and Fr. E. Cerrato were confirmed in their respective roles

Messer Filippo Neri, Santo. *L'Apostolo di Roma*, De Luca, Roma, 1995. Atti del Convegno di Studio Roma, 11-13 maggio 1995: *San Filippo Neri nella realtà romana del XVI secolo*, a cura di M.T.BONADONNA RUSSO e di N. DEL RE, Roma, 2000.

⁶³ FRISINA M., *Paradiso, paradiso*, Roma, 1995. The centennial produced other theatrical plays: FANTACCI A., *Fiorentino anche in Paradiso. Commedia in tre atti*, ediz. a cura delle Suore di S. Filippo Neri, Firenze, s.d.; PAVAN M., *Filippo Neri, Santo "giovane"*, Vicenza, 1995; COSTANTINI G., *Santo Filippo degli opposti amen. Mistero in quattro atti*, Vicenza, 1995.

⁶⁴ "L'Osservatore Romano" 29-30 maggio 1995.

⁶⁵ For the preceding centennials of the birth of St. Philip, see GASBARRI C., *I tre centenari del 'dies natalis' di San Filippo*, in "L'Oratorio di S. Filippo Neri", 25 (1968), 1, 4-11; 2, 23-30.

and the Permanent Deputation elected as Deputies for Italy Frs. V. Tyka (Rome) and M. De Gioia (Genoa), for Spain Fr. R. Munoz Perez (Seville), for Germany Fr. H. Froehlich (Heidelberg), for Poland Fr. M. Stebart (Tarnow), for England and Canada Fr. R. Byrne (Oxford), for the U.S.A Fr. M. Drury (Monterey) and for Latin America (by a decision of the Congress which approved the institution of two deputies for the vast number of Congregations in this area) Frs. M. Aviles (Pharr) and J. A. Arturo Gonzales (Pasto).

Two fundamental reports and various remarks at the round table⁶⁵ presented the history, the prophecy and the current state of the Oratory.

The observation of the Congress on the current state of the Oratory has helped, among other things, to notice a significant fact: in the course of the XIX Century when many Houses ceased to exist, only about ten Congregations were founded but in the XX Century a good number of Houses were founded towards the end of the Century. Very few were started before 1933, but after this date with the start of the Apostolic Visitation and the Procure Generalist the increase was noteworthy. Twenty-nine Congregations were erected and the Houses went from fifty-three existing ones in 1965 to the current sixty-four. In the decade 1960-1970, 8 new Congregations were started: Essen, Germany; Dresden, Germany; S. José de Costa Rica; Villa Alemana, Chile; Tlalnepantla, Mexico; Pittsburgh, USA; Mac Allen (now in Pharr), USA; Heidelberg, Germany; Frankfurt/Oder, Germany. (Essen and Frankfurt/Oder closed). Between 1970-1980, 5: Radom, Poland; S. Pablo, Mexico; Orizaba, Mexico; Montreal (now in Toronto), Canada; Vienna, Austria. From 1980 to 1990, 4 Congregations: Tomaszow Mazowieski, Poland; Glattbrugg-Zurich, Switzerland; Brooklyn, USA; Kamianna, Poland. Between

⁶⁶ BONADONNA RUSSO M.T., *L'Oratorio di s. Filippo Neri*; CARRIQUERY LECOUR G., *El Oratorio en la misión de la Iglesia al alba del Tercer Milenio*; DE LLANOS PENA F., *El Oratorio que somos, el Oratorio que imaginamos*. The texts have been circulated by the Procura Generalis with other material in the "Memoria Congressus Generalis A.D. 2000".

1990-2000, 12: Maria Lanzendorf, Austria; Goslar (now in Celle), Germany; Oxford, England; N. S. de la Paz, Mexico; Nancy, France; Sao Paulo, Brazil; Oudtshoorn, South Africa; Maastricht, Holland; Ilsede, Germany; Metuchen, USA; Poznan, Poland; Philadelphia, USA.

