



Peter Casani, “poor”

*A radical option
for education*

Antonio María Perrone

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After the death of Fr. Casani, St. Joseph of Calasanz ordered that all the testimonies about his exemplary Christian life be collected, but the Cause of his Canonization was not begun until 1905.

On January 22, 1991, Pope John Paul II declared that his theological and cardinal virtues had been heroic, naming him “Venerable.”

On 15 of December of 1994, once the Vatican concluded all the necessary studies, Pope John Paul II declared, before the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints that *“there is evidence of the miracle performed by God, through the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God Peter Casani of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, professed Priest of the Order of Clerics Regular Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools (Piarist Fathers); the perfect and permanent healing of Helena Szoës (of the bubonic plague with serious neurological syndrome)”*, which happened in Hungary, in October of 1738.

On October 1, 1995, in St. Peter’s Square in the Vatican, he was proclaimed “Blessed” by John Paul II, along with 13 other Piarists and many other Christians; all the others were martyrs of the French Revolution or of the religious persecution unleashed in Spain in 1936. October 16 was chosen as the liturgical date for his memory.

I believe in the Communion of Saints!

I like the subject. I like it and I get passionate about it. *To like*, here, is as “to savor”, “to taste”. This is a subject - I say it with simplicity - I have lived. So it enters fully into the *creed* that, thanks God, gives, and has given meaning to my life.

You can easily frame it. It fits in the epigraph: *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, and in the great work of the Spirit that is the Church and, as the Body of Christ, the People of God and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Precisely it is the part of the creed where the dogma becomes spirituality.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “What is the Church, but the assembly of all the saints?” (Nicetas, symb. 10). “The communion of saints is precisely the Church” (n. 946). And it continues: “As all believers form a single body, the good of some is communicated to others ... It is therefore necessary to believe that there is a communion of goods in the Church”. And even more: “As this Church is governed by one and the same Spirit, all the goods that it has are received necessarily from a common fund”. The expression “communion of saints” then has two closely related meanings: *communion with holy things and communion between holy people*.

Holiness is one of the words that gives me more and more respect. And my spirit is barefoot before the holy, holy, holy God. And I understand better and better that so deeply Calasanzian quality of the “holy fear of God.” It is a fear that does not frighten me; rather it opens the bottomless well of the mystery of God who really is the Other.

The communion of saints; this too, further than a canonical thing, maybe. These are the games of the Spirit.

It is so simple: *God, creator of heaven and earth, of everything visible and invisible*. Of all the invisible. And that's so much! ... a geography to explore, which is only glimpsed trembling, with a surprise and with astonishment. A world worldlier than usual, much more exciting and tempting than the orography or the volume of things governed by three dimensions...

It is not a profession - this of mine - "anti-enlightenment", my God! It is the perception, the unshakable demand of "there is more", or the Ortega's saying "it is not that, it is not that". Being so easy to agree that everything has its mystery; let's not even mention the people. *God is everything in everyone*. By saying this alone, everything is said.

Well, yes, a communion of spiritual goods, a communion of the saints, of the blessed, of the venerable, of the servants of God and of all the common people that we are. There is a kinship that goes beyond flesh and blood; so true, so intimate, so effective and moving that we could sustain our entire Christian life just by squeezing out such joyous wonder.

Let's paddle down the flow of the waters a little bit.

It is time for the "Magnificat", for the Lord did in all of us such and so great wonders (Luke 1:46ff). In the kingdom of the Spirit, the skin is never a border, but a relationship, closeness. I would like to symbolize it. The organizing commission of the Universal Year of the Family in 1994 said: *a heart within a heart*. Something foresees, by his own experience lived in the own family, the one who had the joy of testing in his own family that all paternity comes from God, which is made to His image and similarity...

We are children, brothers of communion, in permanent transfer, divine communicating vessels. Thus - through Christ, with Him and in Him and in all His saints - we go *from grace to grace and from glory to glory*.

Saint Paul enigmatically said: "Our conversation is in heaven". And he called us "domestici fidei", pointing out that faith made us partners in the same home, where everything is common. (Acts. 4, 32).

"Everything that the true Christian possesses must be considered as a common good with others ... The smallest of our acts done with charity affects the benefit of all, in this solidarity between all men, living or dead, which is founded on the communion of saints" (Cat. Eccles. n. 953).

Blessed communion of saints, which populates our divine living encounters; and neither the flapping of angels is strange to us, nor the fact that Saint Teresa of the Infant Jesus spends her life from heaven leaning out and throwing us roses, saying, "I shall spend my heaven doing good on earth..."

"The union of the members of the Pilgrim Church with the brothers who slept in the peace of Christ is in no way interrupted. Even more, according to the constant faith of the Church, it is reinforced with the communication of spiritual goods" (L.G. 49). "Because those in heaven are so intimately united with Christ, they consolidate the whole Church more firmly in holiness ... they do not cease to intercede for us before the Father" (L.G. 49).

And I conclude: "We do not venerate the memory of those in heaven only as our models, but, above all, so that the union of the whole Church in the Spirit may be reinforced by the practice of brotherly love. Indeed, just as the union among Christians -still on the way- brings us closer to Christ, so the communion with the saints unites us to Christ, from whom flows, as from a Source and Head, all the grace and life of the People of God" (L.G. 50).

Oh, intimate brother Peter Casani, I feel you, I savor you very close, a Piarist heritage, a splendid income of our peculiar communion of saints! Waiting to be divinely "nickname you" as blessed, you already are from now on and forever in the very heart of the Pious Schools. Pray for us!

Rome, June 25, 1995
Fr. Josep María Balcells, Father General

The Saints are relevant today

(introduction)

From 1647, the year of the death of Blessed Peter Casani, until 1995, the year of solemn and definitive recognition of his holiness by the Church proclaiming him Blessed, almost three and a half centuries have passed. To be exact, 348 years. That is enough and too much to consider outdated and hardly interesting for our time and our society, with all its problems and tensions, the figure of a man who lived in totally different social, cultural, and ecclesial situations.

Peter Casani was born in Lucca, Italy, on September 8, 1572 and died in Rome on October 17, 1647. Society and the socio-political and religious problems of the period between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are realities widely surpassed by the unstoppable evolution of history. They may be the subject of very dignified studies, of deepening and often of admiration also for the extraordinary objectives achieved by man in important fields of his history; but they cannot offer indications to the men of the 2000, to their interests, to their aspirations, to solve their problems, and to improve the current living conditions.

All this is true if we refer to the material and economic aspects of society, or to the organized structures of social life, with which man tries to regulate his own existence strictly linked to the contingent availability of material resources; but it cannot be applied to those profoundly human realities, referred to the values of the spirit, which presence and development are not linked to the inexorable law of time.

