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INTEREST OF THE REDEMPTORISTS IN THE CONVENT OF S. MARIA DELL'UMILTA' IN ROME, 1853

In the preceding article on Saint John Neumann and the American College in Rome it is mentioned that the Visitandine convent in the Via dell'Umiltà was acquired as seat of that College in 1858¹.

It seems worth while to give a short note on the fact that six years earlier the Transalpine Redemptorists seriously had considered the purchase of that same convent.

Since 1815 the Redemptorists had a house in Rome, the former Mercedarian monastery next to the church of Santa Maria in Monterone². It belonged to the Fathers of Naples and served mainly as a residence for the procurator general of the Institute. Since 1847 there resided also the procurator's 'Socius', who looked after the affairs of the Transalpine Redemptorists at the offices of the Holy See³.

As the house was not very roomy and also because the Naples observance followed in the monastery was in some points different

¹ On the purchase by the S. Congregation 'de Propaganda Fide' see R.F. McNAMARA, *The American College in Rome, 1855-1955*, Rochester, N.Y. 1956, 34, and the documentation gathered in the Propaganda Archives, Congregazioni Particolari, vol. 158 (1851-60) and 159 (1857-59).

² A. SAMPERS-J. LOEW, *De initiis hospitii romani S. Mariae in Monterone, 1814-1820*, in *Spic. hist.* 8 (1960) 40-60.

³ By the papal decree *Presbyterorum saecularium* of July 2, 1841, the Transalpine Redemptorists were entitled to send one of their members to Rome as 'Socius' of the procurator general. He had to reside in the same house as the P.G. *Acta integra capitulorum generalium Congregationis SS. Redemptoris, 1749-1894*, Romae 1899, 302, No. VII.

When the Transalpines decided in 1847 to send the German Fr. Markus Andreas Hugues as 'Socius', the Italian superior general and his consultors highly disapproved of the move. M.A. HUGUES, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Congregation des allerh. Erlösers*, pp. 353-354. *Id.*, *Additamenta quae spectant ad historiam Congregationis SS.mi Redemptoris*, pp. 67-68. Both manuscripts are kept in the general archives of the Redemptorists in Rome (hereinafter: AGR).

from the Transalpine customs, the Fathers from beyond the Alps considered several times the opportunity of establishing their own house in Rome⁴. During Fr. Victor Dechamps' stay in Rome, October 1851-June 1852, the project seems to have taken a more definitive form, though the remaining documentation on the question dates from about half a year after his return to Belgium⁵.

In December 1852 Cardinal Raffaele Fornari notified Fr. Rudolf von Smetana, since July 1, 1850, vicar general of the Transalpine branch of the Redemptorists, resident in Koblenz, Rhenish Prussia, that it was opportune to establish a house in Rome⁶. Fr. Smetana answered forthwith that he intended to acquire such a house as soon as a good occasion presented itself⁷. He asked also if he could be sure that the Roman authorities would assent to the establishment. After consulting Cardinal Gabriele della Genga, prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Cardinal Fornari answered in the affirmative on January 10, 1853⁸.

Meanwhile Fr. Smetana had received also several letters from Fr. Brixius Queloz, who handled since 1850 the affairs of the Transalpine Redemptorists in Rome, telling him that the monastery next to the church of Santa Maria in Trivio was for sale at a reasonable

⁴ For instance, in 1839 when several Transalpine Fathers were in Rome for the solemn canonization of St. Alphonsus, and in 1841 when some Fathers of the Transalpine obedience were there negotiating the reorganisation of the Congregation's general government. K. DILGSKRON, *Pater Rudolf von Smetana*, Wien 1902, 89-90. Documentation on this subject in AGR XI 40^b (letter of ven. Fr. Joseph Passerat of January 18, 1841) and 80 (letter of Fr. Pietro Luigi Rispoli of July 24, 1841).

In August 1841 Pope Gregory XVI offered the church and monastery of San Crisogono in Trastevere to the Redemptorists as seat of the central government, but the Naples Fathers declined the generous offer for several reasons; AGR XI C 83-84. DILGSKRON, *op. cit.* 98, in the footnote.