The Congress concluded with the Eucharistic Concelebration in the church of St. Maria in Vallicella by Card. Eduardo Martinez Somalo, Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of consecrated life and the Society of Apostolic Life and was received in a special audience by the Holy Father John Paul II, who rejoiced “*about the growth of the Oratory in the various parts of the world*” and making explicit reference to the institution of the Congregation said: “*Your Congregations, faithful to the autonomy desired by the Holy Founder, live in a way that is tied to the particular reality of special Churches and local situations. But is important not to forget the importance vested in Community life and that of its members as well as the fraternal bond with other Congregations constituting the Confederation. It is through this bond that the autonomous characteristic of the single Houses opens to the gift of active charity and the confederated Communities find valid help for growth in the faith of the Oratorian charisma*”⁶⁶.

With the omen that Fr. Edward Griffith formulated in 1958 commenting realistically that “*it will take years for the legal agreement to become spirit and life*”, we salute the sixtieth anniversary of that Congress from which the Confederation of the Oratory was officially established, grateful for the token of faith and dedication of so many Oratorians during these years, who strive with courage and at times amidst many types of difficulty.

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⁶⁷ “L’Osservatore Romano” 6.10.2000.

The “Fathers” of the Confederation

The fundamental paths that led to the establishment of the Confederation of the Oratory have already highlighted the accomplishments of the Servants of God, Giovanni Battista Arista and Giulio Castelli as well as their essential contribution to the union of the Congregations of the Oratory in a juridical body that could safeguard not only its existence but also its identity and original autonomy. It is now necessary to enter into the soul of these two protagonists of the new institution who lived their Oratory vocation following the role of evangelical perfection. They were wonderful examples of holiness which makes them even more precious and sends a message to the tradition of the Oratory that goes beyond the values of the Confederation which they desired so intensely. We hope with all our hearts to see them elevated soon to the glories of heaven, perhaps all together in the same way in which they lived this strenuous adventure of a noble project.

The **Servant of God Giovanni Battista Arista** born in Palermo on April 2, 1862 to Domenico and Francesca Vigo, who moved to Acireale when their son was eight months old. Gianbattista spent all of his childhood and youth in this city, an illustrious center of study and home to a Congregation of the Oratory which was humiliated by subversive legislation that made it difficult in many other cities for Oratories to survive the juridical suppression.

The child strongly believed in the will of God and was gifted with a strong sense of piety in contact with his parents and with the Fathers of the Oratory who, living privately amidst many difficulties, continued in the church of the Congregation to exercise the ministry with particular attention to the education of youths in the College of San Michele.

Strong Eucharistic Spirituality and tender devotion to the Immaculate Virgin nurtured the training of Gianbattista and brought him to accepting the vocation of the priesthood. He was ordained on June 25, 1888, fascinated by the example of St. Philip Neri and he felt a deep calling to recompose that worthy Congregation. On the eve of the feast of the Saint in 1895, which

marked the third centennial of his death, Arista managed to start community life with two Fathers and two brothers.

"We have finally united into a community" he wrote to Fr. Giulio Castelli on June 6th *"I cannot express the happiness of my soul nor can I express the gratitude I feel for the Good Lord, and certain of the intercession of the Madonna and our St. Philip in bonum Congregationis nos congregavit"*. Fr. Arista was elected Provost in 1896 and Director of the College and with a powerful burst of new life that animated the Congregation with words, but above all with the examples of tenacious faithfulness to the duties of fraternal life. His heart shone with boundless goodness, his sweetness relieved a lot of pain and his strength gave courage and all of these traits supported the steps of the rebirth of the Congregation by simultaneously attracting to the "school" of Fr. Arista many people who were fascinated by his priestly spirit. Whatever he had, he gave with generosity and for his brothers he built the house where the Congregation of Acese still lives today, substituting the house that had been confiscated by law. Filled with Oratorian tradition , for God and for the people, he embellished the church.. The field of his Apostolate was above all the young and he divided his day between the Oratory, the College of San Michele and Villa Filippina. His presence was intense and paternal, joyful like that of Fr Philip and just as fruitful. *"The young are my passion and my dream,"* he wrote in 1910 while Bishop of Acireale, *"and by loving my young I feel that I could face great sacrifices for their sake. What I would like most to bestow upon them is the true goodness which comes from God and which is no different from God"*. And the young have loved him with the freshness and filial sense of which they are capable when they feel perceive that an adult loves them with all of his heart.