Referring specifically to Christian values -the spiritual message of the Gospel- which for two millennia has been *the salt and light of the world*, we can say that the relevance of the human experience leavened by them is directly proportionated to the intensity of their presence in the heart of man. In this sense, the *saints* – not only those who are canonized – are more updated as more radically have they accepted and lived during their earthly presence the words of the Gospel. They participate, in certain way, of that perennial vitality of the spirit who expressed Jesus with this clearly affirmation: *The heavens and the Earth shall pass, but my words shall not pass* (Mt. 25, 35). Certainly, it will be necessary to do, also with regard to them, that work of dispossession of everything outdated and contingent - modalities of language and of behaviour strictly linked to changeable culture of time - to keep the genuine testimony of those values that we deem deeply necessary, even due to the demands of our time.

In this perspective we approach Peter Casani today, on the occasion of his Beatification, highlighting the main events of his life, the ideals that moved him to definitive choices and guided him in his religious and priestly dedication, even in difficult situations, to the summit of holiness.

Peter Casani

At the end of his life (Rome, October 17, 1647), Peter Casani had matured some unique experiences in different situations. It started from a serene childhood, firmly oriented toward goodness and virtue under the guidance and example of his parents. Then, it had pushed him to embrace a religious life, to consecrate himself totally to God and to souls in the young Lucca Congregation of the Blessed Virgin. And finally, better defining his religious option, to become a tireless collaborator of Saint Joseph Calasanz in the foundation, spreading and consolidation of the Pious Schools.

Therefore, there are three very precise periods clearly identifiable in his life. For Casani, the deep desire to discover God's will for himself was constant; today we would say God's project on his person. The same as to put it into practice in the various situations offered to him by Divine Providence, always ready to sacrifice, to detach himself from things and join God with the practice of heroic virtues. These periods are: His *first youth* in the family environment (1572-1594); his *religious life in the Lucca Congregation* (1594-1617); his *religious life in the Pius Schools* (1617-1647).

Familiar atmosphere

(1572-1594)

Lucca, the Tuscany city that is zealous of its laborious autonomy, manifested and guaranteed by the solid walls that surround it on all sides (they are still its pride and symbol today), was the city of his childhood and youth. Peter was the only son of the spouses *Caspar Casani and Elisabeth Drago*, both belonging to well-off families of the old nobility. The same day of his birth, September 8, 1572, he received the baptism in the church of Saints John and Reparata. Together with the Convent of Saint Francis of Friars Minor and the parish of Santa Maria de Corteorlandini, were particularly loved by Casani, as a point of reference in his life as a boy and as a young man.

His life was spent, in fact, in total serenity, under the careful surveillance of his parents (the father is remembered, in particular, by his “*terrible personality*”, an uncompromising severity of his Christian life) between studying, frequent attendance at sacred functions, especially in the parish, and domestic devotions. The biographers of Casani state that there was nothing particular in these youthful years, except for his innate goodness of mind, the simplicity and moderation of his life, the remarkable sensitivity towards the poor and needy, the awakened intelligence that he widely manifested in his studies, even in music, following the custom of the wealthy families of the time. In short, a good boy without problems, who was preparing himself responsibly for a dignified life according to good family traditions.

But in the depths of his conscience, something matured. He finished his higher studies of philosophy and theology at the Convent of Saint Francis, brilliantly concluded when he was 20 years old, around 1592. Then, something made him see other paths and moved him, in April of 1594, to make a firm and irrevocable decision that would turn his life upside down, totally unforeseen even for the people he assiduously dealt with.

In 1591 he had lost his 50-year-old mother, confirming with a profound vision of faith “her most sweet death,” as he himself wrote. The father, totally upright in his personal life and in the administration of family assets, had lost his sight as a result of a serious illness. He was closer to his son with laborious silence more than with oral advice. His discreet but esteemed confidants were friends from the Convent of Saint Francis and from the parish of Santa Maria de Cor-teorlandini. His presence in society was increasingly rare, in the environments frequented by young people of his age, especially after a heavy joke of some friends. They put him in a situation of being alone with a graceful and suggestive girl in a room of a friend’s family palace, on the occasion of trying a musical instrument manufactured by himself. He leapt out of the window to escape the obvious temptation against chastity, which he considered a treasure, and it can be considered, in a way, as the prelude to another more dangerous leap, which he was going to take shortly, decisively choosing a *religious life and the priesthood*.

In the Lucca Congregation

(1594-1617)

April of 1594 - almost 22 years old: - “It pleased God in this year to move the spirit of a young man who since childhood was educated with us because he was from our parish, the son of good Caspar, called the blind man ... and since his vocation was considered miraculous, above all having a father with a terrible temperament, our Fathers did not believe that the rigor of the customary six-month test was necessary, and they gave him the habit the Monday after the Sunday of Freedom. He then gave excellent results, persuading even many to aim for a religious life to the point that his own father, although blind, decided to become one of us”. This is how Father César Franciotti, one of the first companions of Saint John Leonardi, speaks of Peter Casani in his “Chronicles”.

In the aforementioned quotation we find interesting elements that highlight the exceptional character of this vocation: “He was educated with us ... his vocation was considered miraculous ... they gave him the habit without the rigor of the usual six-month trial ... then he gave optimal results ... persuading many to aim for a religious life ... his very father, though blind, decided to become one of us”.

It may be interesting to go through this second period in the life of Peter Casani (1594-1617), starting precisely from these expressions of Fr. Franciotti, which still preserve all the freshness of the living chronicle today.

“He was educated by our brothers for being part of the parish”. The parish to which the Casani family belonged was the aforemen-

tioned Santa Maria de Corteorlandini, entrusted from 1580 to the “Priests of the Blessed Virgin”, as the Congregation founded in Lucca (known for that as “Lucca Congregation”) in 1574 by Saint John Leonardi, which later in 1621 became the “Order of the Clerics Regular of the Mother of God.” This parish- as we have mentioned before- was, along with the familiar atmosphere, the first School of spiritual formation of the boy and youngster Peter Casani. In his familiarity with the religious of the Blessed Virgin, he found sure guidance for his spiritual formation and direction for a decisive choice of his life.

The assiduous commitment to religious perfection and the pastoral apostolate for the salvation of souls, which were the fundamental characteristics of the young Lucca Congregation, were also Casani’s ideal since April of 1594. He had prepared himself slowly, with great discretion, almost without realizing it and certainly without any particular external manifestations, so that when, upon finishing his university studies, he asked to enter the novitiate, his decision was considered a “miraculous vocation”. But, although unexpected, that decision was welcomed and duly appreciated, and the preparation of the young Casani (“educated by our brothers”) was considered fully sufficient, to the point of dispensing him from the “rigor of the customary six-month test”, required by the Rule of the Institute. Admitted to the religious habit on April 16 of the same year 1594, he made the novitiate under the direction of Fr. John Baptist Cioni, one of the first companions of the Founder and distinguished master of spirit, whose influence, more than just encouragement was a brake on the generous impetus of the young Casani.

With this, a new period of his life was opened, on which Fr. Franciotti highlighted three aspects which we consider particularly significant, however, their rigorous brevity: *(a) had optimum results; b) persuaded many to aim for a religious life; c) even his elderly father, blind, followed him into the same Congregation.*

His father, Caspar Casani, wore the religious habit in August 1610, took his vows on Epiphany Day of 1613 as a lay brother, and died as a good religious ten years later, in 1623. This singular family “conquest” suggests a sublimation of filial piety, capable of drawing loved ones into their own experience of faith. The fascination

of a religious life, which emerged from the words and example of Casani, was an irresistible attraction for many young people. It was certain during the first years of his priestly apostolate in the Lucca Congregation, and also, when the Lord assigned him another field of work in the Pious Schools.

