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Giulia Falletti Di Barolo:

Impelled by Christ's Love

By Michael L. Pomo, MD[1]

This is the story of a woman; a woman that commands our attention; a woman of extraordinary character, virtue and holiness; a woman of exquisite personal sensitivity.

She was a woman of noble birth. As a child, she had to flee political persecution with her family and endure the execution of her grandmother by decapitation with the guillotine. She was a woman acquainted with sorrow; she knew the cross. She was a Lady in Waiting to the Empress Josephine. She was a devoted wife. She was a widow at a young age. She was a reformer of prisons. She was a defender of the weak, the vulnerable, the emarginated, and the oppressed. She founded schools for children and a hospital for girls with disabilities. She was the founder of religious orders. She was well educated and spoke six languages. She was a connoisseur of art. She was a wealthy woman and a powerful woman. She was the owner of palaces, villas, castles and vineyards. She was a business woman and a good one for that. She was a producer of prestigious wine. She knew kings, popes, prime ministers, cardinals, bishops and archbishops, authors, poets and patriots. She was a woman of influence. But above all she was a woman of prayer and a woman of deep faith whose life was centered on Our Lord present in body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist. Her name was Giulia: The Marchioness Giulia Falletti di Barolo, born Julie Victurnienne Francoise Colbert de Maulévrier. Her virtue was so well known that at her funeral the city of Turin had to send the *carabinieri* to maintain order among the multitude of mourners that filled the streets

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around her palace.[2] All of Turin wept. Even the newspapers, which had been so malicious after the passage of Rattazzi's anticlerical laws, printed eulogies of praise. In 1991 her cause for canonization was introduced, and in 2015 Pope Francis advanced her cause, declaring her Venerable. What was so unique about this life?

The Church of St. Julia – By way of Introduction: A Preview of the Marchesa

When we want to know something about a person, especially a person from the past we often search to see what that person had to say especially about themselves. We turn to their writings and other works that they produced. The Marchioness Giulia Falletti Barolo left many letters, prayers, and memoirs. But she also built a church before her death, which is dedicated to St. Julia, her namesake. It was her last work of charity, and it gives us a glimpse into her personality, and particularly into her spirituality.

The Marchioness' most cherished achievement was the foundation of the Congregation of nuns known as the Penitent Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene (or "the Magdalenes),[3] today known as the Daughters of Jesus the Good Shepherd. These nuns occupied a special place in her heart and were a great source of spiritual inspiration. The Church of St. Julia enshrines symbols of the major ideals and devotions of the Congregation.

The Marchioness built the church in a poor and underserved district called "Vanchiglia." This district lay outside the city just beyond the old bastions and defensive city walls, and extended down to the River Po. When the old defensive city walls were demolished in 1818 during the period of the Restoration after the defeat of Napoleon and the collapse of the French Empire, the King ordered a tree lined boulevard (Corso San Maurizio) to parallel the place where the old walls had stood. The boulevard runs all the way from the Palace Gardens to the River Po and still forms the border of the Vanchiglia district today. The people that lived there were mainly a few peasant farmers, washerwomen and people associated with silk production;

2. Stanislao Maria Avanzo, *Quando la ricchezza e' una beatitudine – Vita della marchesa Giulia Colbert di Barolo* (Siena: Edizione Cantagalli, 2009), 13.

3. The Penitent Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene, are called Le Maddalenein Italian. This has been rendered in English several ways. Lady Fullerton uses "Magdalens." Fr. Arthur J. Lenti renders it as "Magdalenes." Fr. Lenti's practice is followed here. See Arthur Lenti, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit,* 7 vols. (LAS: Rome, 2007-2010), 2:87. The reference contains the volume number and page.

it wasn't a very desirable area. Canals that serviced the tanneries and slaughterhouses crisscrossed it, and an open ditch carried the sewage from the city of Turin to open fields to be prepared for fertiliser. The population of the area was small, probably a few hundred people. However, after the defensive walls were taken down in 1818, the area began to develop: small industry started moving in and people started building homes. But the Vanchiglia was not a very safe place; there were notorious gangs whose memory lingers even today. The marshy area down by the River Po, called the Moschino (from the word "moscerino" meaning "gnat"), was a filthy, insect-infested area where chamber pots were emptied and cleaned, and it served as a hang-out for gang members, robbers, thieves, murderers, and prostitutes. It was here that a young, idealistic priest by the name of Don Cocchi set up an oratory called the Oratory of the Guardian Angel, to teach youth some catechism and to give them a wholesome environment for recreation. He soon realized that the Moschino was not the best place to open an Oratory and within a year he relocated it to a more central location in Vanchiglia. The Moschino was finally demolished by the city in 1872, as the Vanchiglia district was developing and becoming more respectable. But when the Marchioness built the Church of St. Julia, the Vanchiglia was still a poor and underserved area.

The Marchioness Barolo became involved in the project in 1862. She was getting older, and her nephew, Paul, had been killed in a hunting accident leaving her with no heirs. So she decided to use the money that had been destined as Paul's inheritance for the construction of a church in the Vanchiglia. The population of the Vanchiglia district now exceeded five thousand and was continuing to increase. Her offer to build the church couldn't have come at a better time for the people of the Vanchiglia. However, she specified that the church would be dedicated to St. Julia, her patron saint, and not St. Luke, as architect Alessandro Antonelli had proposed.[4] It would be in a gothic style similar to the churches of the Vendee where she was born. She dismissed Antonelli and chose a new young Piedmontese architect, Giovanni Battista Ferrante, who at age twenty-

4. In 1844 Alessandro Antonelli was chosen to spearhead the urban development of the Vanchiglia district. He is the man who rose to fame by completing the top of the building named after him, the *Mole Antonelliana,* which has become the symbol of the city. In 1849, Antonelli became the driving force behind the "Vanchilia Urban Development Company" (Societa' dei Costruttori di Vanchiglia). He laid out a plan of streets and city blocks, which included a plan for a very large church dedicated to St. Luke. The planned church would have been able to seat 3,000 people. It never got built since no one could come up with the funding.

eight had already distinguished himself in Turin with numerous projects solidly establishing his reputation for excellence.[5] The Marchioness saw in him someone who could meld spirituality with architecture, and he was determined to scrupulously adhere to the Marchioness Barolo's spiritual ideals. The planning commission and city administration accepted the offer. The anti-Catholic Masons were stupefied that this project passed the anticlerical legislation. They called the Marchioness "an evil genius."[6] City Hall was delighted with this timely and generous solution to their dilemma and named a street after her: *Via Giulia di Barolo*. An assembly of property owners was called and they signed the proposal in May 1862. The proposal also included funding for the construction of an Oratory and a "Convitto" - boarding house - for six priests to be available for the infirm or as substitutes for the pastor when the latter was away or sick. Work was begun on the Church that summer, and the cornerstone was laid the following Spring on May 22, 1863, the feast of St. Julia. The Oratory was also built, and it assimilated the Oratory of the Guardian Angel, which at that time was being run by the Salesians of Don Bosco; but the plans for the Convitto were blocked by the anticlerical policies of the government and it never became a reality. The Oratory is still functioning today.

The Church of St. Julia bears the Marchioness' personal stamp. It is dedicated to the her patron saint and the architecture is patterned after her former parish church in the Vendee. The combined Colbert-Barolo family crest appears at the base of each of the two lateral stained glass windows in the sanctuary. Of the four large statues on the façade of the church, the one on the extreme left is of St. Charles Borromeo. Since this saint did not have any apparent direct influence on the Marchioness' spirituality, it is likely she included his statue on the façade because he was the patron saint of her beloved husband, Charles Tancredi Falletti Marquis of Barolo. This would be one way of weaving the memory of her husband into the fabric of the church, and highlights her notable personal sensitivity.

There are two large statues of Giulia and her husband Tancredi Falletti Barolo in the transepts, each kneeling in reverent prayer. These were added when the Marchioness' body was transferred to the Church thirty years

5. Among his many secular and religious projects were included his participation on the Frejus Tunnel, many wealthy residents' palatial homes, the chapel in the monastery of the Visitation Sisters on Corso Francia, the parish church of Giaveno, a few pavilions at the Santuario di Oropa, and other projects.

6. Angelo Montonati, *Giulia Colbet Di Barolo, Marchesa dei Poveri* (Milano: Paoline, 2011), 187.

later, and buried in the sanctuary. A few years ago , the Marquis' body was also transferred from the cemetery to the right transept of the church.

The Church of St. Julia also speaks to us of the Marchioness' spirituality and gives us a glimpse of her devotional life. The image of St. Julia, virgin and martyr embracing the Cross, dominates the church from the stained glass window in the apse behind the altar. St. Julia was an 18-year-old virgin that suffered torture and crucifixion for her faith, and she serves as a symbol of Faith and of the Cross.[7] Although it doesn't appear that there is any mention of St. Julia in the writings of the Marchioness, it is hard to imagine that she did not see in St. Julia the suffering of the girls that she worked with in the prisons and in the slums.