⁵ Fr. Dechamps (1810-1883, 1867 archbishop of Mechlin, 1875 cardinal), then superior of the Belgian province, was sent to Rome mainly to settle a question about poverty risen among the Transalpine Redemptorists. See the instructions given him for his mission on October 4, 1851; AGR XV A 31.

⁶ [R. von SMETANA], *Expositio actorum et factorum ad Congregationem SS. Redemptoris transalpinam spectantium, 1839-1853*, Romae 1854, 30. Fr. von Smetana does not mention the name of the cardinal who sent him the message, but we do not fear to be mistaken, identifying him as Cardinal Fornari who was on very friendly terms with Fr. Dechamps since the time he had been (inter)nuncio in Belgium (1838-1842). Fornari had been very helpful to Dechamps during the latter's stay in Rome 1851-52. He was prefect of the Congregation of Studies and member of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

⁷ *Ibid.* 31. Neither the text of Fr. Smetana's nor of Card. Fornari's letter is known.

⁸ The original of this letter is kept in AGR XV C 10. There is also a contemporary copy made by Fr. Queloz.

price⁹. Queloz gave this notice in his letter of December 4, adding that he thought the building would do for the purpose¹⁰. To make sure that he had on hand in due time the purchase price, Fr. Smetana contacted the Belgian provincial, Fr. Dechamps, and the superior of the English mission, Fr. Friedrich von Held¹¹. As soon as he got a positive answer that the money was available, Fr. Smetana entrusted Fr. Queloz to make further enquiries. From the correspondence Smetana-Queloz of December 1852-January 1853 — unfortunately very incompletely preserved¹² — it is clear that Fr. Smetana was inclined to buy the monastery, but that he by no means intended to buy a pig in a poke (*un chat en poche*)¹³. He asked for detailed information: a plan of the building and a description of its present state, this with a view to the necessary adaptation and eventual restoration.

All this took time and in his letter of January 31, 1853, Fr. Smetana urged Fr. Queloz again to inspect the building and to send him the necessary information, so that he could make a final decision¹⁴. When he got the information, Fr. Smetana decided in the affirmative and authorised Fr. Queloz to make the purchase, of course,

⁹ SMETANA, *Expositio* 31.

¹⁰ We do not have Queloz' letter. But from Smetana's letter to him of March 4, 1853, we can deduce that he began writing on the subject on December 4, 1852. Smetana's letter is kept in AGR XV C 11.

¹¹ SMETANA, *Expositio* 31.

¹² AGR XV C 7 and 11. None of Queloz' letters to Smetana of this period has survived. There are three of Smetana's letters to Queloz written in December 1852 and four in January 1853; from the dates mentioned it is clear that some have been lost.

¹³ From the letter of Smetana to Queloz, January 7, 1853: « Quant à S. Maria in Trivio nous [Fr. Smetana and his consultors] nous sommes résolus à entrer dans ce projet. Le motif principal, qui nous a déterminés, c'est que le P. D[echamps] en est informé et que nous craignons de grands inconvénients si nous rejetons ce projet. Mais on n'achète pas un chat en poche; il nous faudra avant tout connaître l'objet et toutes les conditions. Il sera donc à vous de nous en informer exactement et de m'envoyer un plan et une description circonstanciée de la maison et de l'église et de l'état de l'une et de l'autre, pour savoir si elles n'ont pas besoin de réparations ».

¹⁴ In this letter Fr. Smetana says: « Je vous dispense de l'envoi d'un plan de S. Maria in Trivio, si cela ne peut se faire. Mais il faudra pourtant que vous fassiez l'inspection des localités sous quelque prétexte ». Evidently, Fr. Queloz had met with difficulties in getting a reliable description of the building. There is, however, in AGR XV C 12, a very neat floor-plan of the monastery and the church (24.5 x 18.5 cm) in pen-and-ink, and on a large sheet (75 x 52 cm) of drawing paper there is in the middle the same plan on the same scale with above the facade of the building and the church (facing south) and below the eastern side elevation of the church and the adjoining wall of the garden (in Via Poli). The drawings on the large sheet are slightly coloured. All the drawings are executed by a person well-versed in architectural designing.

after having obtained the pope's approval¹⁵. But the authorisation arrived too late¹⁶. A few days before the monastery had been secured for the Missionaries of the Precious Blood by papal intervention¹⁷.