The Bishop of Acireale, Mons. Gerlando Genuardi, had no difficulty in seeing in the young seminarian and later in the Oratorian Father the highest figure of his diocese and thought of him as his successor. The humility of Fr. Arista managed to obtain from Pope Leo XIII, who in 1901 had nominated him as Bishop of Sebaste with the duty of Prelato nullius di S. Lucia del Mela, the faculty of refusing the nomination already communicated to him from a note of the Secretary of State. His humility, however failed to obtain the possibility of eluding the nomination as Auxiliar of

Acireale. Fr. Arista went to Rome on that occasion and his prayers at the altar of St. Philip remained impressed in the mind of whoever saw him. Fr. Timpanaro remembers having seen him in ecstasy, with his feet rising from the ground during the celebration of Holy Mass. He continued to live humbly in the Congregation and direct the College, dedicating a great deal of his time to the service of the diocese and the Bishop. He was already elderly and ill and three years later when Mons. Genuardi died, Pius X personally wanted him to become Bishop of the diocese and the Pope wrote to him personally in response to Fr. Arista's request to seek another candidate: *"I would like to please you but how can I resist manifesting the will of the Lord who wants you to become Bishop of Acireale?"*. "Omnia in caritate" is the Episcopal motto chosen by Fr. Arista and it was his daily planning among the enormous difficulties caused by natural disasters, political misunderstandings, problems at the Seminary and the infirmity that would bring him to death from stomach cancer. In his Pastoral letter of 1918 he wrote: *"Oh pain, pain! Come and work our souls; come and consume in them the perverted love that attempts to extinguish the holy flame of charity; come and establish in them the charity of the reign. God likes us this way, so that we will complete the law of God!"* *"I want to stay on the cross – he repeated- My Jesus I want to stay. From the cross you rise and do not descend... At any cost on the cross"*. He was the Bishop of the Eucharist and from the Eucharist he found the strength to serve with love without measure the faithful of his Church whether priest or layman. He died on September 27, 1920, consumed by his illness and even more by the incessant gift that made him spend his life drop by drop. He wished to be laid to rest in the church of the Oratory by the tabernacle, the love of his life and under the watchful eye of the Madonna of Purity, to whom he said among the last few words pronounced on this earth: *"My Lady and my Mother, remember that I am yours"*.

The strenuous worldly life of the **Servant of God Giulio Castelli**, who together with Fr. Arista had shared the desire and the action to see the Oratory refluish ,which he loved enough to sacrifice his own life, and would have continued for another six years

comforted by the sweet shadow of the Olmo di Maria at Cava de' Tirreni.

Fr. Castelli was born in Turin into a distinguished family on June 27, 1846. He was educated in the Oratory of St. Philip Neri and very soon he was attracted to it, consequently at the age of 19 he entered the Congregation, where he completed his theological studies and was ordained on March 13, 1869 into the priesthood.

He was immediately involved in the catechesis, preaching and exercising Confessions. He was an incomparable educator, he was a "teacher", right from when he was a cleric, of the youths of the Congregation and of many others later on who occupied eminent posts in the Church and in society.

His love for the Oratory pushed him into accepting the invitation in 1890 of helping the Congregation of Rome, which was in a terrible state of material poverty and was short of individual members because of the restrictive laws that had been enacted for the entire Reign of Italy, as the process of unification was advancing.

In the sepulcher of Fr. Philip, in the "Chiesa Nuova" of the Romans, Fr. Castelli continued with great sacrifice his untiring task of educating children and youths and among his altar boys was thirteen year old Eugenio Pacelli, who as Pontiff, never forgot to remember his old "master" and reminisced emotionally during an audience, "*the tall, frail, reserved, very humble figure with his eyes lowered*". He rejoiced for his beatification and hoped to personally proclaim him a saint.