From now on we must underline this gift that God granted to Peter Casani, of "persuading many to a religious life", because, as we will see later, it constituted one of the most characteristic features of his personality and of his apostolate; an authentic charism that he knew how to faithfully use through his life. The total dedication to religious consecration, which he conceived and put into action as a radical adherence to Christ with a consequent and rigorous separation from the world, appeared as a lofty ideal to follow, especially because it was accompanied by a coherent testimony of life. He proposed it to young people as guidance in the period of formation and as a definitive life option. Hence his preference for the apostolate among young people, for whom he instituted in Lucca, in 1604, a certain form of Marian congregation called the *Congregation of Our Lady of the Snows*. From there numerous religious vocations emerged, and he subsequently dedicated his best energies to it as master of novices and professor of philosophy and theology of young clerics. With this particular ability to communicate with boys and young people, which a witness (Fr. Balthasar Guinigi), personally won by him, called "an admirable talent to attract young people", we can relate without forcing terms the definitive option for education that he would do later when he got in touch with the exceptional educational experience of Joseph Calasanz in the triennium 1614-1617, in Rome.

But let us return to Lucca, where at the end of 1595, while the novitiate period was continuing with great benefits, he had the opportunity to approach the Founder, Fr John Leonardi, in a direct and personal way. He had come back from Rome, where he had been forced to reside for more than five years in a kind of exile for political-religious reasons, which prevented him from returning to his homeland. Fr Leonardi sensed the exceptional gifts of the young Casani and his enthusiasm for religious life and upon returning to Rome the following March, he brought him along. The pretext was to improve his state of health, but in reality he did so to be able to make certain ex-

periences for the good of the congregation itself. The occasion arose almost immediately, when Fr Leonardi received the commission to “visit” the Congregation of Monte Vergine, in the Kingdom of Naples, from Pope Clement VIII after the successful conclusion of the preceding “visit” by him to the “Madonna dell ‘Arco”, in the same territory of the Kingdom of Naples at the end of 1592.

It was a delicate and difficult mission for which Fr Leonardi was accompanied by Casani as his secretary and notary. This first experience at the side of the Founder, who as Visitor and Reformer was going to put order in a religious Congregation thrown adrift by serious lack of regular observance. It had to be exceptionally useful for our Casani, making him appreciate that he had not yet made his religious vows, the advantages of a severe rule of life, which he developed more and more for himself and for the Congregation.

A second experience of the same kind, always at Leonardi’s side during the apostolic visit to the monks of Vallombrosa in 1601, when he was already a professed priest, confirmed him in the same conviction, which later guided him in the rest of his life, both to personal level as in the effort to contribute to setting norms and rules for the life of the Congregation. These uncommon experiences were probably the base of his future choices and a project of religious life, entitled *Pussilli Gregis Idea*, which he elaborated later, when discussing the difficult question of union between the Lucca Congregation and that of the Pius Schools. Fr Guinigi later wrote of him: “He always had thoughts of greater narrowness of state ...and aspired towards a more rigorous life ..., he was always looking for a more perfect state ... and stricter poverty”.

But in this period there are other important events in the life of Peter Casani: his religious profession, made in Lucca in the autumn of 1597(he had just returned from Naples, where he had received the tonsure and the first Minor Orders at the intervals of the Visit to Monte Vergine); the Visit to that Congregation, carried out by Founder Leonardi and he as secretary, between the end of 1597 and the first months of 1598; and his departure to Rome, called by Leonardi to study Thomist theology at the Roman College of the Jesuits with a view to his priestly ordination. He received it on September 23 of the Holy Year 1600 in the Basilica of St John Lateran. The concise data we have on this event in his life (solemn celebration pre-

sided over by the Vice-Regent of Rome, Mons. Leonardo Abel and numerous clergymen from various congregations) do not authorize us to add arbitrary reflections. Peter Casani was a young religious, just 23 years old, and a priest with an immense desire to exercise his apostolate wherever the Superiors would send him. This we can affirm with all simplicity.

Until 1614 Lucca and Rome were the places of his religious and priestly work, with sporadic presences in other cities with special missions. His activity was developed in two precise directions: towards the inside of the Congregation for its institutional consolidation (Rules, Constitutions, General Congregations, Diets, teaching to student clerics, various government responsibilities ...) and to the outside, in the pastoral care of souls (preaching, confessions, spiritual assistance especially to young people, for whom, as already we have mentioned, he instituted the Congregation of Our Lady of the Snows in Lucca).

The death of the Founder John Leonardi, happened in Rome in reputation of sanctity on October 9, 1609, must have caused a great pain to our Casani, who had been so close to him, in a deep spiritual tune. But his priestly-religious fervour did not diminish. The singular "Mission of Sospello", a town of Saboya, in which Casani participated in May of 1613 next to the new General Superior of the Congregation, Fr Alexander Bernardini, with the perspective of a probable foundation in that place, constituted a significant example of his apostolic fervor, which Bernardini himself described with meticulous details.

We have mentioned above, "until 1614". That year brings an important turn in the life of Peter Casani. A new experience opened up for him, and not only for him. In God's plan, he was called to share his life with another apostle who for more than 15 years had started a new "social and religious revolution" in Rome in order to free poor children from the ignorance and the dangers of the street, offering them "instruction and education in piety and letters". And this one was Joseph Calasanz. We have already mentioned him in previous pages, but this was the historical moment, or better, the providential circumstance that got Casani into the orbit - we would say today - of Calasanz. It is also the occasion to briefly sketch his figure and his work.

In two words: The Pious Schools, which for a few years had offered the poor children of Rome a real school and educational environment - totally free - had moved in 1612 to the Palazzo Torres, adjacent to the church of Saint Pantaleo, one step away from Piazza Navona. Joseph Calasanz, a Spanish priest, opened the school 15 years earlier in the Trastevere parish of Santa Dorotea (Ludwig von Pastor would later write in his monumental *History of the Popes, as "the first public, popular, free school in Europe"*). Then he decides to strengthen the group of generous people who share the difficult educational work with him; and he organises the small "Secular Congregation of the Pious Schools". He addresses the topic with Cardinal Benito Giustiniani, (old friend and confidant of John Leonardi), and decides to request the collaboration of the Lucca religious of Santa Maria in Portico, after having informally spoken with Fr Bernardini, General Superior. Cardinal Giustiniani himself acted as an intermediary. The idea is favorably received and communicated to Pope Paul V, who promulgates a Brief, committing the Lucca Congregation (which from this moment is called "Congregation of the Mother of God") to take charge of the Pious Schools. The Pope names Calasanz as Prefect of the schools as long as he lives.