The fact that they missed S. Maria in Trivio at the very moment when they felt sure of getting hold of the monastery was certainly a serious disappointment for Frs. Smetana and Queloz. But once decided on the establishment of the Transalpine Redemptorists in Rome, Fr. Queloz went in search of another suitable building and on February 16, 1853¹⁸, he notified Fr. Smetana that the Visitandine nuns were willing to sell their convent of Santa Maria dell'Umiltà¹⁹. Fr. Smetana wrote again to Frs. Dechamps and von Held about a possible purchase, to which he himself was opposed for several reasons²⁰.

¹⁵ In AGR XV C 9, i.e., between documents of January 1853 (in C 7-8 and C 10-11) is kept a draft of a petition to the Holy Father to give his approval for the foundation of a house of the Transalpine Redemptorists in Rome. Unfortunately, the document has no date.

¹⁶ From the sources at our disposal it is not clear when the authorisation arrived in Rome. Fr. Smetana says in his *Expositio*, p. 31: « Initio mensis Januarii 1853 haec auctoritas [acquiritur praefatum conventum] Romam pervenit ». But this is impossible, as he is still asking for information about the building in his letter of January 31. At its earliest it can have been in the first half of February. Nothing has survived of the correspondence Smetana-Queloz of February 1853. From the letters of March (see below), however, it is clear that the project of acquiring S. Maria in Trivio had been given up. So, we do not know how to explain the following sentence in Smetana's letter to Queloz written in Vienna on May 21, 1853: « Ci-joint l'autorisation pour S. Maria in Trivio. Mais je vous prie de n'en user qu'au cas de nécessité ». AGR XV C. 44.

¹⁷ On September 19, 1981, Fr. Andrew J. Pollack CPPS, general archivist of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, was kind enough to send me photostats of several documents of his archives. There is a letter of Mgr. Andrea Bizzarri, pro-secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, dated February 5, 1853, to the superior general, Fr. Giovanni Merlini, in which he gives him an appointment for a conversation on the 7th. The ven. Merlini put the following note at the bottom of the letter: « Mi ha comunicato l'intenzione del Santo Padre Pio IX di darci la chiesa e convento di S. Maria del Trivio a Fontana di Trevi in Roma. Si è risoluto di accettare. Giov. Merlini, Miss. Ap. ». From this document it is clear that S. Maria in Trivio was secured for the Congregation of the Precious Blood in the first week of February 1853. There is also a copy of the official conveyance of the property, dated January 28, 1854. I wish to thank Fr. Pollack for his courtesy.

¹⁸ We do not have Queloz' letter. But from Smetana's letter to him of March 8, 1853, it is clear that he began writing on S. Maria dell'Umiltà on February 16 (« votre première lettre du 16 Février relative à cette affaire »). Smetana's letter is kept in AGR XV C 16.

¹⁹ SMETANA, *Expositio* 55: « Acquisitione conventus ad S. Mariam in Trivio ad irritum redacta, paulo post, eodem mense Februario 1853, certior factus sum, alium conventum Romae venditari, videlicet conventum S. Mariae de Humilitate ».

²⁰ Fr. Smetana seems to have felt somewhat reluctant about the purchase, also

A serious difficulty was, no doubt, the purchase price, much higher than the one asked for S. Maria in Trivio: 48,000 Roman scudi, i.e., about 260,000 French francs, to which were to be added around 20,000 scudi for repairs mostly due to the fact that a French garrison had been quartered in the convent since 1848. Furthermore there was the drawback that there was no secure prospect of when the garrison was going to leave the building²¹.

Fr. Dechamps, who at first was against acquiring this convent, changed his mind as soon as Fr. Edward Douglas²², a member of the English Redemptorist mission, declared himself willing to put 200,000 francs at the disposal of the superiors for the purchase²³. Fr. Dechamps began then pressing Frs. Smetana and Queloz to buy the convent at once, as he feared the unpleasant experience met with S. Maria in Trivio could be repeated²⁴.