Very prominent on the façade of the Church is the large rose window above the main entrance with its broad, heavy casing conspicuously inscribed with large Latin letters: *Absit gloriari nisi in cruce Domini nostri Jesu Christi*. The inscription is taken from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians: "May I never boast except in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ."[8] It has been reported that the Marchioness of Barolo adopted this quotation as her motto.[9] Suor Ave Tago, Mother Superior of the Magdalenes, in a private conversation, was not ready to confirm that the quotation from Paul was her "motto," but was quick to say that the Marchioness often told her "daughters" - the Magdalenes: "Glory for God; love for others; the cross for ourselves," ("Gloria a Dio; bene al prossimo; croce a noi"), a saying rooted in the quotation from St. Paul. Stainslao Avanzo calls it her "slogan."[10]

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7. An account of St. Julia's life has come down to us according to which the saint, an 18-year-old virgin, born of a noble Carthaginian Family, was sold as a slave to Eusebius, a Syrian merchant, who took her into his household. He became very attached to her because of her beauty and her virtue, and he took her with him on his sea voyages, which one-day brought him to Corsica. Pagan rites were being celebrated the night of their arrival, and Eusebius became drunk with the rest of the revelers. The Roman governor, Felix, seeing that Julia did not honor the pagan gods, offered her freedom if she would sacrifice to the gods, but, even after beatings, whippings, and having her hair pulled out, she refused. Her reply was, "Christ has suffered for me, now I must suffer for him." Exasperated, Felix had her crucified. To this day she remains the patron saint of the Island of Corsica. Ultimately, a Lombard Queen took her relics to Brescia where they remain today.

8. Gal 6:14

9. Montonati, *Giulia Colbet Di Barolo*, 187

10. Avanzo was the historical *peritus* (perito storico) in the diocesan inquest regarding the life, virtue and reputation for sanctity of the Marchioness in the diocese of Turin.

Another prominent feature of the façade is the marble bas-relief of a woman standing in the center of the lunette above the main entrance. In her left hand, the woman is raising on high a chalice surmounted by a host. Rays of light are shining on it, and angels at the woman's feet are bowed down, evidently in adoration. The woman is an allegorical representation of Faith. Faith and the Blessed Sacrament are the elements central to the scene. The Marchioness was known to be a lady of great faith. Avanzo writes that, "she saw everything through the eyes of Faith,"[11] a faith rooted in the Eucharist. Suor Ave relates that it was part of her prayer life to find a church every day that had exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and to go there in the afternoon to spend some quiet time with Our Lord. When the Marchioness was in Rome in 1834 she met the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Upon her recommendation, King Charles Albert had a monastery built for them in Turin, and the Marchioness herself paid for the annual maintenance of the sisters and the monastery. The sisters moved into their new monastery in 1839, and the Marchioness herself was known to be a frequent visitor.

The devotions that are most significant in the Marchioness' spiritual life and that of her Magdalenes are nestled in the transepts of the church. In the left transept is a massive and elaborately beautiful crucifix, the work of Giuseppe Tamone, which underscores the centrality of the Cross in the Marchioness' spirituality. She knew the mystery of the relationship between love and suffering that we see in the Cross. Central to the devotional life of the Sisters of Saint Mary Magdalene is the Passion of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, especially observance of the "three hours of the agony" on Good Friday.[12]

In the right transept is an enormous, gold-gilded *trittico* (triptych) displaying three more devotions that are foundational for the Magdalenes. The central panel of the *trittic*o displays the Madonna with all of her maternal tenderness and love. In this scene the Madonna is holding the child Jesus in her arms. It calls to mind a frequently told story of the Marchioness. One day as she was at the Church of the *Consolata* where she went daily to pray, there was a child who wanted to see the statue of the Madonna better and kept saying to her mother in Piedmontese dialect, "*Mamma, piime an bras*" ("Mom, take me in your arms"). The Marchioness was captivated by the innocence and simplicity of the child. Avanzo tells us that the Marchioness frequently repeated that phrase in her prayers. Five

11. Avanzo, *Quando la ricchezza é una beatitudine*, 70.

12. Montonati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo*, 100.

months before she died she wrote to Sister Metille, one of the Madgalenes in Cremona, "Every once in a while, tell all the sisters for me: *Mamma, piime an bras*. Do you remember that story?"[13]

On the right-hand panel of the *trittico* is St. Joseph, whom the Marchioness affectionately calls, "My dear St. Joseph." He was to be considered the "head of the house" and "economer" of the Magdalenes. She even composed a prayer to St. Joseph with seven petitions[14] which is to be recited every March 19, on the Feast of St. Joseph. She also obtained permission to have the Sisters of St. Joseph come from Chambery in France to work in her schools for girls and in the prisons.

The left-hand panel of the *trittico* is dedicated to the Guardian Angel to whom she had special devotion. She frequently exhorted her nuns and the girls she worked with to pray to their Guardian Angel as she did hers. Just before her death she composed a prayer to the Guardian Angel.[15] Pope John XXIII used this prayer in praying to the Guardian Angel.

The Marchioness' husband, Tandredi Falletti Marquis of Barolo (1732-1838) also had great devotion to the Guardian Angel, as did Don Bosco. As a member of the Confraternity of the Guardian Angel, Tancredi Falletti Barolo commissioned the Chapel of the Guardian Angel in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in central Turin. This Chapel is well known as it is where Don Bosco celebrated his first Mass assisted by Fr. Joseph Cafasso, the director of the Pastoral Institute attached to the church.

The church of St. Julia highlights the importance of the Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene, in the life of the Marchioness. The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene was the "capolavoro" – the masterpiece – of her career. And she herself lived the spirituality of her "daughters."

13. Montonati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo*, 191.

14. Giulia Falletti di Barolo Colbert, *Scritti Spirituali,* ed. Stanislao Avanzo (Milano: Tipografia GRAFMIL, 1994), 71-72.

15. Falletti di Barolo, *Scritti Spirituali*, 56.

Giulia Falletti Marchioness di Barolo's background

Giulia Falletti née Colbert de Maulévrier Marchioness of Barolo, was born in France. She was of the Colbert family, one of the most aristocratic families in France, a family in the direct line of the famous Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the minister of finance of the Sun King, Louis XIV. The Colbert castle was in an area called the Vendee, one of the most Catholic areas of France. The people of the Vendee so resisted the hated anti-Catholic legislation and dechristianization policies of the liberal Jacobin revolutionaries that in 1793 they organized an outright counter-revolution.

Julie was born in 1786 in the Maulévrier family castle, three years before the beginning of the French Revolution. After the Revolution had begun, during the period of the Constitutional Monarchy and before the radical Jacobins came to power, Julie's father took her and her sister, disguised as boys, out of the country to Germany where he was stationed. In February of 1793 Julie's brother, Antoine, was born in Holland; eight months later her mother died in Brussels. By 1794 the Reign of Terror had begun in France; the radical Jacobins met the Vandean's resistance with a determination to exterminate all of them including the children with their mothers. The revolutionary Republican forces reported to the "peoples representative" in Paris that they did not have enough gunpowder and bullets to shoot them all so they tied them to rafts in the Loire River, and sank and drowned them day after day until an estimated half a million people had been done away with. Julie's 63-year-old paternal grandmother was taken by cart to Paris where she was tried by the Revolutionary Tribunal in the Palace of Justice, and was found guilty of the crime of "murderer of the people." She was condemned to death by decapitation with the Guillotine. The Parisian crowd begged the executioner spare her life because she was known to be such a dedicated woman that helped the people. When he refused, the crowd did something very unusual in that frenzied atmosphere of lustful violence. They knelt and sang the Salve Regina. Two days later Robespierre was arrested and guillotined. While in exile, Julie's father was providing her with an education far superior to that of other women of the time. Julie excelled in languages, and, in addition to her native French, she learned German, English and Italian, as well as Latin. Later she would master Piedmontese dialect.

In the meantime, Napoleon had begun his military career. By the time he was twenty-six years old he was already a Major General. His military promotion came in 1795 during the period of the Directory, when he was

asked to put down a royalist insurrection. The following year, the Directory sent him to Italy. On his Italian campaign, he won the battle of Lodi, and began setting up sister republics all over Italy. Piedmont came under French rule. When he went on his Egyptian Campaign in 1797, things did not go well for him; and in France the Directory was getting weaker. So in 1799, Napoleon left his men in Egypt, went to France, toppled the Directory, set up a new form of government, the Consulate (which was in reality a ruse for a military dictatorship), and put himself in charge. While he was away in Egypt, the sister republics that he had formed in Italy, had rebelled against French control, and the Austrians had made inroads into Northern Italy. Turin was no longer under French rule. Like Hannibal in ages past, Napoleon crossed the Alps with his armies and defeated the Austrians at Marengo driving them out of Piedmont and Lombardy and re-establishing French hegemony. Turin was now again French.

