



*A life  
for the Ambrosian Church*



**LUIGI BIRAGHI**

was born at Vignate in 1801.

When he was eleven he entered the seminary: he received priestly ordination on May 26, 1825.

He taught seminarians academic disciplines till 1855.

He was the spiritual rector of the theological seminary in Milan from 1833 to 1848; he shared with the seminarians the experience of the "Five Days of Milan".

In 1838 he founded the Institute of the Sisters of Saint Marcellina.

From 1855 he was a doctor of the Ambrosian Library.

He died in Milan in 1879.

## *THE FARMHOUSE "CASTELLANA"*

Around the year 1805 the Biraghi family settled at Cernusco sul Naviglio, where Francesco Biraghi had bought the farmhouse "Castellana" and the adjoining land.



Entrance to the "Castellana" farmhouse.  
Very often poor people begging for help went through this gate. "In the town the Biraghi family were known as benefactors and were loved for their charity" (from a document of the time).

Courtyard.  
On the right the ancient stables for horses and promenade carriages.  
The Biraghi family owned some of them, fit for different kinds of travel.



This abode was always very dear to Father Luigi Biraghi, who lived there for many years, also as a guest of his brother who inherited it.

In this house, in the ambit of a simple and serene family life, even if tried by many difficulties and sufferings, Luigi Biraghi heard and accepted God's invitation to give Him his life. Up to the present day the descendants of the Biraghi family live there.

It is a warm and cosy ambience, which still reveals the taste of family life and the love for learning and thought, which were characteristic of Monsignor Biraghi.

Domical bell of the "Castellana". Its chime signalled the different moments of the day for the people who lived there and for the peasants who were working in the property of the Biraghi family.





Inside front of the "Castellana", opening onto the large and peaceful garden. Here Luigi Biraghi and his brothers, as children, used to spend happy times, playing.



Don Luigi's library, which still holds his books. During his life, since his boyhood, Luigi Biraghi devoted long hours to study, bent on a search for truth, therefore of God - even with self-sacrifice and in a spirit of penance.



Ancient chest of drawers in the sitting room.



The large dining-room of the "Castellana", suitable for a numerous and hospitable family, as the Biraghi family was. The coffered wooden ceiling dates back to the origins of the farmhouse, in the eighteenth century.

## *SAINT TERESA ORATORY AT THE "CASTELLANA"*



The exterior of Saint Teresa Oratory, adjoining the farm side of the "Castellana".

Every farmhouse had its own adjoining oratory, a spiritual support to the daily labour and token of God's nearness to man.

Here, on May 29, 1825, Father Luigi Biraghi celebrated his first Mass with deep feelings of emotion; he had been ordained priest on the previous day.

Father Cesare Rovida, Father Biraghi's godfather, many years later still remembered this event with emotion: "The most pleasant memory of Cernusco Asinario that I keep is the honour I had to have been godfather to the first mass that you celebrated in your oratory with deep devotion and great solemnity."

The interior, towards the altar.  
 At the entrance, on the right, there is the ancient marble holy water font: the gesture of aspersion still reminds us of our baptism.



The eighteenth-century fresco represents the prize given by the Child Jesus and by Our Lady to Saint Teresa of Avila.



Memorial plate placed inside the Oratory on the fiftieth anniversary of Father Biraghi's death.

## *SPIRITUAL RECTOR IN THE SEMINARY*

In 1833 Father Luigi Biraghi was appointed spiritual rector of the theological seminary in Milan.

He prepared seminarians to become Christ's generous witnesses in the world:

"This is the first, the most eminent quality of Jesus Christ's ministers: to love Jesus Christ, to love him truly, to love him above all things.... Here is where all saints caught fire, burning fire, which made them work wonders".

"To give oneself up in one's youth: God loves youth. In youth one's heart is loving, the will is innocent, feelings are pure. Jesus Christ loved children... Now then, give yourself up at once, do not say: later on, later on"

"A priest must keep all believers in his heart. The holier he is, the more apt he will be to intercede for the people".

"To fight, but with the charm of charity, with the beauty of truthfulness, with the saintliness of examples".

"Go on then and take fresh heart and go out in the field of the world, since priesthood is carried on in the world."

In 1848 Father Biraghi helped the seminarians and the young priests, inflamed with civil enthusiasm, to live their participation to the redemption of their Country in evangelic charity.

He urged Archbishop Romilli to claim freedom for the Church from the Provisional Government.



Calix and paten of Father Biraghi's first Mass.

On the Archbishop's behalf he went to Count Casati, president of the Provisional Government, to obtain freedom for the Church to appoint bishops, to manage church endowments, to teach and to educate.