As Fr. Smetana remained averse to the purchase²⁵, Fr. Dechamps decided to go and see him, hoping that it would be easier to convince him by word of mouth than by correspondence. Frs. Dechamps and von Held left Brussels for Koblenz in the evening of March 15²⁶ and discussed the question on the 17th²⁷. They scored a partial success, in as much as the vicar general withdrew his prior decision to refrain altogether from buying S. Maria dell'Umiltà. But he could not be induced to give at once his approval for the purchase as Fr. Dechamps had hoped to obtain. He told his visitors that,

because this would entail the transfer of the seat of the Transalpine vicar general from Koblenz to Rome. Though not against this move in principle, he had his doubts about its opportuneness at that precise moment. Several of his Fathers were definitely opposed to it. See Smetana's letter to Queloz of March 12, 1853; AGR XV C 18.

²¹ SMETANA, *Expositio* 55.

²² About Fr. Douglas and his great wealth see S. Boland's article in this issue. A short biographical notice can be found in *Spic. hist.* 2 (1954) 248, No. 51.

²³ SMETANA, *Expositio* 56.

²⁴ See Dechamps' letters to Queloz of March 7, 10, 11 and 15, 1853. AGR XV C 15, 17 and 19.

²⁵ Queloz had informed Dechamps of Smetana's attitude much to the latter's discontent. See Smetana's letter to Queloz of March 12, 1853, in which he reproaches him that he is trying to extort his superior's consent « par une violence morale ». AGR XV C 18.

²⁶ From Dechamps' letter to Queloz of March 15: « Nous partons ce soir avec le R.P. Held pour Coblenz afin d'obtenir le *fiat* du Vicaire Général et de sa consulte, malgré la première décision contraire ». AGR XV C 19.

²⁷ SMETANA, *Expositio* 56-57 says that the Fathers arrived on March 18 and that the discussion was held that same day. From the letters quoted in footnotes 28 and 29 below it is clear that the question was discussed on the 17th.

though not absolutely opposed to acquiring the convent, he felt it necessary to think it over maturely on the basis of more detailed information to be procured by Fr. Queloz. Moreover, he thought it proper to consult the other provincial superiors about the matter, because also their regions had to contribute to the expenses for purchase, repairs and maintenance. Also they had to send Fathers and Brothers to staff the new — and large — house, something not so easy because there was lack of personnel everywhere. Fr. Smetana was also very definite as to when the discussion with the provincial superiors was to be held: he did not intend to treat the matter by correspondence, but was going to put it on the agenda of the triennial consultation of the higher superiors to be held in about six months.

From two letters written from Koblenz to Fr. Queloz — one by Fr. Dechamps, immediately after the discussion²⁸, the other by Fr. Smetana the next day²⁹ — it emerges quite clearly that the latter was not seriously interested in the purchase of S. Maria dell'Umiltà and that he was rather inclined to put it off by delaying the decision. This was certainly the impression of Frs. Dechamps and von Held when they returned crestfallen to Brussels on March 18.

But Fr. Dechamps did not desist from his purpose, as he had the fixed idea that on the acquisition of a house in Rome as residence of the vicar general depended the salvation of the Transalpine branch of the Congregation and even the Institute's complete unification³⁰. He kept in touch with Fr. Queloz assuring him repeatedly that the money could easily be procured and that he relied on his vigilance

²⁸ The letter, written in pencil, gives the impression of having been jotted down in a disturbed state of mind. AGR XV C 19.

²⁹ Smetana's letter to Queloz of March 18 is written in his usual quiet and resolute style. AGR XV C 20.

³⁰ [V. DESCHAMPS], *De la nécessité de fixer à Rome le gouvernement de la Congrégation du T.S. Rédempteur* [...]. Exposé sommaire adressé au Vicaire Général, à ses consultants et aux autorités provinciales [...], Bruxelles 1853. AGR XV C 23 and 52. In AGR XV C 21 there is a Memorandum of von Held about the matter, dated March 27, 1853. Under the same archive number also a copy of von Held's letter to Card. Fornari of March 28 and of Dechamps' letter to the same of March 30.