Napoleon knew he could not give France the stability that it wanted without the support of the old aristocracy. And he knew he would never have the support of the old aristocracy without making peace with the Pope and restoring Catholicism to France. The Vendee, for example, had never been able to accept the religious and political policies of the Republic. All over France, a big reason, if not the biggest reason, for opposition to government was religion. In 1801, Napoleon negotiated and signed a concordat with Pope Pius VII. In the same year, French aristocrats in exile were welcomed back to France, with a promise of restitution of a part of their land and property; Julie, her father and her brother returned to the Vendee and their castle, which was now in ruins.

The Consulate soon gave way to the Empire. Within five years, in 1804, the Senate "voted" to make Napoleon emperor. In forming his court Napoleon created a "new" aristocracy based on merit and wealth. But about twenty per cent of his court was still "old" aristocracy. Julie, who was eighteen years old, became a Lady-in-Waiting to Josephine, and Tancredi Falletti Marquis of Barolo, a young twenty-year-old nobleman from Piedmont (now under French rule) became a page to Napoleon. Julie and Tancredi developed a romantic relationship while at court, and, with Napoleon's blessing, were married in Paris in 1806. Julie Colbert de Maulévrier was now Giulia Falletti Marchioness of Barolo.

As is well known, the French Empire only lasted about ten years. After Napoleon's defeat and exile, the Congress of Vienna initiated the period of the Restoration, and re-established the fallen monarchies. Piedmont was no longer under French rule. King Victor Emmanuel I returned from

exile in Sardinia and took up residence in the Royal Palace. But Turin was changed. You cannot erase twenty years of history with the stroke of a pen. People liked many of the Napoleonic reforms, such as, the educational system, the civil code, uniform taxation, and other reforms. However, even with the return of the monarchy, there were groups agitating for a liberal Constitution and the establishment of a Constitutional Monarchy. There was also discontent among the population because of social and moral degradation characterized by poverty, unemployment, precipitated by the Napoleonic wars and incipient industrialization. The population of Turin in 1814 was 82,000,[16] thirty to fifty per-cent of which were illiterate. There were five hundred taverns in town where one could get drunk, and alcoholism was commonplace. Suicide was on the rise. Prostitution was widespread. One birth in four was illegitimate and many babies were abandoned. Infanticide was not uncommon; the dead bodies of unwanted children were tossed in the Moschino. Delinquency was high.[17] This was the Piedmont to which Tancredi Marquis of Barolo and his wife returned. They took up residence in the Barolo family palace in Turin. Even prior to the fall of the empire, the Marquis and Marchioness only spent a few months at Court in Paris, and the rest of the year at the Barolo Palace in Turin. Tancredi Barolo's bride, Giulia, was very well received in Italy. Silvio Pellico, in his biography of the Marchioness, writes that "Every one here easily forgave her being French, so perfect was her freedom from vanity or affectation, and so great the sympathy she showed for our country, which had become her own."[18]

The Marchioness' Defining Moment

Even as a young person, the Marchioness had developed an interest in prisons and the incarcerated. Her youth was at a time when such an interest was developing in Europe. In England, for example, a Quaker by the name of Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) was doing pioneer work in this field, and her brother-in-law, Francis Cunningham, made trips to Piedmont to see the prisons there. In Italy there were the *Compagnie della Misericordia*

16. Domenico Agasso, Jr., *Dentro La Storia: Tancredi, testimone di speranza* (Cinisello Balsamo (Milano): San Paolo, 2010), 15.

17. Agasso, *Dentro La Storia*, 13.

18. Silvio Pellico, *The Life of the Marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo, Reformer of the Turin Prisons,* trans. by Lady Giorgiana Fullerton (London: Richard Betly 1866), 18.

(Companies of Mercy) in all the major cities. Their function was a charitable work to bring comfort to the incarcerated. It was along these lines that the Marchioness' program would take shape.

In her memoirs, the Marchioness of Barolo relates that her interest regarding the incarcerated was aroused the very first time she saw a criminal being led to prison.[19] She was young at the time and her thoughts regarding making the world better, although sincere, may have been naïve and superficial relative to her age. But she never lost her lingering interest in prisons and the incarcerated.

A defining moment in her life, came at age twenty-eight when she was in Turin. It was such a defining moment that she begins her memoirs of the prisons with a description of this, and none of her biographers fail to repeat it. The most reliable date for this event is the first Sunday after Easter, on April 17, 1814. The Eucharist was being carried to the sick in their homes, followed by a procession singing holy hymns. The Marchioness knelt in reverence, as she was accustomed to doing. As the procession passed her, she heard a gruff and strident voice cry out, "It is not Viaticum I want, but food rations." It was pronounced so irreverently that the Marchioness took it as swearing. Looking up, she saw that they were standing in front of the prison called the "Senate." It was just about a block from the Barolo palace. The voice came from the prison. Her immediate impulse was to go and find the man who cried out, and give him some coins to buy food. Having obtained permission to enter with her servant, she went to the man and found that he was not hungry at all. He was just mean and irreligious.

In the darkness and stink of the prison, with the rattle of the prisoner's chains ringing in her ears, she could only think of how inhuman a place this was. It resembled a zoo for animals. At her appearance, the prisoners respectfully quieted down. She thought they became respectful because of her youth and her white dress, but more likely it was related to the kindness and compassion in her demeanor. The prisoners remained in silence, perhaps awestruck, as she distributed coins to each one of them. Then she was taken up one floor to where the women were kept. It was dark with only one small window for air and light. There were so many women that their straw mats completely covered the floor. There was only one narrow corridor in the center where they could walk and get some

19. Giulia Colbert Marchesa di Barolo, *Con Gli Occhi del Cuore, Memorie sulle carceri, Appunti di viaggio, raconti*, ed. Anglelo Montonate (Cinisello Balsamo (Milano): Editrice San Paolo, 1995), 27.

exercise. The corridor was crossed by metal building supports over which the women could trip, and the Marchioness Barolo writes that several women had sustained injuries. The women were scantily clad, and, in spite of their semi-nudity, they showed no shame. The men had shown the Marchioness some sort of respect, but not these women. They threw themselves at her all yelling at the same time. Their degradation provoked in her a sense of pain over the shameful conditions of the prison. The Marchioness remembers standing there with her hands clutched together as she repeated, "O, my God! O, my God!" A few coins fell from her hands and the women threw themselves on the ground like famished dogs contending for a coin, "probably to buy some strong liquor to dull the pain of that terrible existence."[20]

It was in that vortex of contrasting images and feelings that the Marchioness came into contact with our common humanity, with the humanity that she shared with them. She saw them as "daughters of the same Father."[21] In her words, we are all "plants of the Heavens."[22] Every one of them had an "age of innocence"[23] just as she did. All were called to the same heavenly destiny as she was. She returned home with her "heart in pieces."[24] Maybe her heart was in pieces, but it was touched by the Holy Spirit, and was aflame with love. She already knew what she had to do. But she still had to learn how to do it. And that would take her on the journey of a lifetime. Her story reminds us of Zacchaeus in the Lucan parable. Zacchaeus was a rich man seeking to find God and know his will. When Jesus called him, he followed Jesus' call using his wealth to help others.[25] Giulia did the same thing.

The seed was planted. And it was a force that Giulia Marchioness of Barolo could not resist. She was not the only person to experience these same sentiments. Fr. Joseph Cafasso, the brilliant young theologian at Pastoral Institute, visited the prisons, and once he started, he couldn't stop. When Don Bosco entered the Pastoral Institute in 1841, Fr. Cafasso took him with him to the prisons. Teresio Bosco records Don Bosco's reaction to that experience in Don Bosco's own words, "I was horrified at the large

20. Giulia di Barolo, *Con Gli Occhi del Cuore*, 30.

21. Giulia di Barolo, *Con Gli Occhi del Cuore*, 30.

22. Giulia di Barolo, *Con Gli Occhi del Cuore*, 30.

23. Giulia di Barolo, *Con Gli Occhi del Cuore*, 30.

24. Giulia di Barolo, *Con Gli Occhi del Cuore*, 30.

25. Luke 19:1ff.

number of 12 to 18-year-olds, all healthy and strong, intelligent looking, rotting there eaten by insects and starving of material and spiritual food."[26] Don Bosco dedicated his life to these young people when they were released and doing his utmost to prevent them from returning to such a dreadful place. The Marchioness of Barolo, Don Cafasso, and Don Bosco all saw the same thing. And it wasn't poverty. They knew what poverty was. They were stultified by a new phenomenon, a new reality – the dehumanization that was spreading through their society. And they couldn't turn away from it. It involved so many young people in the prisons, in the slums, in the streets. And it was growing. This was a product of the Industrial Revolution.[27] The Revolution got a late start in France and Italy because Napoleon had blocked trade with England. But with the collapse of the French Empire, France began to catch up. In Italy, the growing problem of incarcerated young people came to Milan first, but it didn't take long for Turin to start developing the same problems.