The imposing entrance to Milan's Archiepiscopal Seminary, in Venezia street. The seminary was founded by Saint Carlo Borromeo as an impressive token of the importance that the Church attached - after the Council of Trent - to the education of the clergy.

Father Biraghi went through this entrance for 31 years, from 1824 to 1855, bringing all his forces into play as a teacher, as an educator, as a spiritual father: "My heart is all for the seminarists". "I do not feel greater joy than when I hear that my spiritual sons make good progress in the presence of the Lord."



Caryatid.  
Detail of the entrance to  
Milan Seminary



Cope of Father Luigi  
Biraghi's first Mass - made  
out of his mother Maria  
Fina's bridal gown - and  
Father Biraghi's prie-dieu,  
coming from Saint Teresa's  
Oratory.

## *DOCTOR OF THE AMBROSIAN LIBRARY*



Father Luigi Biraghi, Doctor of the Ambrosian Library. Notice the medal, always shown in the specific iconography.

In 1855, after some years marked both by the development of the congregation of the Sisters of Saint Marcellina that he had founded in 1848, and by some troubles caused by the long political inquisition against him following the events of 1848, Father Luigi Biraghi was

appointed Doctor of the Ambrosian Library and went to live at the Barnabite Fathers' of St. Alexander's Parish church, who welcomed him with high regard and friendship.

Here he carried on with his studies and his publications, above all of the history of the church and of sacred archeology, and he was a wise adviser for his bishops and for the Ambrosian clergy.

In these years Father Biraghi was highly and enthusiastically interested in the missions of P.I.M.E., which he supported generously, encouraging Father Ramazzotti and Father Marinoni and guiding two very good spiritual sons of his to it: Father Giovanni Mazzucconi, who died as a martyr in 1855, and Father Carlo Salerio.



Milan, upper part of Saint Alexander's Church frontage.



Ancient print of San Sepolcro Square, of the eighteenth century, with the Ambrosian Library entrance. Notice - between the building and the church - the three beautiful windows, which can still be seen nowadays.



*MONSIGNOR BIRAGHI AND THE SISTERS OF  
SAINT MARCELLINA:  
TO THE YOUNG AND FOR THE YOUNG*

THE ORIGINS

From 1835 Father Biraghi perceived the need to safeguard young people, especially young women, from the Enlightenment doctrines of his time, which were founded on the denial of the spirituality of man.

He believed that "the good of the Church and of the State" depended "mostly" on the "Christian and civil success" of girls.

" And as the task of a teacher is holy,difficult and such as to require great skill, edifying examples, absolute self-forgetfulness and continuous sacrifices" Father Biraghi wanted to found an Institute of lady teachers, whose self-devotion to the young had Jesus Christ as a model.

The plan was carried out after the providential encounter, during a retreat in Saint Ambrose basilica in Milan, between Father Luigi Biraghi and young Marina Videmari, who was already contemplating a life of consecration.

The plan for a boarding school was carried out after a period of spiritual and professional training for Marina, who was guided by Father Biraghi.

The accomplishment of the work went through many difficulties, even of a spiritual kind, for the founder himself who remembered them after many years, when he wrote to a sister of Saint Marcellina:



Saint Marcellina with her brothers, Saint Ambrose and Saint Satiro (altarpiece in the chapel of Cernusco college). Marcellina, the eldest, devoted herself to the formation and education of her brothers after both parents' untimely death.



Saint Ambrose Basilica:  
Ansperto hall.  
Here Father Luigi Biraghi met Marina Videmari (photo below) for the first time. In the same basilica Father Biraghi discovered Bishop Saint Ambrose's and Martyrs Saint Protaso's and Saint Gervaso's bodies, which are nowadays placed under the high altar. Saint Marcellina's body is in a side chapel.



" When I looked at this picture, at this powerful sorrowful Virgin (in Rho shrine) I recalled the sorrowful image of Saint Mary in Cernusco, and that day, and that time in October 1837, at the end of the month, when I prayed before that statue and I was urged to decide on the institution of our dear congregation. Kneeling down beside that altar, in solitude, in silence I was thinking of the congregation. I was planning to found, and I foresaw the difficulties, the expenses, the worries, the never-ending bond, the responsibility that I took, the troubles to which I had to submit myself after a very untroubled life; and I felt reluctance and idleness and great hesitation:  
and I prayed to the Virgin Mary, asking her to enlighten me and to give me wisdom, strength,



Foundation stone of the first boarding school of the Sisters of Saint Marcellina, in Cernusco sul Naviglio.

and I prayed....And suddenly I had a new heart, a will of iron, a sweet confidence that God liked this thing and that He would bless it. And so it was. Heartened by Our Lady I saw to the purchase of the property of the Greppi family, and to the building of the house, and I thought out the moral and civil structure. Oh, how obliged I feel to Our Lady of Sorrows! Yesterday I thanked her with a special Mass and I offered Her our congregation. Amen."