On Dechamps' attitude in the matter and his opposition to Smetana's almost over-cautious way of proceeding, see M. BECQUE, *Le Cardinal Dechamps*, Louvain 1956, I 190 ff. The deplorable alienation between the two men, who had been close friends and who had acted for a long time along the same line, was never bridged completely; the mutual confidence had definitively been lost. At the bottom there was an incompatibility of temper: Smetana, meticulous and prudent, pondering all pros and cons, therefore somewhat slow in acting; Dechamps, easily impressed by what he saw as good and quick to act accordingly without further delay.

and good offices³¹. But reprimanded by Fr. Smetana for having given confidential information to Fr. Dechamps, Fr. Queloz withdrew from the latter's influence³².

As he became aware of Fr. Queloz' changing attitude, Fr. Dechamps sent Fr. von Held to Rome first of all to get several important questions settled with the ecclesiastical authorities, but also to have a close look at the pending affair of the purchase of S. Maria dell'Umlità³³. After having informed the vicar general about his going to Rome on April 23, 1853³⁴, Fr. von Held left Brussels on the 26th and arrived in Rome in the beginning of May³⁵. In his audience with Pius IX he told the Pope that the money to buy a house in Rome had been found³⁶, but this was about all he could do in the matter, as he had no authority whatsoever to take decisive steps and Fr. Smetana constantly ignored his presence in Rome, not answering his letters³⁷ nor those of Fr. Dechamps explaining why he had sent Fr. von Held³⁸.

³¹ Dechamps' letter to Queloz of March 25 ends by saying: « L'Angleterre donnera — quand on voudra — autant qu'on voudra. Les 200.000 [francs] sont prêts. Rome consent à nous voir à Rome. Le Cardinal Préfet della Genga l'a dit. Il faut donc y arriver. Tous les enfants de St. Alphonse le désirent. Salve spes mea! » AGR XV C 19. — See also Dechamps' letter to Queloz of April 7-8; AGR XV C 22.

³² [B. QUELOZ], *Contre-exposé et Contre-mémoire pour servir de réfutation au premier, au second Exposé et à leurs suppléments sur le gouvernement et l'observance dans la Congrégation du T.S. Rédempteur par le P. D[echamps]*, Rome 1853.

³³ From Dechamps' letter to Smetana of April 22, 1853: « Le retard de l'acceptation de la fondation de Rome est devenu pour moi un poids pesant et pesant même sur la conscience. [...] Nous devons donc présumer que le Révérendissime Père Vicair Général approuvera une dernière mesure de prudence [...] c'est que le R. P. Held, visiteur en Angleterre, voie de ses yeux ce que les maisons anglaises vont acheter et parte pour Rome de suite, afin que toutes les précautions préalables soient déjà prises, quand l'acte que le Cardinal Préfet [de la Congrégation des Evêques et Réguliers] attend de V. P., y arrivera ». AGR XV C 24.

³⁴ Held's letter is kept in AGR XV C 25. On p. 3 Smetana noted as follows: « Mit diesem Briefe kündigte mir P. Held seine Abreise nach Rom an, nachdem er bereits am 27. März im Verein mit P. Dechamps an Cardinal Fornari geschrieben hatte, um meine Absetzung zu erwirken ».

³⁵ The date of Held's departure from Brussels is given in the *Chronica Provinciae [Belgicae] et Collegiorum* (ms. in AGR) IV 90.

³⁶ Held gives several details about the audience in a paper entitled *Ma Justification*, dated Aachen 1872. Written twenty years *post facta*, there are several inaccuracies in this apologetically coloured narrative in which Held tries to justify his journey to Rome made in 1853 against Smetana's will. The original of this document is kept in the archives of the Cologne Province CSSR, Geistingen (Nordrhein-Westfalen). There is a typewritten copy in the AGR that has some misspellings.

³⁷ Held complained repeatedly about this fact in his letters and in his *Justification*.