The worst part of the Industrial Revolution, as is very well known, was the exploitation of workers. Even young boys nine or ten years old would be put to work for sixteen hours a day for paltry wages. Often they were dead by age twenty. The young people in the prisons were often there for crimes of theft, or, prostitution to get money for food. This was not like any poverty that the Marchioness or Don Cafasso or Don Bosco, had ever known. This was more evil than one could imagine. This was man's inhumanity to man. It takes one's breath away, leaves one speechless, numb. They knew how to deal with poverty. But, how do you deal with dehumanization? That is why Giulia Falletti Barolo, Don Cafasso, and Don Bosco could not help but reach out by sharing their humanity with the victims of the time, and using their humanity to look for remedies for the pain of dehumanization, particularly of the young.

26. Teresio Bosco, *Don Bosco: una biografia nuova* (Torino: Elledici, 2011), 110.

27. It had its origins barely more than a half a century earlier in Scotland when a man by the name of James Watt invented the steam engine. One hundred horse power steam engine could do the work of 880 men. A new class of people was born called the proletarians (factory workers) who owned nothing and whose only wealth was their children. The proletarians replaced the artisan class of society along with the guilds causing a massive reorganization of society which brought with it starvation wages, family disintegration, crime, widespread drunkenness, and prostitution.

The Marchioness of Barolo's Prison Apostolate – The Path Of Holiness

Giulia Falletti Barolo did not begin her prison ministry right away. She couldn't. She didn't know enough. It would be three or four years before she would be prepared to start her work. She very much wanted to return to the prison and get to know the prisoners and their needs. But she met resistance from her family including her husband, Tancredi Falletti Barolo. She was too young and naïve, was their objection, and it could create scandal. Her confessor sided with her family and was opposed to the idea. Giulia used this period to learn more about the problems of work in the prisons and to prepare herself for her work of prison reform. Even though the Marquis was cautious regarding his wife's desire to become involved in prison ministry, they always shared their thoughts in all their charitable activities. They were on the journey of life together, and they had made a commitment to helping the working class.

The Marquis and the Marchioness were connoisseurs of art, and in 1816 made a trip together to London where they visited the museums, churches, and important palaces. They also included in their itinerary visits to several hospitals, and in particular they visited the Hospice of the Magdalene for reformed young ladies, that is, for young ladies who wanted to change their life. They also visited the New Gate Prison whose programs were being reformed by Elizabeth Fry, an innovative prison reformer who had caught the attention of countries on the continent including Piedmont. The Barolo's must have met Elisabeth Fry at that time, although such a meeting is not documented. However, from that time on the Marquise and his wife received the annual report of the Governing Board of the New Gate prison.[28] Eventually Giulia Falletti Barolo convinced her confessor to let her cautiously explore prison reform further. Giulia joined the Company of Mercy to become involved in the prison system. The Company of Mercy was a long established organization that had grown stale and spent much of its time praying for its deceased members and having processions. But it did get the Marchioness into the prison, and she served soup with them, and it gave her the opportunity to be alone with the ladies. By 1818 she had began her work in earnest in the Senatorial prison.

The foundation of her approach to working with these young women was to provide a kind maternal presence. Perhaps disintegration of family structures contributed more than anything else to the dehumanization that these young women felt. She may have thought of the child that said,

28. Montonati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo* 53-54.

"Mamma, take me in your arms," and she had to be that mother to them and "create family." She would need to do her work with the "douceur", the gentleness and kindness that St. Francis of Sales spoke of in his book *The Devout Life*.[29] Silvio Pellico makes reference to "the care she took always to speak in a low voice and a quiet manner"[30] and to "the sweetness of her own words and manner,"[31] and he notes that "her rule…was to carry on her good works as quietly as possible."[32] The Marchioness herself says in her memoirs that speaking in low tones had the capacity to induce silence, and she noted further that it is easier to make oneself heard in the middle of a screaming group of people by lowering one's voice rather than by trying to talk over the din.[33]

The rest of the Marchioness' approach was simple. It was formulated to meet the spiritual, material, and moral needs of the women. Every day began with a prayer for those willing to participate. And every day included catechesis to help give the women some authentic direction vis-à-vis their own existence. She also wanted the women to be literate. They received instruction in learning how to read, and with this also increased their self-esteem. Part of the program was to involve the women in various activities such as household chores or spinning, for which they were reimbursed. This was practical as it improved their living environment, but it also increased their sense of personal dignity and self-worth. Finally, the women were taught the type of comportment and manners that would be conducive to a healthy living environment and the formation of solidarity.

The Marchioness' work in the Senatorial prison was so successful that after five months, news had spread to the women incarcerated in the other prisons of Turin, and, at the request of the women in the prison called "il Correzionale,"[34] she added that prison to her program. Silvio Pellico relates that she also made several visits to a women's prison known as "Le Torri" or "The Towers"[35] but after a few visits she ascertained that she could

29. Joseph Boenzi, *St. Francis of Sales: Life and Spirit* (Stella Niagara: De Sales Resource Center, 2013), 178 -180.

30. Pellico, *The Life of the Marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo*,. 27.

31. Pellico, *The Life of the Marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo*, 58.

32. Pellico, *The Life of the Marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo*, 70.

33. Giulia di Barolo, *Con Gli Occhi Del Cuore*, 34.

34. Located on Via Stampatori 3, about four blocks from the Barolo palace.

35. Called "The Towers" because it was built around the towers of one of the old Roman gates to the city, the Porta Palattina.

not include them in her work, because of the physical characteristics of the prison. It was too dark to teach them how to read and write, and that was an important part the program.[36]

After three years the Marchioness wrote a letter, dated 10 January 1821, to Count Prospero Balbo, Secretary of State of the Interior.[37] The letter is a landmark piece, demonstrating the Marchioness' expertise in the field of prison reform. It concludes with twelve concrete proposals for change in the prison system. The authorities gave a prompt response to her exquisitely formulated letter. The King's review of her proposals was very favorable. But before there could be any action taken, revolution erupted in Piedmont, "the revolution of 30 days." It began in February of 1821. All regular activity in the city stopped. The Marchioness and her husband had to decide if they wanted to stay in the city and risk the horrors of being caught up in the revolution. They opted to stay and the Marchioness continued her work in the prisons. The revolutionaries, led by Santarosa, were in the peripheral cities of Piedmont and were demanding that the King give them a Constitution. On the third day of the revolution, King Victor Emmanuel I abdicated in favor of his brother Charles Felix who was away in central Italy at the time, so his 23-year-old-nephew, prince Charles Albert, was appointed regent. Charles Albert had been born in Turin in 1798 when Turin was a part of a Napoleonic French Republic, and he had been educated in Paris and Geneva where he came into contact with the principles of the French Enlightenment and ideals of the French Revolution, such as a Constitution, democracy, and equality. He himself demonstrated some liberal tendencies. As regent, he conceded a Constitution to the liberal revolutionaries when they formed a great throng in front of the Royal Palace demanding one. At that time he reformed the government making Santarosa the Minister of War. Charles Felix was not happy. He annulled the Constitution and ordered Charles Albert to go to Novara in the eastern part of the country. In the meantime, Austrian troops were headed to Piedmont to restore order. Charles Albert abdicated his regency and went into exile in Florence. With the intervention of the Austrians, Santarosa and his volunteers were defeated and the monarchy and its absolute authority and power were restored. The revolution was over in March. This is also the period when Silvio Pellico was arrested in Milan because of his participation in the "Carbonari," a secret liberal

36. Pellico, *The Life of the Marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo*, 46.

37. Ave Tago, *Giulia Colbert di Barolo: Madre dei Poveri* (Citta' del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), 216.

revolutionary movement that had its roots in Masonry and supported many of the ideas of the French revolution. Pellico would spend the next ten years in Austrian Imperial prisons. After being released he wrote a book describing his prison experience. He would eventually become the Marchioness' secretary.

Once the political situation in Piedmont had been stabilized and a state of normalcy re-established, the authorities could respond to the Marchioness' letter. In June, they offered to put the *Forzate* prison at her disposal. It had once been used as a prison for women "that had been led astray" but was currently in disuse. She found this offer so re-affirming of her work, that she couldn't help but share this information with her English friend, Elizabeth Fry, in a letter. They corresponded regularly. The Marchioness persuaded all of the women prisoners of all three prisons to transfer to the *Forzate*. Some of the women were reluctant to be transferred because it meant walking through the streets where they would be exposed to public ridicule and embarrassment. The Marchioness of Barolo could have simply ordered them to go, but, with her tremendous personal sensitivity, gentleness, and kindness had them taken in carriages to preserve their sense of personal dignity. The authorities remained very attentive to her "experiment," as she organized the *Forzate* prison. She did it along the same lines as she had done in the other prisons. There was enough work that she involved the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambery to help her. The authorities were so pleased with her results that later that year, in October, she was given the appointment of Superintendent of Prisons by express desire of King Charles Felix. She was the first woman ever to have such an appointment. The Marchioness' success was described as the "Colbert method" at the international level.[38] Francis Cunningham made a second visit to the Turin prisons in 1828, and in his report he praises Giulia Falletti Barolo's results. A copy of his report is kept in the library of the Barolo Castle in the Langhe.