In January of 1614, the reinforcement of the Lucca religious enter Saint Pantaleo. The first among all is Peter Casani, who expresses his great satisfaction for the new apostolate, inviting his father to pray to God so that "he will give me spirit and light to carry out his will in everything that the Superiors deign to entrust to me" (Letter to his father, dated 01.25.1614). In fact, a new stage was opened in his life, in which he would give himself totally to a "very high and above all, very useful work not only in Rome, but all over the world". In this work, he continues writing in the same letter to his father, "all poor children in Rome are taught without any reward not only grammar, but also how to write and do accounts and to live in a Christian way, exhorting them frequently, for confessing and receiving communion and teaching them the Christian doctrine". A work, in short, from which "the reform of the Church would emerge".

Since then, all physical and spiritual energies of Casani were used to labour in this work of Calasanz, to enhance it. First as Rector of Saint Pantaleo in the three-year period of this original experience of union between the Lucca Congregation and the Pious Schools

(1614- 1617). Then remaining definitively at Calasanz' side as his main collaborator, when the experiment of union comes to an end, due to the many difficulties that made its continuation impossible.

Meanwhile, it is interesting to highlight the intense activity developed by Casani during this triennium. With the management of the schools left in the hands of Calasanz, Casani, as Rector of the community made up of 20 members of the two Congregations, had to worry about the community organization and administration, assigning tasks to each of the religious, entrusting to the Fathers of the Lucca the pastoral work of the students and the exercise of the sacred ministry in the church. He himself had an important part in the preparation of religious practices and in the administration of the sacraments to the students who, according to what Father Bernardini noted in his "Chronicles", had gone from 800 to 1,200. Casani's initiative was the institution of the Forty Hours and other practices of piety in the church of San Pantaleo. But after the first enthusiasm, the first difficulties of a community life and of apostolic work also arose, while trying to obtain from the Pope the elevation to Religious Order.

The brevity of these pages does not allow us to follow the incidents of this singular experience of union. The truth is that, towards the end of 1616, especially due to the attitude of the Lucca religious, who considered the almost complete abandonment of the pastoral apostolate in churches and parishes contrary to their institutional charism, the separation of both institutions was requested. And it was sanctioned by Paul V with the Brief *Ad ea per quae* of March 6, 1617. It constituted the birth certificate of the *Pauline Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools*, dedicated completely to the instruction and education of children, according to the original purpose of Calasanz.

Peter Casani felt particularly attracted by the novelty of the educational apostolate of Calasanz and when the separation occurred, he opted for the Pious Schools, followed by a small group of fellow Lucca brothers, who in those difficult moments were a precious help for the Calasanzian work.

Casani's option for the Pious Schools was strengthened by another aspect that he saw in the experience and living testimony of Cala-

sanz and that found full resonance in his ideals of consecrated life: a rigorous religious poverty. Calasanz had opened his Pious Schools for the children of Rome, especially the poor and in the first years a “certificate of poverty”, signed by the parish priest, was required for admission. He maintained that dedication to the poor demanded a coherent witness of poverty in the teachers, which he wanted to be disposed to an effective practice of evangelical poverty.

It was precisely this aspect, together with the dedication to the apostolate of education, which definitively differentiated from there on the two religious congregations. Both were recognized in 1617, almost at the same time, with two pontifical briefs. “Regular Clerics of the Mother of God”, that of John Leonardi, and the “Pauline Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools”, that of Joseph Calasanz. The first, dedicated, according to Leonardi’s charism, to the priestly apostolate with a renewed pastoral impulse for the salvation of souls through the preaching and administration of sacraments in churches and parishes; and the second, according to the charism of Calasanz, which was becoming more and more clearly invigorated, dedicated to the Christian education of children, especially the poor, through instruction in schools, in a demanding life of evangelical poverty, which did not even disdained the possibility of begging.

Both, through different ways and modalities, would contribute, as they continue to do today, to the evangelization and diffusion of the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men, and to the reformation of society.

In the Pious Schools

(1617-1647)

Thirty years at the service of an ideal: this is how this last and long period of Peter Casani's life could be defined. We will try to learn more about his spirituality as it was manifested through events that led him to occupy positions of responsibility in diverse situations and places. But more than with these events, which are cited here successively, we will try to outline the marked features of his profound spirituality with the testimonies of his contemporaries and with those of his own voice, insofar as it is possible to collect them from his letters and others writings.

Chronology of the main events in his piarist life

- 1617 Perhaps in this year he wrote the *Pussilli Gregis Idea*.
On March 6, Paul V instituted the Pauline Congregation of the Pious Schools with the brief *Ad ea per quae*.
Casani decides to be part of the Pious Schools.
On March 15, he renounces his assets in favor of the poor and the Congregation of the Mother of God.
On March 25, he received the Piarist habit and took the name of Peter of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
On July 17, he was appointed Master of Novices and moved to the house of San Onofrio al Gianicolo.
- 1618 The novitiate moved next to the church of Santa Maria in Via, where Glicerio Landriani died in reputation of sanctity on February 15, assisted by Fr. Casani.
In October he went to Narni, as Rector, to found a house.

- 1620 Called to Rome, he returned to the novitiate, transferred again to San Onofrio al Gianicolo.
- 1621 On November 18, Gregory XV, with the Brief *In supremo apostolatus*, elevated the Pious Schools to Order of solemn vows.
- 1622 On January 31, the Constitutions of the Pious Schools are approved.
 On April 20, Fr. Casani, along with Calasanz and three other religious, made their solemn vows in the hands of the dying Cardinal Michelangelo Tonti.
 On April 30, Gregory XV appointed Calasanz as the Superior General of the Order and Fr Casani as first General Assistant.
 On May 7, Fr Casani, together with Calasanz and the other three Assistants, renewed their solemn vows in the hands of Mons. Peter Llobard in the oratory of the novitiate in San Onofrio al Gianicolo.
 In September Casani was sent to Savona to found a house.
- 1623 On July 10, he was appointed Provincial Superior of the Province of Genoa.
 In October, in Carcare, Casani presided over the first Provincial Chapter of the Order.
- 1624 In February, Casani is transferred to Genoa for the novitiate in Oregina.
- 1625 He was called to Rome by Calasanz who entrusts him with the novitiate again, located in Quattro Fontane.
- 1626 He had been in Messina since May, sent by Calasanz as Superior of the community, envisioning a new foundation.
- 1627 On April 14, he arrived in Naples, summoned by Calasanz, who entrusted him with the government of the house in the Duchesca and appointed him Provincial of the Province of Naples.
 In October he was part of the first General Congregation of the Order in Rome.
- 1631 In October he attended the General Chapter, convened in Rome.
- 1632 The 21-1-1632, Urban VIII with the Brief *Inscrutabili* appoints Calasanz as General for life and Casani General Assistant for life, in charge of the Province of Naples.

He was Master of Novices again and resided in the house in Quattro Fontane.