³⁸ In AGR XV C 24 there is the following note of Fr. Smetana: « Briefe des

On May 14, 1853, Fr. Smetana himself was called to Rome by Cardinal della Genga³⁹, who informed him that it was His Holiness' will that he should come as soon as possible (*quamprimum*). In the meantime Fr. von Held was to remain in Rome.

Fr. Smetana had first to settle several questions concerning the reestablishment of the Congregation in Austria⁴⁰. But evidently he was by no means in a hurry to undertake the Roman journey. The main reason for his dawdling seems to have been that he wanted to avoid meeting Fr. von Held, who in fact — tired of waiting and achieving nothing — left Rome not long before Fr. Smetana's arrival⁴¹. Meanwhile he prepared himself thoroughly for the questions to be settled with the Roman authorities. These were certainly of far greater importance than the acquisition of a house there for the Transalpine Redemptorists. But also this question had to be faced. Therefore he wrote on May 26 from Vienna to Fr. Douglas, about whose generous donation he was so far only informed by Frs. Dechamps and von Held, asking him for a distinct statement on his intention in making the gift: to whom he intended to give it, for what purpose, at whose disposal it was to be put⁴².

Fr. Douglas answered from Gorey (Ireland) on June 1 adding the required declaration: the donation is not in favour of the Belgian province, nor of the English mission but simply and solely to the Transalpine branch of the Redemptorists in order to establish a

P. Dechamps an mich vom April bis Juli 1853. Bloss auf den ersten vom 15. April antwortete ich von Modena aus, wo ich mich eben befand, mit einigen Zeilen, er wisse ja ohnehin, dass ich bis Ende Sommer eine Triennial-Consulta berufen wolle, wo wir alles gemeinschaftlich berathen wollten. Die übrigen Briefe liess ich unbeantwortet ».

³⁹ Della Genga's letter, also signed by the pro-secretary of the Congregation, Mgr. Andrea Bizzarri, is kept in AGR XV C 35. In AGR XV C 36 there is a letter of the same date, signed by della Genga and Bizzarri, to the superior general of the Redemptorists notifying him that Smetana is being called to Rome and that Held has to remain there for the present.

⁴⁰ By imperial decree of May 7/8, 1848, the Jesuits and the Redemptorists had been suppressed in the Austrian states. By imperial decree of June 23, 1852, the Redemptorists had been readmitted. But much had to be settled before regular life and apostolic work could be resumed in proper form. *Spic. hist.* 7 (1959) 262 ff.; E. Hosp, *Erbe des hl. Klemens M. Hofbauer*, Wien 1953, 411-421.

⁴¹ Held says in his *Justification* that Smetana put forward several reasons for his delaying the Roman journey, which do not seem very convincing. « Quant à moi, j'étois tenté d'attribuer la cause à ma présence à Rome ». He asked the pope whether he could return to Belgium and this was granted. « Le R. P. Smetana n'avoit pas attendu mon retour pour se mettre en route vers Rome après avoir appris mon départ certain de cette ville ».

⁴² Smetana's letter is kept in AGR XV D 23.

house in Rome; therefore, only the vicar general of the said Congregation, in accord with his consultors, is entitled to dispose of it⁴³.

On June 19 Fr. Smetana left Koblenz for Rome⁴⁴, where he arrived around July 10 and put up at the house of the Lazarists near the Palazzo di Montecitorio⁴⁵. On July 28 he informed Fr. Douglas that he already had begun negotiating for the purchase of S. Maria dell'Umiltà⁴⁶. But the negotiations with Mgr. Domenico Fioramonti⁴⁷, Segretario delle Lettere Latine, who acted as agent of the Visitandine Sisters, dragged on as Fr. Smetana found his conditions unacceptable. On September 25 he wrote to Fr. Douglas that the negotiations — evidently not much to his regret — had been broken off and that he had already his eye on another building⁴⁸. — There