Avanzo sees in the Marchioness' life an itinerary typical of so many of God's servants who are called to live their faith in extraordinary ways.[39] First there is a fortuitous event; then a desert experience in which there is searching and suffering; and finally clarity and a mission. We see this even in the life of St. Paul. At Damascus, as the light of Faith flooded his mind, the scales of pride fell away and he was able to see clearly, opening the way to new life in Christ. But he still did not know what to do. He spent

38. Montonati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo*, 73.

39. Avanzo, *Quando la ricchezza é una beatitudine*, 44.

three years in the deserts of Arabia searching for his path, and consulting with the apostles. It was through his desert experience that his soul was wrested by its roots bringing him to clarity regarding the path he was to follow, God's will in his life, led by Christ's Love. Paul's heart was so filled with Christ's Love, he could not help but share it: *Caritas Christi urget nos* - Christ's love impels us.[40]

Foundress Of A Religious Order: The Growth Of The Christ's Love

The Marchioness of Barolo's heart was so full of love she could not contain it. Her love spilled over as she started one project after another reaching out to so many. The list reads like a litany. One act of charity led to another as her work grew. Her family even became concerned and tried to get her to slow down. They were concerned that she would overextend herself, get exhausted, and break down. But, like Paul, Christ's love ceaselessly urged her on. One of the major axes of her spiritual life was the progression from her prison work to the *Rifugio* to the Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene. She knew at an early stage in her work with the women in the prisons that they were at high risk for returning to their former way of life. They needed preventative and rehabilitative education after their release. As she relates, some of the women of the prison became enmeshed in a "life of vice" as early as age twelve-years-old and didn't know any thing else.[41]

The Marchioness had made some attempts at dealing with this problem locally by finding families and private homes for the women to go to as an intermediate step, preparing them to re-integrate back into society. She kept her friend, Elizabeth Fry, informed of what she was doing in her correspondence with her.[42] But this method of "home training" could not serve as a definitive solution, both because of lack of structure and because there were many more women and girls needing placement than families capable of handling them. This problem had received international attention, and some attempts at dealing with it had already been tried in

40. 2 Cor 5:14

41. Giulia mentioned this in her letter to Roget de Cholex, 23 Sept. 1822: "J'ai vu quelques unes de ces malheureuses commencer la carrier du vice a l'age de douze ans, parce que leurs indigne parents, qui ne leurs avaient appris aucun métier, le repoussaient de chez eux. Sortir des pauvres creatures de la boue e de la misère, ou elles meurent après s'y etre trainees pendant quelches annees, serait l'oeuvre d'une charite' active et eclairee." See Tago, *Giulia Cobert di Barolo*, 247.

42. Tago, *Giulia Cobert di Barolo*, 253.

other countries. On one of her frequent trips to Paris, the Marchioness made the acquaintance of a priest by the name of Fr. Legris-Duval who had founded a hospice for the rehabilitation of such women. She came to the conclusion that she too would need to establish an autonomous house with a specialized program for these women.

In September 1822, she wrote to Count Roget de Cholex, the Minister of State for the Interior, proposing a place where women released from prison and who were motivated to reform their life could go until they were ready to re-integrate into society. And it would not be limited to women leaving prison, but would be open to any motivated girl at risk for being drawn into a "life of vice," or to girls already enmeshed in such a life, many of whom were young girls desperately looking for a way out. She would call the establishment *Il Rifugio*, (The Refuge). It would be a place where the girls and women could live and work; it would be supervised by the Sisters of St. Joseph (the same group of nuns that were engaged in helping the women in the *Forzate* prison) and, it would be operated in the name of love. Candidates had to come voluntarily, they had to be motivated to change, and they had to be willing to work. Most of the work that they engaged in was spinning and making textiles for the Army and the Navy. The women and girls would be paid: one third of the revenue went to the Refuge, and the other two-thirds went to the women, one third while they were still residents, and the other one third when the left the Refuge. Otherwise their day was a continuation of the routine established in the prison with time for prayer, work, lessons to learn how to read and write, and time for recreation.

The Marchioness wanted the Refuge to be located in the Valdocco area. Valdocco was outside the city, but was still near the Barolo palace. Today it would be about eight to ten blocks from the palace. She had great devotion to Blessed Sebastiano Valfrè, a seventeenth-century Piedmontese Oratorian priest who carried out his many charitable works in the Valdocco area. He was known for his visits to the incarcerated and the infirm, the care of wounded soldiers during military campaigns, especially that of 1706 when he took care of Pietro Micca, a young Piedmontese soldier that lost his life to save the city. Blessed Valfrè also brought aid to emarginated Waldensians and Jews. The Marchioness had such devotion to Blessed Sebastiano Valfrè that she even included his statue on the façade of the Church of St. Julia.

King Charles Felix reacted favorably to the proposal and agreed to provide a building. It was situated in Valdocco. The Barolos paid for the

renovations. The Royal Permit for the Refuge was issued on March 7, 1823. It quickly gained a very good reputation with the women and girls who wanted help in reforming their lives. The program was so successful that there were even women who asked to extend their stay in prison until they could be assured of a place in the Refuge.

Many of the girls had never known anything but abuse and degradation. At the Refuge they found a loving family atmosphere that they had never experienced before. Some of the girls eventually manifested a desire to remain at the Refuge and consecrate their life to the Lord. They repeated this desire to the Marchioness so often that she began to look into it and consulted with a few priests that she knew. Finally in 1832 she approached the Archbishop regarding the desire of these ladies to enter consecrated life to lead a life of prayer and penitence. The archbishop reacted favorably and urged the Marchioness to start the monastery without delay. She converted the second floor of the Refuge into a monastery, and the first postulants entered cloistered life on September 14, 1833, the liturgical Feast of the Holy Cross. A few weeks later they received official government approbation as well as an annual government stipend. Eight months later, in June of 1834, two of the postulants were vested with the religious habit. These women did not as yet have a rule, so each one was given a copy of the *Imitation of Christ*. The responsibility for the religious formation of these women was entrusted to the Sisters of St. Joseph. The head of the Community was also a Sister of St. Joseph, Mother Scholastica. It would not be until 1847 that they would have their own Mother superior, Suor Giulia Gerbi. They called themselves the Penitent Sisters of Saint Mary Magdalene (*Suore Penitenti di Santa Maria Maddalena*).

The Magdalenes, as the sisters were called, grew so rapidly that the Marchioness di Barolo recognized the need to build a self standing monastery. With her husband's consensus, she acquired the land next to the *Rifugio* and built, at her own expense, a large quadrangular monastery and cloister with a central garden, independent of the Refuge, but attached to it at the chapel. On either side of the altar of the chapel is a grill separating the chapel of the Refuge from the Magdalenes. The Magdalenes, who were cloistered, sat behind the grill in their chapel in the monastery. The monastery is the same today as it was then but there has been an accretion of buildings around the monastery and the Refuge as the charitable activities of the complex increased.[43]

43. Today there are about a dozen charitable activities in the complex around the monastery.

In the meantime the Marchioness began drafting the Constitutions for the Congregation with the help of Fr. John Baptist Borel and Fr. Antonio Durand. The latter appointed by the Archbishop. She based the Constitutions on those formulated by St. Francis of Sales for the Visatandine sisters. The Constitutions were approved by the diocesan authorities in 1840 and the Magdalenes moved into their monastery in 1841.

Of all the Marchioness' pious works, the Magdalenes meant the most to her. It was the crowning jewel of her accomplishments. And it was impressive. She is the first laywoman to found a religious institute for nuns. She considered herself a part of the congregation, and she herself was very close to her "figlie" (daughters), as she called the Magdalenes. Her letters to them fill two volumes. The Magdalenes called her "Madre" (Mother) or "Mammina" (an affectionate diminutive of "Mother"). After a Mother Superior was installed, they affectionately called her "Nonna" (Grandma).

The Marchioness participated in the spiritual life of the Congregation which included prayer, work, love of the cross, and total abandonment to the will of God. She was frequently heard to say, "Sia fatta la voluntà di Dio" (God's will be done). There was a particular emphasis on the virtues of mortification and simplicity. Mortification excluded any form of corporal penance. By mortification she understood a spirit of detachment from the things of this world, and a sober and austere life open to fraternal charity. By simplicity, it was meant childlike innocence totally open to the will of God and free of any trace of hypocrisy or duplicity. The sisters also had a missionary charge – to unite their prayers and sufferings to those of Our Lord so that with one voice they would go to the Father for the salvation of the souls.

Christ's Love Knows No Limits

The major axis of the Marchioness' charitable and pious works between 1818 and 1845 was her prison reform, the *Rifugio*, and the religious order that she founded. However, during this period, both her and her husband Tancredi Falletti Marquis of Barolo, let Christ's love continue to overflow into the community in ever new and creative ways.