- 1634 By order of Calasanz, Casani visited the houses of Genoa.
- 1637 In August he completed a mission in Fanano territory and in San Pellegrino in Alpe.
In October he took part in the General Chapter in Rome.
- 1638 On April 10, he was appointed General Commissioner for Germany. On May 12, he arrived in Nikolsburg (Moravia).
- 1641 He returned to Rome, arriving on March 21, to attend the General Chapter.
- 1642 On August 8, he was arrested and taken to the Holy Office, along with Calasanz, two Assistants, the Procurator and the Secretary General.
On December 30, Fr Mario Sozzi was appointed Vicar General of the Order.
- 1643 On January 15, Calasanz was suspended from his post as General and the four Assistants, Casani among them, were deposed. The Apostolic Visit is imposed to the Order.
On March 6, the Somascan Fr Augustine Ubaldini was appointed Apostolic Visitor of the Pious Schools.
On May 9, the Jesuit Fr Sylvester Pietrasanta was appointed Apostolic Visitor, replacing Fr Augustine Ubaldini.
On November 11, Fr Stephen Cherubini was appointed Vicar General of the Order.
- 1646 On March 16, with the Brief *Ea quae pro felici*, Innocent X reduces the Order of the Pious Schools to a secular Congregation without vows depending on the Bishops.
- 1647 In September Fr Casani is seriously ill in the house of Saint Pantaleo.
On the afternoon of October 17, assisted by Calasanz and the other religious, Father Casani died, comforted by the last Sacraments, in the house of Saint Pantaleo.
On October 18, his body was transferred to the church.
On October 20, he is buried on the ground, in the presbytery of the church of San Pantaleo.

From this chronological synthesis it is easy to deduce the intense activity of Fr. Casani in this period, who was fully dedicated to the consolidation and spreading of the Pious Schools in close collaboration with the Founder Saint Joseph Calasanz.

Rome, Genoa, Naples, Moravia, are the places most related to his activity; but Narni, Frascati, Carcare, Savona, Fanano, Messina and other localities also saw him as a tireless promoter of the Calasanzian work and a vigilant custodian of regular observance. His gifts of mind and heart were totally dedicated to this purpose, and he also developed a deep inner richness, which led him to the summit of holiness through the often painful but always extraordinary exercise of the highest Christian virtues.

Main aspects of his personality

We are now going to collect the essential elements we have, referring to some particular aspects, enriched by Casani's own words, which are the most appropriate to make us understand his soul and his spirituality. Obviously, we must avoid forcing everything that could lead us to design a "perfect" figure, far from historical authenticity. True Christian holiness, in fact, does not need such extremisms, since it is not based precisely on the absence of human defects, but on the intensity of God's love that permeates the heart of men and impels them to work for the greater glory of God and the utility of others.

Total consecration to God in his religious life

It is the aspect that most stands out in the life of Peter Casani. It constituted, can be said, the essence of his holiness, the dominant motive for his thoughts and actions from the beginning of his choice of a religious life, developed in the secret of his young heart. "His vocation - as we have mentioned it before with the words of Fr Franciotti- was considered miraculous" because of its improvised manifestation in a young man with brilliant human perspectives and gifted with an uncommon intelligence. It constituted a radical option, which with the passing of the years intensified more and more, marking his whole life and guiding all his successive options.

Certainly, the experience lived with Fr. Leonardi in the apostolic visits to the Monasteries of Montevergine (1596) and Vallombrosa

(1601) gave him the opportunity to deepen the different aspects of religious life and to make him appreciate more the need for a strong coherence between the rejection of the world, of things, of people, and the new reality of a religious life when it is embraced.

He was deeply convinced that the abandonment of things for the love of God should correspond to the strictest poverty in a religious life, without remorse for what had been left, without any hidden nostalgic moments. He did not conceive the half measures regarding things, considering them useful for the same cause of a religious life. Let us hear his voice: "I do not want to stop recommending Y.R., as I have done in other writings, in the midst of so much abundance and alms competition, our extremely precious poverty, envied by the infernal spirits that in other times have stimulated men, as you know, to give great alms to the religious to take this rich treasure from their hands" (22-2-1635).

As we have already said, this deep conviction was at the base of his decision to move from the Lucca Congregation to the Pious Schools at the conclusion of the experiment of union of the 1614-1617 triennium. This is what Fr Carloantonio Erra, historian of the said Congregation, expressly intuited, stating: "Father Casani did not leave due to any displeasure, but because of the desire to live with that extreme poverty and austerity that was introduced from the beginning in the Pious Schools". Therefore, he had to enjoy very much with Calasanz and his first companions when in the Brief of the foundation of Paul V, *Ad ea per quae* (3-6-1617), "supreme poverty" was recognized as a distinctive note of the new Congregation: "The Pauline Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools", whose "vow of poverty - he said - introduces into them supreme poverty, both in particular and in general". He wanted to change his own last name with the adjective "poor", always signing his letters like this: "Peter Poor". "Poor" was also the name he wanted to give to the Religious in his mentioned draft of the Constitutions "Pussilli Gregis Idea".

But it was not just a matter of names. His poverty was indeed radical, as his contemporaries noted, and thus he also recommended it to his religious brothers: "May the most ardent charity of Jesus Christ, our Savior, make Y.R. more and more in love with holy, Supreme, Evangelical Poverty" (6-20-1919). And in the ordinary priva-

tions of a religious life he saw God's will "that wanted we exercise ourselves through Holy Poverty".

In addition to the renunciation of things, religious consecration - which Casani knew well - entails the separation from people and from one's own body with the consequent vow of chastity, which he observed with integrity and with the rigor of his own customs.

Some unpleasant situations that he had to face in the fulfilment of his duties as Superior due to serious faults by a religious brother in this delicate matter, confirmed him in this rigid asceticism, so more necessary as more is one exposed to danger. "Do not forget, dear brother- he recommended in a letter dated 3-23-1624, the continuous care of your senses, on which your perseverance depends". And if he was always sympathetic to human weaknesses, he was categorical with those responsible for "violating Chastity and Poverty". Only in these cases did he grant Superiors in his "Pussilli Gregis Idea" the power to impose penalties on the guilty "not excluding the expulsion from the Religion."

To complete these synthetic data that defines his radical religious consecration, here are his words about absolute and unconditional obedience: "I am and want to be - as I have always seemed to be - in the hands of my Superiors. And I have fully referred to Fr Rector, not only what I do, but also my thoughts", he wrote in a letter dated 5-14-1611, when he was still in the Lucca Congregation. He later confirmed this strong attitude in the Pious Schools with expressions like these, frequent in his letters to Calasanz: "I am a subject, servant and son of Your Paternity" (5-3-1631); "I am prepared for the insinuations of Y.P." (1-29-1633); "My return is in the hands of Y.P." (3-5-1633). And even when, due to certain differences of opinion on some internal matters of the Order, his relations with Calasanz suffered certain ups and downs, which led him to remain silent until he breathed pessimism about the future of the Pious Schools, his spirit never lacked of obedience, which was always prompt and unconditional.

In the end, together with Calasanz, he was subjected to the harsh test of misunderstanding, suspicion and mistrust, on the part of the supreme ecclesiastical authorities, due to a series of events that disturbed the internal peace of the Order for some years, coinciding

more or less with the last twelve years of his life (1635-1647). Even then, his attitude, in the midst of pain, was one of obedience united with firm confidence in God's help.