⁴³ Douglas' letter and declaration are kept in AGR XV D 23. In two letters of August 6, written from St. Mary's Clapham (London) — one to Fr. Smetana (in French), the other to Card. della Genga (in Italian) — Douglas enters into some more details about the motives that induced him to make the donation: « Le seul motif qui m'a fait désirer de voir une maison à Rome, longtemps avant qu'il ne fût question de cet achat, ayant été mon désir pour le bien général de la Congrégation. Et comme je croyais que toute Congrégation, dont le supérieur était allemand ou français, et qui en même temps habitait en Allemagne ou en France, serait toujours en danger de devenir allemande ou française, en prenant peu à peu cet esprit national, dont Rome seule est exempte, je désirais ardemment de voir le supérieur fixé à Rome ». In the letter to della Genga Douglas is even more specific as to his fear that a nationalistic spirit could pervade the Transalpine Congregation, « che stava sempre nel pericolo di farsi tutta tedesca, mentre che il vicario generale stava in Germania con quattro consultori, tutti e quattro tedeschi » [Frs. F. Kosmaček, J. Fey, J. Kaltenbach, M. Heilig]. Both letters are kept in AGR XV D 23.

⁴⁴ In a letter of June 20 Fr. Michael Heilig informed Fr. Nicolas Mauron that Fr. Smetana after his return from Austria stayed four days in Koblenz from where he left for Rome on June 19. AGR XV C 56. Heilig passed the same notice to Douglas on June 23; AGR XV D 23.

⁴⁵ The Lazarist house of Montecitorio, founded in 1642, partly suppressed in 1876 (after Rome had become capital of the kingdom of Italy), was definitively closed in 1913. [P. SILVA], *Cenni storici su la Congregazione della Missione in Italia, 1642-1925*, Piacenza 1925, 3-38.

⁴⁶ Smetana's letter to Douglas is kept in AGR XV D 23. There is also Douglas' answer of August 6. Smetana repeated a request made in his letter on August 1, to which Douglas answered on August 9.

⁴⁷ When negotiating in 1854 through an intermediary about the purchase of the Villa Caserta, property of the duke of Sermoneta, Michelangelo Caietani, the Redemptorists met again with Mgr. Fioramonti, who intended to buy the villa for the Visitandine Sisters. They got the better of him by offering a higher purchase price (45,000 Roman scudi, passed on January 31, 1855). *Cronica della casa generalizia del Santissimo Redentore* (ms. in AGR) I 5-6. [A. WALTER], *Villa Caserta, 1855-1905*, Romae 1905, 23-25. — A short note on Mgr. Fioramonti is found in *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 50 (1980) 224, n. 26.

⁴⁸ Smetana's letter of September 25, 1853, and Douglas' answer from Strabane (Ireland) of October 19 are kept in AGR XV D 23. Douglas declares himself quite pleased with Sant'Ildefonso, situated as it is in the city quarter where most foreigners live, « where dogs are kept out and where the pavement is a little less dirty than elsewhere ».

follows now an extract from Fr. Smetana's letter, in which he gives the reasons that induced him to give up the purchase of the convent of S. Maria dell'Umiltà.

J.M.J.A.

Mon révérend & très cher Père!

[...]

Quant à S. Maria dell'Umiltà les négociations sont rompues. Mgr Fioramonti, le procureur des Salésiennes, avait fait faire l'estime du couvent par un architecte de son choix, qui l'a évalué à 42000 écus romains. Pour l'église il a demandé une aumône de 3000, par conséquent en tout 45000 écus. Outre cela la maison se trouve dans un fort mauvais état. La dégradation causée par les 400 soldats français qui y logent est énorme. Il nous faudrait, comme Mgr Fioramonti a avoué lui-même, une somme de 18-20000 écus pour les réparations nécessaires, donc en tout une somme de 63000 écus environ, c.-à-d. de 340000 francs.

J'ai fait estimer le couvent de ma part par un architecte de la municipalité, et il l'a évalué au plus à 28000 écus, en ajoutant que ce n'était le prix réel, mais seulement pour une communauté religieuse. J'ai donc offert à Mgr Fioramonti 30000 écus et une récompense pour l'église, mais celui-ci ne voulait pas rabattre un seul bajocco, parce qu'il s'était mis en tête que nous soyons nécessités [= obligés] à acheter ce couvent à tout prix. Cependant ce n'est pas encore la fin. Il demanda de plus que nous payions le prix tout de suite et au moins 35000 écus immédiatement après l'arrêté du contrat, sans nous donner la moindre garantie, *si* ou *quand* le couvent sera évacué des soldats français. Je lui ai offert de payer le prix *pro rata* de l'évacuation, mais il ne voulait s'obliger à rien, ni céder la moindre chose de ses prétentions.