In 1820, Fr. Domenico Mullardi, the pastor in the abysmally poor quarter known as "Borgo Dora" (or the "Balon" as it is known in Piedmontese dialect) needed help. This is the area where industrialization first came to Turin and all of the evils of industrialized society manifested themselves here. It lies just northeast of the Barolo Palace near the river

Dora. Don Mullardi invited the Marchioness to take a walking tour of the area and she saw the need that existed there: the young girls of the quarter were "at risk," and didn't have any schooling to help them deal with the challenges of life. Ignorance is a strong factor in human degradation, and the she knew it. She wrote a letter to Count Prospero Balbo and reported to him the seriousness of the problem and that it required more intervention than almsgiving on the part of a few pious and concerned parishioners. She organized the school and King Charles Felix approved a subsidy. She also asked the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambery for their help and they sent three nuns from France to run the school. Don Mullardi served as the sisters' spiritual director. This was the first time that the Marchioness worked with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambery. She would continue to involve them in her work in the prisons, and with the Refuge, and to help her start her Order of Magdalenes, and in other projects. The Marchioness did not stop with Borgo Dora. There was a similar need in many places, and she opened schools in other communities where she and her husband owned land and villas.[44]

Another serious problem was developing in the city of Turin in the 1820's. The countryside had been devastated by the Napoleonic wars. Mortality rates were high, disease was rampant, and many people had been reduced to being tenant farmers. They often had to give the wheat they produced to their landlords, and they themselves were reduced to eating the same corn they used to feed the pigs and the cows. People started coming to the city in ever increasing numbers. At least in the city they could make a living by begging, theft, or prostitution. That's mainly what the children did. More and more families found work in the factories but they had to leave their youngsters at home neglected and unattended because there was no one to look after them; in the poorest homes even the grandparents had to work.[45] Giulia had been following the work of a Scottish philanthropist by the name of Robert Owen who had opened some Infant Schools to deal with such situations. Inspired by his work, as well by similar type schools in France and elsewhere, Giulia and Tancredi Barolo opened up their home to these neglected and abandoned children, dedicating several rooms on the ground floor of their palace to their care. It was called the "Sala d'Asilo." We might call it a Kindergarten or a Day Care Center. It was open to boys and girls from two and a half to six years old, a novelty for Piedmont at that time when boys and girls were never

44. There are still schools in Moncalieri, Altesano, e Viu' today.

45. Montonati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo*, 78.

mixed, even at that age. They started out with about fifty children, but by 1830 they had over two hundred.[46]

Originally the children were cared for by laywomen. In 1832, the Marchioness decided to entrust the care of the *Sala d'Asilo* to the Sisters of Providence of Domodosola. However, these sisters believed in corporal punishment and the she did not. She absolutely forbade the use of corporal punishment of any kind, and strong tensions developed between them. She tried working with the sisters but found it necessary to change them out several times. It kept her busy because at the same time, in 1833, she founded the Penitent Sisters of Saint Mary Magdalene. It was also a chaotic year for Tancredi Falletti Marquis of Barolo. He had proposed opening a novitiate in Torino for the Sisters of Providence, evidently, so they could see that the sisters would have an appropriate preparation to work in their *Sala d'Asilo*. The Archbishop approved it. In the meantime, Antonio Rosmini, who had originally helped write the Constitutions for the Sisters of Providence, re-wrote them resulting in changes in the Congregation. The Marquis did not let this deter him. He stuck with his original plan to start a novitiate in Turin for the Sisters of Providence of Domodosola; he kept the old Constitutions; and he changed the name of the Congregation to the "Suore di Sant'Anna della Providenza" (Sisters of Saint Anne of Divine Providence) or, simply, the "Sisters of St. Anne" as they are known today. Thus he started a new religious congregation. On December 10, 1834 the first ten postulants were received into the new congregation; a Sister of St. Joseph was given the responsibility of their formation. The sisters of St. Anne look upon Marquis of Barolo as their founder. When he died three years later, his wife continued his work and together they are sometimes looked upon as cofounders. The Sisters of St. Anne have been known to refer to the Marchioness as "nostra madre fondatrice" (our Mother Foundress).[47] The Congregation grew rapidly, and by 1845 they already had eight houses, and sixty professed religious. Before his death in 1838, the Marquis of Barolo bought a house for them near the Sanctuary of the Consolata on the corner of *Via della Consolata* and *Corso Regina Margherita* not far from the Barolo palace. The sisters moved into their new home in August 1840 where they remain today and continue to run a nursery school and a primary school.

46. Montonati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo*, 79.

47. Avanzo, *Quando la ricchezza é una beatitudine*, 82.

The Widowed Marchioness

Many things happened in Piedmont during the 1830s while Giulia and Tancredi Barolo were busy with the prison reform and with founding schools and religious orders. In 1831 King Charles Felix died, and his nephew Charles Albert assumed the throne. Charles Albert had liberal tendencies, and the liberals hoped it would only be a matter of time before he would grant a Constitution.

That same year Silvio Pellico finished his ten-year prison term for his participation in revolutionary activities of 1821. He described his prison experiences in a controversial book called *My Prisons*, which became a best seller in all of Europe and catapulted him to fame. In it he tells of his conversion from his former Voltairian ideology to a Christianity reconciled with reason.[48] But Pellico and his book were not well received in the conservative aristocratic Piedmontese society. Among the first to befriend Silvio Pellico was Count Caesar Balbo, and among the first to praise his book was the Marchioness Barolo. She wasted no time in letting the Count know that she would like to be introduced to Silvio Pellico. That same night, the Count came by the palace accompanied by Pellico. The Marchioness received Silvio Pellico in her bedroom, as she had not been feeling well. That was not uncommon for nobility at that time. Her husband and her mother-in-law were present, as was the Cardinal archbishop of Novara and other notables.[49] All were interested in meeting Pellico. Giulia and Tancredi Barolo were impressed with their meeting with Pellico and they became friends. That meant a lot to Silvio Pellico who was not well accepted in conservative mainstream society. At the end of their first visit, when Pellico got up to leave, the Marquis got up, shook his hand and said to him, "I want this visit to be the beginning of an enduring friendship between us."[50] And he meant it. When Tancredi Barolo and his wife went away for the winter of 1833-34 to southern Italy where it was warmer, Silvio Pellico was invited to go with them. He was unable to accompany them on their trip, and the Marchioness wrote him forty-five letters while they were traveling; that is about two letters per week. When Silvio Pellico was offered an enticingly lucrative position in France by the French royal family, Tancredi Barolo countered by offering him a well-paid position as

48. Montonati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo,*. 90.

49. Agasso, *Dentro La Storia: Tancredi, testimone di speranza*, 102-103.

50. Montonati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo*, 90.

the Barolo palace librarian and as their secretary in managing the palace. Pellico accepted the Barolo's offer.

In the summer of 1835, there was a cholera epidemic that devastated Turin as well as other parts of Europe. The Marquis Barolo was mayor of Turin at the time, and he had a votive column with a statue of the Blessed Virgin erected next to the *Consolata*; and both he and his wife Giulia participated personally in the care of the sick in the hospitals, for which heroism the Marchioness was decorated with the Gold Medal by the government, and the Marquis was honored with the *Ordine dei Santi Maurizio and Lazzaro*.

The year 1838 was tragic. The Marquis Barolo had not been feeling well since the beginning of the decade, and he became worse as time went on. Finally, in 1838, he and his wife decided to go to their villa in the Tyrol to change the air. That was always considered a good cure to improve health in those days. They got as far as Verona when Tancredi Barolo developed a high fever, and upon the advice of their doctor, they turned back. They never made it to Turin. After they passed Brescia, he became too weak to speak and died in his wife's arms.

The Marchioness of Barolo returned home with a heavy heart. She must have realized that she was a very desirable, young, beautiful, talented, wealthy widow. She was, in fact, sought after for marriage. This had to be a second defining moment in her life. But even though her husband was no longer with her, she still was on the same trajectory as on that original day on the octave of Easter 1814. She never lost sight of her guiding light: Christ's Love. For twenty-four years she and her husband followed that trajectory hand in hand. She knew what she had to do. She gave her reply to her suitors: her modest, sober austere life style was her answer. That told the story. There was no doubt. She promised her husband that she would carry on what they had begun together. Now she would do it alone. But she wasn't really alone. She had her *figlie*, her daughters, the Magdalenes. More than ever they were a part of her family.

The Marchioness began to dress modestly. She exchanged her red shawl and blue dress for a simple light brown dress. She ate simply. It was customary to give food to the poor and the hungry on the ground floor of the palace every evening. The same food was on her table. She increased the time she spent with Our Lord in prayer: meditation before Mass in the palace chapel, a lengthier thanksgiving after Communion, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament after breakfast, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

before dinner, rosary and night prayers before retiring for the night. In short, her life became lived in constant union with God. Her decision in this second defining moment of her life was clear. She was impelled by Christ's love to give herself to the poor. Silvio Pellico's parents died in the same year. He had been living with and caring for his parents, but when they died he took up residence in the Barolo Palace and assisted the Marchioness in her affairs.

The Marchioness of Barolo continued to have a deep concern for the little girls under 12 years old that were at risk for becoming involved in a degrading life style. Besides coming from an impoverished background, these youngsters were neglected or abandoned by their parents. Perhaps they already were involved in such a lifestyle. In July 1843 she began taking them in, starting with eight little girls. She had housing constructed for them nearby the monastery of the Magdalenes or attached to it. It was sometimes called the *Rifugino* or "Little Refuge." Each of the little girls was assigned to one of the Magdalenes who acted as their mother. These little girls were called *Maddalanine* or "Little Magdalenes." The Little Magdalenes were cared for by the Magdalenes during the day and by the Sisters of St. Joseph during the night.