Fr. Castelli loved the ideal of the oratory and worried about the sad situation of numerous Italian Congregations and so with the approval of Pope Leo XIII he planned and realized a College in Rome for the training of some candidates for Oratory life. It was an endeavour that in addition to great sacrifices, also brought about slander from his fellow brothers who failed to understand his zeal. The harshest sufferings started around 1895, when he lavished for dignified and fruitful celebrations of the III Centennial of St. Philip. It all started from his own family and he was forced to leave the House in Rome, accepting the invitation of the Bishop of Cava de' Tirreni who proposed the establishment of a new Congregation in the old city, where there was a famous but almost abandoned sanctuary dedicated to Mary.

Fr. Castelli reached Cava on New Year's Eve and started with renewed dedication the apostolic life he had always led, earning the same esteem devotion of many, just as it had happened in Turin and Rome. A halo of sanctity surrounded him everywhere he went to work and because of the very deep humility of this Servant of God, this was burdensome for him and so he frequently felt he had to change location. Even in Cava, in the Congregation erected canonically on October 16, 1900, his apostolate was exercised primarily among the poor and the sick, the altar boys, the young, priests and the religious. Surrounded by the fame of sanctity and hailed as the "miracle worker" because of some prodigious events after his prayers, Fr. Castelli left Cava for some time but he returned in obedience to his Bishop and brothers.

He perfected his interior life right to the very end, which consisted of humility, constant union with God, prayers and mortification. He shone for his constant sincere obedience to the Bishops for whom he worked and for his filial devotion to the Pope: an unfailing love for the Church within which glowed his love for the Oratory.

He died at Cava de' Tirreni on July 21, 1926 and his body has been laid to rest under the protection of Mary, in the sanctuary that he restored to its former splendor and vitality.

Already at the first anniversary of his death, the process of ordinary information for the introduction of the cause of beatification started which collected an impressive amount of precious evidence.

In 1931, on occasion of the transfer of the body of the servant of God from the local cemetery to the Olmo Sanctuary, the Provosts of the Italian Congregations met in Cava, and in the shadow of Mary and Fr. Castelli important decisions were taken that determined the founding of the Confederation of the Oratory.

That meeting of the Provosts in Cava and the devoted gesture with which they bore the coffin of their holy brother, rendered justice to a true disciple of St. Philip Neri who was now contemplating history from heaven.

(The text of the present publication was taken from the book of EDOARDO ALDO CERRATO, *S. Filippo Neri. La sua opera e la sua eredità*, Pavia, 2002.)

Johannis Pauli PP. II

ad Congressum Generalem a.D. 2000

adlocutio

Dear Oratorian Priests and Lay People!

1.I am pleased to extend a cordial welcome to each of you, participants in the General Congress of the Confederation of the Oratory of St Philip Neri. With this visit you wanted to renew your sincere devotion to the Vicar of Christ and full adherence to his Magisterium, in the spirit of your founder, who loved the Church with his whole being and left you his unreserved fidelity to the See of Peter as a legacy.

As I affectionately greet Fr Antonio Rios Chavez, the Apostolic See's Delegate, I extend my cordial wishes to each of the Congregations represented here at your General Congress and express my deep gratitude to them for the good they do, delighted as I am with the Oratory's growth in various parts of the world.

2. At the recent General Congresses your Confederation, established by the Apostolic See to unite the individual Congregations of the Oratory in a bond of charity and mutual help, has undertaken to revise your constitutions along the lines suggested by the Church at the Second Vatican Council. At the dawn of the third Christian millennium your meeting plans to revisit, from a primarily pastoral standpoint, the sources of the spiritual movement that traces its origin to St Philip Neri, in order to respond faithfully to its perennial mission: to lead man to encounter Jesus Christ, "the Way, the Truth and the Life", truly present in the Church and the "contemporary" of every person.

This encounter, lived and proposed by St Philip Neri in an original and engaging way, makes us new persons in the mystery of Grace

and instils in the soul that “Christian joy” which is the “hundredfold” given by Christ to those who welcome him into their lives. To encourage a personal meeting with Christ is also the fundamental “missionary method” of the Oratory. It consists in “speaking to the heart” of men and women in order to lead them to an experience of the divine Master that can transform lives. This is achieved especially by showing the beauty of such an encounter, which gives life its full meaning. Those who are “distant” must not be offered a theoretical proclamation, but the possibility of a truly renewed and thus joyful life. This is the great legacy you received from your Father Philip! This pastoral way is always valid, because it belongs to the perennial Christian experience! I hope that the revisiting by your Congress of the sources of St Philip’s spirituality and work will instil in each congregation a renewed awareness of the value and timeliness of your founder’s “missionary method” and make a significant contribution to the task of the “new evangelization”.