Il était donc évident que je ne saurais accepter telles conditions injustes et irraisonnables à la fois. J'ai communiqué à Sa Sainteté l'état des choses, et le Saint-Père a trouvé lui-même ces conditions inacceptables, mais il a eu au [= en] même temps la grâce de me rendre attentif à un autre établissement, c.-à-d. à S. Ildefonso (Alfonso) dans la Via Felice⁴⁹, la rue par laquelle on passe de la Piazza del Tritone⁵⁰ à la Trinità dei Monti. Vous vous en souviendrez sans doute.

L'église et la maison appartiennent aux Augustins espagnols, qui depuis longtemps n'y ont qu'un seul frère laïque, c'est pourquoi le Saint-Père les a engagés de vendre leur propriété à une autre communauté religieuse, qui pourrait administrer l'église. Ils y sont très disposés, et j'ai

⁴⁹ Nowadays: Via Sistina.

⁵⁰ Piazza Barberini.

déjà parlé à l'Ambassadeur d'Espagne qui m'a promis d'écrire tout de suite à Madrid pour obtenir le consentement du gouvernement espagnol et pour engager à la fois les Augustins à nommer un procureur qui entre avec nous en négociation.

Je suis enchanté de ce projet et j'espère que nous y réussirons sous peu. La situation est excellente. Non seulement qu'il y a là l'air le plus salubre de Rome, mais c'est aussi le quartier le plus habité par les étrangers, et excepté les Capucins⁵¹ et quelques églises de religieuses presque toujours fermées il n'y a d'autres églises dans le voisinage. L'église est petite, mais beaucoup plus grande que celle de l'Umiltà et très jolie et dans un très bon état. La maison est également petite, mais on pourra l'agrandir aisément de trois côtés et sans trop grands frais, surtout parce qu'il y a aussi un petit jardin⁵².

Vous comprendrez maintenant, pourquoi je n'ai pas pu consentir, et mes consultants non plus, à acheter rapidement et à tout prix l'Umiltà sans commettre la plus grande étourderie. Abstraction faite du prix exorbitant, il faudrait être fou pour acheter une propriété sans la moindre assurance d'en pouvoir prendre possession en dix ans. Je viens d'apprendre que les Salésiennes, qui s'étaient adressées au ministère de [la] guerre à Paris pour obtenir l'évacuation du [corps] militaire français, ont reçu le refus, parce que la position stratégique était trop importante pour pouvoir la quitter.

Je remercie le bon Dieu et St Alphonse de nous avoir débarrassés de cet établissement dont je me suis hautement déplu aussi sous d'autres rapports. La maison étant entourée de rues étroites et sales, l'air y est très pesant et la chaleur excessive. De plus on n'y trouve que des cellules petites et basses (la maison était primitivement un couvent de Dominicaines) et des grandes salles avec 4 ou 5 fenêtres qui nous auraient été tout à fait inutiles.

Vous n'avez pas besoin de faire tout de suite des arrangements auprès de votre banquier, car les négociations dureront encore quelque temps. En tout cas je vous informerai préalablement, si le temps sera arrivé de faire les préparatifs.

[...] En me recommandant à vos prières je suis dans les SS. Coeurs de Jésus et de Marie

Votre très affectionné confrère
R. Smetana CSSR

Rome, le 25 Sept. 1853

⁵¹ The church of S. Maria della Concezione, situated in what is now called the Via Vittorio Veneto.

⁵² The plan to acquire S. Ildefonso had to be abandoned in 1854, when it became evident that it was impossible to buy at a reasonable price the adjacent house and garden. *Cronica della casa generalizia* I 4-5. WALTER, *Villa Caserta* 19.