The Marchioness was also aware of a need in the community among families with disabled children. These children often put a burden on families, especially poor ones, as these children need extra care and attention. The Marquis Barolo had noted this as far back as 1832 and started to make plans for a "Ospedaletto" ("Hospice" or "Center") for disabled children in Moncalieri where he and his wife had a villa. Such a hospice would be able to provide therapeutic physiotherapy under medical supervision, primary education, and rehabilitative care tailored to the needs and capacities of the individual to engage in productive activity and possible eventual gainful employment. The Marquis died before he was able to realize his project, but his wife did not let it fall by the wayside. She promised him that she would continue his work; and she did.

In 1842 she obtained the appropriate government approvals as she always did, and she transferred the project to Turin adjacent to the *Rifugio* and the monastery of the Magdalenes. She called it the "Ospedaletto di Santa Filomena" (the Hospice of Saint Philomena) because she herself had experienced a cure in Naples when praying to the saint. It was limited to the care of girls because it would have been considered scandalous to have boys and girls together in the same hospice, even though they were twelve-year-olds or younger. Giulia had already received criticism for having

little boys and little girls together in her nursery school. The Hospice was approved for sixty beds, and the care of the children was entrusted to the Sisters of St. Joseph, and to lay nurses. She even founded tertiaries of the Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene called the Oblates of Saint Mary Magdalene to work in the Hospice. The Hospice would open in the summer of 1846. It still exists today as a part of the Barolo Foundation (*Opera Pia Barolo*) and it is operated by a charitable group called "Camminare Insieme." – Walking Together.

The Marchioness of Barolo saw that her two religious institutions were thriving and she was determined to obtain Pontifical approbation for each of them. In November of 1845, armed with letters from the Archbishop of Turin, the Apostolic Nuncio, and King Charles Albert, she departed for Rome accompanied by Silvio Pellico and her chaplain. In Rome she met with Cardinals from the appropriate Congregation and she even met with the Pope. She would not be satisfied with a *decretum laudis* (a decree of praise) which could be revoked at a later time. She wanted solemn pontifical approbation with a Papal Brief.[51] For months she presented her case before the Cardinals and the Pope. Her patience and prayers paid off. She returned to Turin with pontifical approval of both of her Congregations.[52]

In the summer of 1844, Don Bosco finished his studies under Fr. Cafasso at the Pastoral Institute. Fr. Joseph Cafasso knew that the Marchioness would need a chaplain for the *Ospedaletto di Santa Filomena*. Although the *Ospedaletto* was still under construction the Marchioness, following Fr. Cafasso's suggestion, gave Don Bosco the position, recognizing in him a dedicated and holy priest with the same zeal for souls that she had. She gave him a room above the entrance to the Refuge next to Fr. Borel's room. Fr. Borel was the chaplain of the Refuge, and Don Bosco served as his assistant while he was awaiting completion of the *Ospedaletto*. This gave Don Bosco the opportunity to continue the work he had begun in forming an Oratory for boys, a work that Fr. Cafasso did not want to see

51. A *decretum laudis* grants recognition of ecclesiastical institution of Pontifical right (subject to the immediate and exclusive authority of the Holy See) to Institutes of Consecrated Life. Apparently in the 18th and 19th centuries this could be temporary and needed to be followed by a Papal Brief to be permanent.

52. Both religious congregations received definitive Pontifical approval at the same time with the signing of the appropriate documents by the Cardinals (March 8, 1846), and by Pope Gregory XVI (April 3, 1846). See Avanzo, *Quando la ricchezza é una beatitudine*, 63.

interrupted. For the next ten years Fr. Borel, along with Fr. Cafasso would help and guide Don Bosco in his work. Don Bosco was inspired by the preventative system employed by the Marchioness in her work with the women and girls from the prisons and the slums. He was also inspired by her devotion to St. Francis of Sales, particularly the saint's gentleness and kindness with which his spirituality is imbued. On the fourth floor of the *Ospedaletto* were several rooms destined to be a priest quarters for a future order of priests that the Marchioness intended to found to serve as chaplains in her institutions. This order was to be named after St. Francis of Sales and there was already a portrait of him at the entrance.[53] The Marchioness gave Don Bosco permission to use two of these rooms for his Oratory while the *Ospedaletto* was under construction. Don Bosco used one of the rooms for a chapel. When he and his boys met there for the first time on December 8, 1844, he put the Oratory under the patronage of the Savoyard and from then on it was known as the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

Don Bosco's health was not good, however. He had developed a pulmonary problem that continued to deteriorate. The Marchioness became aware that Don Bosco's health was worsening when she was in Rome trying to get approval of her religious Congregations. She attributed this deterioration of Don Bosco's pulmonary condition to overwork and wrote a letter to Fr. Borel telling him that Don Bosco must look after his health and should give up the oratory. Don Bosco refused to give up his work with his Oratory, and the Marchioness found no option but to release him from his contract with her. But Don Bosco came away richer from his association with her, and the she probably did too, and it is likely that the rapport of mutual esteem between them never diminished.

The Marchioness had a very innovative and creative mind. She sought the "cutting edge" in all of her works, especially education, and was open to new and better solutions to problems. At times her own palace become her laboratory. It was during 1846-7 that she dedicated a wing of her palace to the formation of "Case-Famiglie" ("Family Homes"). These were groups of twelve to fifteen girls between fourteen to eighteen years old that lived at the palace. They were there to learn a trade while at the same time receiving an intellectual, moral, and religious formation. During the day the girls would go to carefully chosen artisans' shops, selected for their willingness to participate in the program. The girls' "free time" was spent living "at home" in the palace with their "family" of a dozen or more girls.

53. The Marchioness never succeeded in founding the order

Each family had a "Mother" who was a laywoman known for her virtue. There were three such "families" each with its own name: The Family of Mary, the Family of St. Joseph, and the Family of St. Anne.

1848 – Times That Try Men's Souls

When Napoleon's empire came to an end and absolute monarchies were restored, the French Revolution was over. But it was not dead. It wasn't even asleep. Turin had been under French rule for nearly 20 years. There were people born in that system and didn't know anything else. Not everyone was happy to see the return of the absolute monarchy. There were those that wanted a Constitution with a representative form of government. In addition to these vestiges of French revolutionary idealism, there were new problems. People were agitating for social reform to deal with the injustice generated by the industrial revolution and the exploitation of workers.

As these liberal tendencies were growing and asserting themselves ever more urgently, there was developing a crescendoing tension with the ultraconservative superpower of Austria, not only in Italy, but all over Europe. Austria was the protector of absolute monarchies, and defender of the Pope. It maintained order and stability by keeping liberals in check. But there were many movements seeking independence from Austrian political and ideological domination. By the year 1848, Europe was like an abscess ready to burst and release its fetid purulence everywhere.

King Charles Albert was caught between the liberals and the Austrians. If he didn't make concessions to the liberals there was sure to be a revolution. If he made too many concessions to the liberals the Austrians were sure to invade and "restore order." At the end of January 1848, a group made up of ten concerned citizens approached the King privately and insisted that it was urgent that he concede a Constitution. On February 7, he announced his plans for a Constitution to his council. They were to prepare a Constitution that would guarantee respect for the Catholic Faith and honor for the Monarchy.

There was jubilation. A massive celebration was planned and held on February 27th in Piazza Vittorio Veneto, along the River Po. It was the largest square in the city. The King was there and so was the Archbishop. Fifty thousand people on horseback pranced before the King. The Archbishop gave permission for Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament,

but withheld permission for the celebration of Mass or the singing of the *Te Deum*, the traditional hymn of praise for jubilant occasions. The Archbishop's seminarians, against his wishes, took active participation in the ceremonies wearing the patriotic red-white-green bow, a distinctive political symbol of Italian unity that everyone was wearing. It was clear that there was a mixed agenda. This was ostensibly a celebration of the new Constitution, but below the surface it was also a political rally for Italian unity, with its implication of taking the Papal States away from the Pope. The Archbishop responded to the seminarians disobedience by closing down the seminary.[54]

Four days later, rabid anti-clerical demonstrations broke out all over the city. Organized gangs attacked two Jesuit houses and the convent of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. They had to flee the city. The gangs threatened Fr. Guala, the director of the Pastoral Institute, with death. And they attacked the palace of the Marchioness of Barolo, hurtling stones and smashing her windows. They claimed she was protecting the Jesuits. It must have seemed to her as if the French Revolution had burst forth again with all of its anti-religious, and anti-Catholic fury, but this time it was at her doorstep. One can only imagine the thoughts that must have swept through her mind, and the memories that came back to her of her many thousands of countrymen being drowned in the river. How vivid must have been the vision of her grandmother's death by guillotine.