3. The Oratory was born of the faith and genius of St Philip Neri, who knew how to combine in a harmonious synthesis the charismatic dimension and full communion with the Pastors of the Church.

In the Rome of his time he also met the spiritual and material needs of young people with deep wisdom, exemplifying the joyful dimension of faith to the point that he was considered “the prophet of Christian joy”. From the beginning, the Oratory has been a feature of your congregation, which takes its name from it, as the Bull *Copiosus in misericordia* by which Gregory XIII established it in the Holy Year of 1575 recalls. Born with the participation of secular priests, who came from the first experience of the Oratory, and put at its service, your congregation must continue to focus its concerns on this worthy institution with its original intentions, method and style, which are always adaptable to the needs of the times.

As the *Spiritual Path* approved at the General Congress in 1994 recalls: “The specific aim and mission of the Congregation of the Oratory is the birth and growth of genuine Christian communities, the light and salt of the earth”. These are presented in the very first articles of your Constitutions as a fraternal union of the faithful who, following in the footsteps of St Philip Neri, set as their goal

what he taught and did, thus becoming “one heart and soul” (*Acts 4: 32*). They draw their inspiration from your Father Philip’s example of simple family prayer meetings and spiritual talks with penitents and friends. In this perspective, the Oratory sees its identity in “the practice of discussing the Word of God together in a familiar way, as mental and vocal prayer, in order to foster a contemplative spirit in the faithful, as at a school, and the love of divine things”.

I hope that the Oratory, by serving people with joy and simplicity of heart, will exemplify and spread this spiritual method in a more and more attractive and effective way. Thus it will be able to offer a consistent and incisive witness by fully living the fervour of its origins and offering our contemporaries an experience of fraternal life that is principally based on accepting and living the reality of supernatural communion in Christ.

“Those who want something other than Christ do not know what they want; those who ask for something other than Christ do not know what they are asking for; those who work but not for Christ do not know what they are doing”. Your holy founder’s words reveal the ever valid criterion for every renewal of the Christian community, which consists in returning to Jesus Christ: to his word, to his presence, to the saving action which he accomplishes in the Church’s sacraments. This commitment will lead priests to give priority to the ministry of Confession and the spiritual guidance of the faithful, as is your tradition, in order to respond fully to your charism and to the Church’s expectations. Thus they will help the lay people who belong to the secular Oratories to understand the essential value of being “*christifideles*”, in the light of St Philip’s experience: regarding the laity, he anticipated ideas and methods that would prove fruitful in the life of the Church.

4. Your congregations, faithful to the autonomy desired by their holy founder, are particularly linked to the reality of the particular Churches and to local situations. But the importance in the life of the communities and their members of the bond of fraternity with the other congregations that make up the Confederation must not be forgotten. It is through this bond that the characteristic autonomy of the individual houses is opened to the gift of active charity and the confederated communities find effective help to grow in fidelity to the Oratorian charism.

Let each congregation devote special care to the initial and continuing formation of individuals and communities, in order to assimilate the ideal passed on by St Philip and reposed by the Constitutions, for the sake of a growing spiritual vitality and effective apostolic presence.

In particular, I urge you to be guided by these values, especially in approaching the world of youth, which is full of promise despite the difficulties, and to feel that you have been especially sent to those who are “distant” but very close to the Saviour’s Heart. In this regard, you will find great support in the traditional sensitivity of Oratorians to art and culture, which are particularly suitable ways for a significant evangelizing presence.

May the Virgin Mary, “Mother and Foundress of the Oratory”, be for each of you the model who constantly inspires you to receive the gift of the Spirit with complete docility and to proclaim the joy of Christ to your brothers and sisters.

With these wishes, as I entrust you to the heavenly intercession of St Philip Neri, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each of you and to the whole Confederation of the Oratory.