His holiness and the effort to communicate it to others

The practice of the evangelical advice on which the consecration of a religious life is based would be a mere external formality, and even sterile, if it were not animated by a deep inner experience of all the human and Christian virtues, in which evangelical perfection consists. This experience was lived by Casani throughout his life and reached the typical degree of heroism of the saints, as unanimously attested by his biographers and by everyone who had the opportunity to approach him during his life.

The voluminous and scrupulous documentation, presented for his canonization process, highlights his virtues in the context of a personality rich in human gifts, which made him appreciated and esteemed by all who approached him. He was a man of easy words in conversation and talking in the pulpit, affable despite his uncompromising radicalism, always available to solve cases of conscience and to guide those who turned to him for advice, tireless in the fulfillment of his duties, even during difficult times.

"In the religious aspect, an undefeated faith shines forth in him, a firmest hope in Providence, a most ardent charity towards his neighbor regarding material things, which is translated into the liveliest zeal of young souls, of Christ's wives and of the heretics. But in a very special way what characterizes the Servant of God, together with the love for the Cross and the Blessed Virgin Mary, it is his immense love for extreme poverty and holy humility, sisters and indispensable virtues to be able to serve the poor Christ in the poor and ignorant children, and to ensure to them the triumph of their rights to education and instruction, the only lever for their human, religious, cultural and social promotion".

In this synthesis, taken from the introduction to the "Positio super virtutibus" (I, p. XI) we can see the essential aspects of the sanctity of Peter Casani, which a detailed analysis of his life would make them even more prominent, as it comes out in the aforementioned

volume from which we selected only a few titles: Faith (God, Holy Trinity, Incarnate Word, Bible, Providence, Saints, Church ...), Hope (in illnesses, in poverty, in tribulations and persecutions), Charity towards God (Eucharist, Passion of the Lord), Filial love to Mary, Charity towards others, Zeal for souls, Prudence, Justice, Strength (magnanimity, patience and constancy), Temperance, Humility, Poverty, Chastity, Obedience...

Such a mosaic of facts and testimonies that give a very defined image, in continuous tension towards sanctity, on the foundation of a deep humility, which pushed him towards forms of rigor for himself, perhaps excessive. He recognized it himself, responding to an observation by Father Alejandro Bernardini, Superior General of the Lucca Congregation: "Certainly I was mistaken by the example of the saints, perhaps misunderstood and even worse when applied to myself, in firmly thinking that I needed, without comparison, a greater stimulus than a brake on austerity". Innocent confession made in youth, while he was still a professed religious in that Congregation, in which his project of imitating "the example of the Saints" he claimed to have "misunderstood" and "applied in a worse way" to himself. In reality, he had understood it "very well" and "better applied", because it was precisely through this holy imitation that he had set out on the path of evangelical perfection.

First, his Superiors in the Lucca Congregation realized this, and then Calasanz in the Pious Schools, entrusting him with the delicate task of forming young religious, repeatedly appointing him novice master and professor of philosophy and theology of the clerics aspiring to the priesthood. It was a job that he fulfilled above all with the example of his own life, in addition to the solidity of his philosophical-theological preparation. He never made any demands on anyone without having first experienced it in himself. "Those were heroic times - observes Fr Mario Carisio, his recent biographer (1990) - those of the novitiate under the direction of Fr. Casani: silence was absolute, contemplation almost continuous, exact obedience, frequent corporal mortifications, rigorous fasts, vigils ... Even when Constitutions did not exist yet, each one of the novices was caught by the fervor that emanated from the Master".

Among "his" novices shined the figure of the Venerable Glicerio Landriani (1588-1618), one of Calasanz' most beloved compan-

ion-disciples, who died in reputation of holiness, assisted by Father Casani, in the Novitiate House next to the Church of Santa Maria in Via, on February 15 of 1618, at the young age of 30; his heroic virtues, already officially recognized by the Church in 1931 (for which he was called "Venerable": worthy of being venerated and imitated), are still a shining example of educational apostolate, especially for the teaching of the catechism to children, youth and adults, to which Landriani devoted himself with tireless zeal as a member of the secular Congregation of the Pious Schools, before beginning the novitiate.

Even when Fr. Casani was not directly responsible for the formation of novices and students, he cared a lot for them and wrote with great care, invoking the sentiment of the Founder: "Take particular care of these students, for that is the mentality of our Father" (6-7-1624). And again: "I consider it more mine and more important than any other concern to think about the novitiate, since it is the foundation of the Religion.... I very much desire that you form the novices first of all to feel the things of God and to treat them magnificently and with actual devotion and to be in love with Holy Poverty, so that they may become accustomed to desire that all things that belong to us, both at home and in the church be kept in the extreme that our Supreme Poverty demands, and consequently, that they may greatly abhor everything, however small, that can reasonably be dispensed with..." (22-9-1634).

He frequently repeated that the good running of any religious institution is based on the good formation of the its members. Thus, in Rome, Genoa, and Naples and later in Moravia, one of his "most important concerns" was precisely the formation of young religious, which he attended personally many times, even though he was the Provincial Superior. This particular predisposition is shown not only by the testimony of those who had him as a master, but also because of the care he devoted for writing the "Rules for Novices", probably around March-April 1617, when the "Pauline Congregation of the Pious Schools" was approved on March 6 of that year. Calasanz himself had entrusted it to him. He considered him particularly suitable for this assignment, offering him the basis of ten fundamental points, which he requested as guidance to carry out his mission. Later he also worked on the "Common Rules for the Poor

of the Mother of God”, a precious reference frame for a personal and community religious life, soaked in deep spirituality, which has left its traces for centuries, practically until the Second Vatican Council, in the formation of numerous generations of Piarist Religious.

Educational Apostolate: commitment towards human promotion and evangelization

The radicalism of the religious experience of Casani and the sanctity of his life, in addition to his own and personal participation in the mystery of the universal redemption operated by Christ, were arranged by God with a specific purpose in the general context of the saving mission of the Church: the educational apostolate, that tends to the human promotion of the person and to his evangelization in order to obtain salvation.

This specific mission was manifested slowly in the life of Peter Casani.

At first it was the priestly apostolate, according to the spirit of the reform promoted and acted upon by Saint John Leonardi, which absorbed all his youthful enthusiasm. A pastoral aimed at the salvation of souls, especially through the preaching and administration of the sacraments in churches and parishes. But already in this context, Casani manifested a clear preference for young people, over whom he exercised, with the natural spontaneity of love sublimated by faith, an irresistible attraction, showing, as we have been told, “an admirable talent for attracting the youngsters”. The foundation of the Congregation of Our Lady of Snows for boys and young people from Lucca, in his first sacerdotal experience, is a clear indication of this preference.