The constitution was supposed to support respect for the Catholic Church. It did not. The newly elected Parliamentarians, driven by the rabidly anti-Catholic Masonic lobby, had an agenda for the secularization of society, which resonated with the dechristianization policies of the radical Jacobean revolutionaries under Robespierre in the Marchioness' days as a child in France. The Parliamentarians began churning out anti-clerical legislation. Ancient privileges of the Church were abolished. The Jesuits were viewed as allies of Austria, opposed to Italian unification, and hence were expelled from the Kingdom, as were other religious orders. After several conflicts with Austria, the King abdicated in favor of his 29-year-old son, Victor Emmanuel II. Charles Albert went into exile in Portugal where he died a few weeks later. The Archbishop also went into exile. Similar events were going on in Rome and even the Pope had to flee.

The anti-Catholic hate campaign unleashed by the Masons was merciless. The Marchioness was one of their targets. They called her "un

54. Bosco, *Don Bosco: una biografia nuova*, 177.

genio malefico," (an evil genius).[55] The Sisters of St. Joseph could see the handwriting on the wall. They left their work in the prison and returned to France. The Marchioness received official notice from the government excluding her from the prison. Rumors were circulated that the she was plotting against the State, and had hired assassins. She received hate mail at her palace threatening her with death.[56] When the Jesuits had been expelled from the country, she let Silvio Pellico's Jesuit-brother stay one night in her palace. That gave rise to rumors that she was hiding Jesuits, and a platoon of the National Guard was sent to do a search of the palace. The Refuge was besieged by hoodlums requiring the intervention of a dozen Carabinieri to restore order. The Marchioness was accused of kidnapping children for her schools and was taken to court; extensive testimony was heard by the judges, all of which exonerated her, and her reputation was cleared. Her detractors perpetrated calumnies and lies. A local scandal sheet published the "announcement" of her "secret" marriage to Silvio Pellico, which created insult and embarrassment and was repudiated in the press. She even discovered that her mail was being read and monitored.

This is the woman who achieved international recognition and respect for her humane reform of the prison system. This is the woman that established a center for girls and women that needed and wanted additional rehabilitation after leaving prison, and for girls and women enmeshed in a life of crime and vice and wanted to reform their lives. This is the woman that built peoples schools for children of working class families. This is the woman that built a hospital for disabled children. This is the woman that dedicated her life to social reform, helping the disadvantaged and emarginated, and now her name was being dragged through the mud. Even her friends were impotent to help her for fear of losing their position in Parliament. The Masons were in charge.

Nobody said this life was going to be easy. Jesus himself says, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."[57] The Marchioness knew that to follow Jesus it was necessary to accept suffering. She did not let the harassment deter her from her charitable and pious works. In 1857, adjacent to the *Ospedaletto* of St. Philomena, she started a new charity, the St. Joseph "Laboratories" or workshops for illiterate girls from ten to eighteen years old. The purpose

55. Montanati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo*, 150.

56. Tago, *Giulia Cobert di Barolo,* 426.

57. Mk 8:34

of these workshops was to better prepare these girls for the workplace by teaching them skills in spinning and sewing, as well as giving them an elementary education and catechesis, so they would have an integrated personal formation. Even until the very end of her life she was starting new charitable works. In 1862, two years before her death, she undertook the construction of the Church and Oratory of St. Julia.

Even death could not stop her outpouring of charitable works done out of love of Christ. According to her will, after her death, the Barolo family Castle in the Langhe was to be converted into a boarding school for disadvantaged boys to give them the preparation they would need to earn a living. Her will also set up a foundation, the *Opera Pia Barolo* which today oversees around a dozen charitable activities, most of which are nestled around the Refuge and the Monastery. Giulia Barolo's love continues today.

Conclusion

The Marchioness Giulia Barolo was a very energetic social reformer of her day. In some respects, she could be compared to Dorothy Day of the twentieth century. Her appearance on the Piedmontese scene was both timely and ahead of her time. The Marchioness was very well read, and when she did something it was "state of the art" or a futuristic, pioneering innovation based on solid data.

But what made the Marchioness Giulia Falletti of Barolo unique? It is true she was a social reformer and was philanthropic. So were other people. She was rich, powerful, and influential. So were other people. She was truly a woman of the world like so many other people, but she was also different. She was at home in the prisons of Turin as much as she was in the salons of Paris. Other people were not. She was a woman of prayer; others were not. She had an intimate relationship with God. Other people did not. Her life only begins to make sense when we see that although she was in this world, she was not of this world. Her world was a life radically rooted in the world of God. Our world ceased to be the real world for her. She lived in God's world, and unless we enter into God's world, we cannot really understand her or her world.

The centrality of God in her life is reflected in the Latin words she chose for her personal sealing wax: *Sursum Corda*. The Marchioness explains these words in a letter that she wrote to the Superior of her order on March 26 1849, "*Sursum corda* means let us lift up our hearts…our thoughts… our feelings…our desires, mind, yearnings, eyes…to heaven…Therefore,

my seal is both a sermon and an ejaculatory prayer." [58] The Marchioness' thoughts, words and actions were always oriented toward heaven, toward God, and toward our common final destiny. She lived in God's world, and she saw our world from that perspective.

Giulia Marchioness of Barolo lived the Christian message in imitation of Mary. After Mary heard the Gospel announced to her by the angel Gabriel,[59] she could not contain the message within her soul, but had to let it burst forth. She went to assist her cousin Elizabeth in her need.[60] Giulia did the same thing; she lived the Christian message by doing what faith commits us to do impelled by the love of Christ[61]. Like Mary, she went to the service of others; she went to help the poor of Turin. Like Mary, her life was a dramatic example of what it means to be a Christian. She shared the Christian message by living it, and she did it extraordinarily well.

The idea of carrying Christ's love to others is central to the Congregation that she founded.[62] Of the several images that we find of Mary Magdalene in Sacred Scripture, the Marchioness chose to develop the one taken from the resurrection narrative of St. John's Gospel. This image is found in the painting above the altar of the chapel in the motherhouse on Via Cigna in Turin. It shows Mary Magdalene at the moment when she recognizes the Risen Lord and addresses him saying, "Rabbouni!"[63] Mary Magdalene then goes and shares what she has learned with the disciples.

Christ's love was reflected in the Marchioness' interrelationships with everyone she encountered. Each person was special. This is evident in her extensive personal correspondence with the nobility, as it was with her

58. Montanati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo*,153.

59. Lk 1:31-35; cf. Rm 1:3-4

60. Lk 1:39-40

61. Gal 5:6

62. The Penitent Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene were cloistered. This image of Mary Magdalene with the Risen Lord giving her an apostolate, may seem a little strange for a cloistered congregation. But it might have been somewhat futuristic on the part of the Marchioness. She was always *avant-garde*. It wasn't until the nineteenth century that congregations of women were beginning to engage in apostolic work. In 1898 the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars began moving in that direction. For the Penitent Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene, this change began in Piacenza in 1914 when, under the local bishop's guidance, they began to engage in apostolic work, and changed their name to "The Daughters of Jesus the Good Shepherd." Today, the entire congregation goes by that name.

63. Jn 20:16

charity to the poor. She couldn't do enough for people. The aristocracy sought her friendship and advice. These included even Cavour, who supported the secularization of society. The poor came to her house daily where two hundred meals a day were dispensed and leftovers were taken to the ill in their homes.[64] On Sundays, meat was also served and wood distributed. On Mondays, twelve of the poor sat with her at her table. The poor also came for medicine and bandages, and at times the Marchioness herself would dress their wounds. No one was turned away. She could see Christ in the suffering of the poor. She had unconditional love for everyone. She shared our common humanity.

In 1876, ten years after completion of the Church of St. Julia, the foundation that she created, *Opera Pia Barolo*, requested permission to transfer the Marchioness' body from the Monumental Cemetery where she was buried to the Church of St. Julia. The request was blocked by Masonic opposition. This was a time when the anti-Catholic Masonic lobby was supporting anti-clerical legislation and suppression of religious orders. They weren't interested in glorifying founders of religious orders. The request was submitted again the following year in 1877, and again in 1879. Each time the response on the part of the government was the same; they said that the Marchioness did not do enough to merit that kind of recognition.[65] In the meantime there was growing public dissatisfaction with the government's refusal to grant permission. The Marchioness had touched the lives of so many people that more and more people were engaging her in intercessory prayer and had even begun to call her "saint." When the *Opera Pia Barolo* again requested permission to transfer the body, the government acquiesced, as they were apprehensive about negative repercussions from the public. The Turin daily newspaper, *La Stampa*, described the funeral procession for the transfer of the body as "interminable" and that there was massive participation in the ceremonies. In his homily, the Archbishop commented that it was remarkable that such a crowd would still gather thirty years after her death. Her cause for canonization has been introduced and Pope Francis has advanced her cause. In 2015 he declared her Venerable.

The Marchioness Giulia Falletti of Barolo was indeed unique: hers was a soul impelled by Christ's Love.

64. Montanati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo*, 111-112.

65. Montanati, *Giulia Colbert Di Barolo*, 203.