Statue of Our Lady of Sorrows in Saint Mary's Church. Before this image Father Biraghi received from God the strength to start the institution of the Sisters of Saint Marcellina.





Saint Mary's shrine in Cernusco; nowadays it is also the heart of a spirituality centre animated by the Sisters of Saint Marcellina, called Saint Mary's Oasis.



"Martha, Martha you fret for many things..." - frescoed lunette on the front door of the college in Cernusco. Father Biraghi shows the icon of Martha and Mary to the Sisters of Saint Marcellina, to indicate the active soul and the contemplative one of their lives directed towards Jesus as their centre.



Ancient print of the first boarding school.

Frontage of the Sisters of Saint Marcellina's first boarding school in Cernusco sul Naviglio.



Expressions of every day life in a boarding school: a corner of the inner schoolyard with the bell, a necessary instrument to strike the times of study, of prayer, of play; precious embroidery made by the first sisters of



Saint Marcellina, who, like all the young ladies of that time, learnt this art from when they were little girls and taught it to their pupils; oven of the first boarding school where, once a week, bread and cakes for the community of sisters and pupils were cooked.





Porch of the boarding school in Cernusco, with original wooden ceiling. At one time the porch opened on to the yard portrayed below. Notice some of the 33 columns that Father Biraghi had purposely built, in the style of the Seminary. In the centre, a statue of Our Lady of the Weeping Infant Jesus. In 1924 a young sister of Saint Marcellina, Elisabetta Redaelli, who was staying in the infirmary of the

school in a very bad health condition, after seeing Our Lady with the Child Jesus weeping in her arms, recovered instantly after receiving a message: "The Child is weeping because he is not sufficiently loved, sought out and desired, even by people who are consecrated to him. You must announce this". The inexplicable recovery has been recognized by the Church in Milan, and a parish church in Cernusco is consecrated to Our Lady of the Weeping Infant Jesus.



## THE BLESSED METHOD

Very soon more boarding schools were added to the first one in Cernusco.

Together with a sound and thorough learning, the educative method devised by Monsignor Biraghi and by Marina Videmari gave the students an education based on:

- spirit of freedom with respect for individual personalities
- family atmosphere favoured by the sisters' motherly and sisterly attitude towards the pupils.

"Never give up the blessed method always to be among the girl pupils, in the dormitories, in the dining room, during playtime: as they will be better formed by your good example than by many rules."

Compared with the boarding schools of that time, where girl students remained for many years without going out, the Sisters of Saint Marcellina's schools contemplated summer holidays both at home and with the sisters and provided for the training of young women who may be equipped to face daily life in a mature way after their school years:

"It will do good to acquaint them, as well as you can, with the world such as it is, that is with its miseries and dangers, and with the discretion to live wisely in it, so that they do not get lost after an imaginary rose-coloured world, which does not exist, as often girls do."



Sister Maria Anna Sala with two pupils, in a painting by Rivetta in the boarding school in Cernusco sul Naviglio. Maria Anna Sala was born in Brivio and was one of the first former students who became a Sister of Saint Marcellina.

She was strong in faith, and she was a model educator and teacher in many boarding schools, in accordance with Father Biraghi's spirit: "Keep before your eyes the Holy Ghost's promise: «He who has taught many people to live well, will shine as a star in the eternal kingdom»".

She had Giuditta Alghisi Montini, Pope Paul VI's mother, as one of her pupils. She was declared Blessed in 1980.



Ancient print of the boarding school in Via Quadronno - Milan (1854) and altarpiece "Mary Immaculate" in the same boarding school. painted by sister Giuseppa Videmari.

In the guest-quarters of this house Father Luigi Biraghi died peacefully on August 11, 1879, surrounded by the caring love of the Sisters of Saint Marcellina.





Group of pupils of the boarding school in Genoa Albaro. This house was founded by Father Biraghi and Mother Videmari also to give the sisters and the pupils the opportunity of sea-bathing during the holidays.

Father Luigi Biraghi continues his mission of prayer and intercession in the Church in Milan through:

- the engagement of the diocesan clergy's tutors and teachers, of church people, of deacons, of missionaries
- the motherly work of the Sisters of Saint Marcellina who are present in ten Countries of the world with schools, social activities, hospitals and missions.

"Remember  
that nothing is more precious  
than souls.

What did Jesus ask Peter  
as a true sign of love?

PETER, DO YOU LOVE ME?

If you love me truly

LOOK AFTER MY SHEEP"

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