Then, the meeting with Calasanz and with the Pious Schools in Rome: his prompt adhesion to the union of the two Congregations in 1614 and, three years later, his decision to continue the educational apostolate in the Pious Schools. It was a long-suffering and considered option, but he performed it with the precise intention of responding to the particular vocation that the Lord manifested to him. It should not have been easy for a young religious man, who had been united by personal ties with the Founder of the Congregation who had welcomed him joyfully in the vigor of his youth, to change that highly worthy religious experience. Among the members of the

same Congregation, in addition to so many beloved teachers of spirit and so many companions of youth, he also left his elderly father Caspar Casani, who had been received in 1610. No particular reason and lack of understanding or misfortune seems to have forced him to leave, having always shown, on the contrary, great interest and concern for his former brothers in the Institute. It was the love for "extreme poverty", but also for the apostolate among the "poor" children, that push him towards the Pious Schools.

An apostolate that he defined as "a very high and above all a very useful work not only in Rome, but around the world". He devoted himself to that service without reservation, sure of responding to a precise call from the Lord. And he responded fully, making himself available to the new religious family and tirelessly collaborating with Calasanz for the consolidation and expansion of the work.

His great merit, we can say it without fear of exaggeration, was that of having recognized, appreciated and shared the great insight of Joseph Calasanz: the reform of society, the main objective of the post-Tridentine church, had to be achieved through the education of consciences. It could actually be done only by starting "a teneris annis" (from tender years), extending this education to those who were deprived of it. A robust, fully grown plant is not bent, but a small, tender plant can be easily oriented as it starts to grow. And not just some privileged plants in God's garden, but all the trees, even the humblest ones, in the Lord's field. This was Calasanz' fundamental insight. Hence, the need for piety and letters for everyone, especially for the poor, from their early childhood; this is the free-popular-school for the promotion of people and their evangelization.

Peter Casani not only understood it in its deep essence and in his revolutionary evangelical reality, but he was also fascinated by it; and in the name of the Lord, being 45 years old, he embarked on this new path of education.

It is true that when it was offered the opportunity to do good to souls, he did not renounce the exercise of the priestly apostolate -even outside of school-, preaching, in popular missions, in confessions, in confraternities, even in the administration of exorcisms; but always in a context permitted by his religious life and without prejudice to its primary commitment to the educational apostolate.

The role he played, given his peculiar qualities, led him more to organize education than to educate directly. Since he always had directive positions in his hands, that did not allow him to have continuous and direct contact with the boys. Most of his time was dedicated to the preparation of religious teachers, to the adaptation of premises and structures for school activities, to the organization of the teaching body and school hours, to the selection - and even personal composition- of scholastic texts, to visit the classes during the scholastic activity, to look out for the preparation of demonstrations or academic youth evenings, congregations, shows... An enormous work of a functional-organizational nature, which he carried out according to the prescriptions of the Rules and Constitutions, also bearing in mind the frequent and detailed indications of Calasanz himself, always related to human promotion and evangelization.

Casani never lost sight of this essential purpose of the Pious Schools. For this reason, while he thanked God for the successes obtained (*Deo Gratias* is one of the expressions with which he ends almost all his letters), he also deeply regretted the errors he noticed in the observance of religious life with negative influences on the educational mission itself. In this case, when, for example, there are religious who “in the schools do not do service to God and souls, but quite the contrary” (he wrote in a memorial of uncertain date, perhaps from 1638), the best remedy is to be able to remove them. His displeasure sometimes reaches the point of pessimism, but in the most difficult moments, when the work seems about to be shipwrecked by various internal and external difficulties of the Order, he becomes like the Herald, “the tireless scribe” of Calasanz (if not the direct author) to send pleas and memorandums to the supreme leaders of the Church to save the danger of the destruction of a “truly most worthy Institute, most noble, most meritorious, most beneficial, most useful, most necessary, most natural, most reasonable, most acceptable, most worthy of gratitude and most glorious”, as Calasanz had already defined the work of the Pious Schools with these superlatives in 1621 in the famous Memorandum to Cardinal Tonti to request the pontifical approval.

The voice and example of these pioneer Saints in the Christian education of children are once again very up-to-date in our morally dis-banded society. Even today, as yesterday and as always, the reform

of society passes through the school classrooms to find in them its strongest foundation: "in the diligent exercise of this ministry - Calasanz had written in the process of the Constitutions of the Pious Schools- is the renewal of Christian society ... Because, if children, from their tender years receive a serious training in piety and letters, it is to be expected, without a doubt, that they will be happy through all of their lives".

The insistence with which the Church today underlines the importance of the Catholic School, as a precious contribution to its work of evangelization and its saving mission, is the best confirmation of the validity of the message that the life and work of Blessed Peter Casani brings today to educators and all those who heartily commit themselves to the authentic progress of the Church and of society.

Intense collaboration with Calasanz for the consolidation and expansion of the Pious Schools

We have already mentioned several times to this remarkable fact in the life of Fr Casani, which constitutes the dominant note of his last years: the role he played as the first and close collaborator of Saint Joseph Calasanz from the triennium of 1614-1617 in the consolidation and expansion of the Pious Schools. Looking through the data from the chronological synthesis above, we can find the following significant elements: he was the first Rector of the House of Saint Pantaleo during the three-year union of the Lucca Congregation with the Pious Schools (1614-1617); the first Novice Master (1617); the first religious after Calasanz to make solemn vows, barely recognized the Order of the Pious Schools with its own Constitutions (1622); the first General Assistant of the Order (1622); the first Provincial of the Order in Liguria (1623); the first Provincial of Naples (1627); the first Commissioner and Visitor General in Germany (1638) and - we might add - the first follower of Calasanz on the streets of Rome, like a prisoner of the Holy Office, on August 8, 1642, and in the painful events that followed...

A long series of "first", which is certainly not accidental, if in human events, as we firmly believe, Divine Providence has the intervention. To Casani's sincere and deep love for the radical evangelical poverty that led him to go unnoticed and to kenosis, the design of God responded assigning him duties of the foreground in the

project of consolidation and expansion of a new evangelical work, whose difficult but fruitful beginnings, had been trusted by the Lord to another of his servants, while he was oblivious to any desire for leadership. Joseph Calasanz, called by God to give voice and heart to the poor children of Rome, from the autumn of 1597, only after having requested and invoked the intervention of those believed the most suitable, decided to carry out his holy work, fearing for his strength but firmly trusting in the Providence, renouncing all prospects of human career, because - he said - "I have found in Rome the best way to serve Christ by helping these poor boys, and I will not leave it for anything in the world".

It is the logic of the Gospel that defeats human projects and is used for the realization of divine projects of those who do not rely on their own strength, but only on the help of God. And it is in this logic that the encounter between Casani and Calasanz must be read. A providential intervention of God to support, sustain and reinforce a work of evangelization in favor of the little ones and the poor, the preferred by the Gospel. This perfect spiritual harmony, this common desire to detach from things to serve God in the little ones and the poor, brought Casani and Calasanz together, making him the most valid collaborator. He was always ready for any sacrifice, tireless animator wherever Calasanz would send him to spread with new foundations and with the formation of novices and clerics "this most fruitful institute, so accepted and required through Europe" (1645). No wonder he was defined in the *Informatio super dubio* as "Divi Calasanzii dexterum brachium atque Ordinis illius columna et basis", that is, "the right arm of Calasanz, column and foundation of his Order" (Positio, 1915, p. 71).

He performed the delicate offices assigned to him - Master of Novices, Rector, Provincial, General Assistant, Visitor and General Commissioner - with the greatest sense of responsibility, balance and tact when dealing with people and facing difficult situations; but above all with a deep spirit of faith and charity. He was aware that his work, more than a contribution to a good and efficient organization, was a service rendered to his brothers in consecrated life for common sanctification and for a fruitful apostolate for the poor boys. In fulfilling his duties of responsibility, he seemed to faithfully reflect the recommendation made by himself to the Superiors in his

"Pussilli Gregis Idea": "We exhort in the Lord all the Leaders of this little flock, strongly pleading with religious ardor before God, that in every action of government they always make use of Christian simplicity, religious sincerity and pure goodness of mind, for that is in fact the prudence of the Saints". And he continued to highlight the risks to which a Superior can be exposed: "Leave far behind political duplicity, secular cunning and that human prudence which St. Paul calls "prudence of the flesh", constantly declaring it the enemy of God; consider it also truly the enemy of yourselves."

His participation in the first General Chapters of the Order, in which questions of capital importance for the life of the Pious Schools and for their future development were dealt with, was also a contribution of the first order to the solution of the serious problems that were arising with the increase of the religious family and the expansion of the Order. The latter was presented as a problem, a serious problem, which threatened its survival. Actually, there were other much more serious and complicated causes that led to the suppression of the Order, or more precisely, its reduction to a secular Congregation without vows, as indeed it happened in 1646 by the decision of Innocence X. That was the period of the great test, which is never lacking in the works of God.

Problems relative to numerous requests of foundation of houses and schools; the religious shortage of personnel suitably prepared for the educative and pastoral functions; the internal relations between the different classes of religious (priests, clerics, cleric brothers and lay brothers), were the reason for preoccupations, difficulties and alive dissensions at several levels, with different proposals for solution. To these were later added, on the part of some agitators, jealousies, envy, personal ambitions with consequent criticism and serious calumnies. All this led to the intervention of pontifical commissions and an apostolic Visit, whose high officials did not always proceed with due equity and justice, in discredit of the whole Order, of its Founder and of its strictest collaborators.

Therefore, Calasanz was called "The New Job". First he was suspended and then removed from his post as Superior General and forced to see, almost in his nineties, the humiliating reduction of the Order in 1646. "Constantes estate et videbitis auxilium Dei super vos", wrote the Old Saint in his last autographic letter, on May

20, 1647. That means, “Be constant and you will see God’s help upon you”, thus summarizing his firm confidence in the Providence regarding the restoration of the Pious Schools to their former rank of Order of solemn vows, as happened after his death.

And Casani?

At first (1635-1638), when the difficulties were only internal, he preferred to limit his intervention and remain on the side-line: “I am so confused and annoyed by the things of our poor Institute, that I do not even know where I am... I don’t dare to think about what will become of our Institute... The less I intervene in our things, the calmer I remain. And in this attitude I intend to remain from now on, as long as this nefarious influence continues...” (6-18-1635). Meanwhile, he was praying and inviting others to pray: “I trust God, who will end all this. I see no other way out of this or remedy other than prayer” (11-15-1635).

Later, when the events turned into a real persecution against the Founder and the Pious Schools, Casani stood by Calasanz’ side to defend him and his work, pleading with numerous memorandums, written by him with his precious calligraphy, but generally regarded as common from the entire dismissed General Congregation, addressed to the Pope, to various Cardinals and high influential personalities, to save such a holy work. “That this institute be preserved in the purity in which it was put when it was founded ... which consisted in the observance of life and in the way of working in the schools” (3-10-44). And if he ever seemed immersed in pessimism regarding the solution of those serious crises, he tried to overcome it in a dimension of explicit faith:

“This is the time of temptation, in which the Holy Spirit teaches us to be firm and stable in our position, until the calamity passes. Let us not be moved by threats or frightened by boasts, and everything will be diluted in the fog ...; for the moment it is necessary to be quiet, be silent, pray and firmly wait for God’s help” (2-12-1644).

And even in a more lapidary way:

“It is better to leave the matter in the hands of God, as Fr. General also thinks” (12-12-1644); “after having lost all human hope, let us only wait for divine help, which is never lacking for

those who truly trust in it" (5-5-1646); "Let us call upon heaven with prayers" (8-25-1646); "Patience and prayer can do a lot" (9-22-1646).

Full of deep hope and vibrant faith in God is the letter of January 7, 1645, which he wrote to Fr Michael Geisselbrunner, in Nikolsburg, where he had been seven years before as a General Commissioner of the Order, dedicating himself with enthusiasm to reinforcing the establishment of the Pious Schools and to promote works of evangelization and conversion of heretics throughout the surrounding region. We quote it almost entirely, translated from Latin, considering it the most authentic reflection of his spirit in the last period of his life:

"Endure a little while, dearest brethren, until God, appeased by your labors and pains borne innocently and patiently, mitigates our sins and crowns your patience. He will do it, indeed, He will do it; and meanwhile, He purges our sins, He will increase your crown. Be manly, and let your hearts be of good courage, and hope in the Lord' [Ps 26:14]. I ask you not to faint in tribulations, 'knowing that tribulation breeds patience, and patience the trial; and trial the hope, and hope does not disappoint, for the love of God has spread in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to you' [Rom. 5:3-5]. 'Will God be eternally angry with us, or will he prolong his wrath from generation to generation?' [Ps 84:6]. I trust that shortly he will turn this storm into a breeze and the waves of the sea will be stilled... I commend myself to the prayers of all".

Conclusion

When Fr Peter Casani died in the house of Saint Pantaleo, in Rome, on October 17, 1647, Calasanz, who had assisted him in his last moments, by announcing his "holy" death on the 19th, confirmed his deep hope: "We hope he will help the Order more after his death than in life".

It is the hope of the saints, which goes beyond human horizons, foreshadowing in a vision of deep faith the inscrutable designs of God.

In that same letter he communicated that "the body was brought to the church; there was an innumerable gathering of people all

Friday, and of the graces that some have received I will not say anything for now, except that it was necessary to remove the body inside the house to prevent so many concurrences". And a few days later he wrote: "reports on his life and customs and the effects that his Briefs [exorcisms composed by Casani] have produced in many places seem to have awakened a certain hope for the necessary remedy for our Institute. Y.R. can go ahead looking if there are people who can declare something in this regard, since we have obtained a license and faculty from Mons. Vice-regent" (26-10-1647).

Those were the first steps, taken by the Founder Saint himself, Joseph of Calasanz, for the process of Canonization of Peter Casani, which we invoke today already with the title of Blessed.

May this authentic wealth of the Church and of the Pious Schools circulate among us, the People of God in this year 2000, and contribute to encouraging in everyone "a sure hope of the necessary remedy" to proclaim the Gospel to young people, through the witness of those spiritual values that can effectively instil new confidence and a new life in humanity.