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# *The Miraculous Fresco of the Mother of Good Counsel*

She is charitable. She is generous, helpful, protective, and caressing. She forgives, restores, and blesses. She calms the storms. What does she ask in return for so many benefits?



**Fr. Felipe García, EP**

**S**ongs, smiles and the sound of musical instruments... The Italian people, artistic by nature, have always celebrated their patrons with joy and public pageantry. On April 25, 1467, the small town of Genazzano was commemorating the feast of St. Mark. Divine Providence had something special in store for this day. About four o'clock in the afternoon, the people who had gathered in Santa Maria Piazza witnessed a truly heavenly spectacle.

“What is that silvery cloud, moving swiftly across the sky and emitting splendid rays? Where does it come from and where is it going?”

“And those angelic voices? What marvellous music! We have never heard anything like it!”

The puzzlement and excitement of the inhabitants of Genazzano mounted as they watched a luminous cloud gradually descend from the sky and settle alongside an unfinished wall of an old church which was being rebuilt. This church, for centuries dedicated to Our Lady of Good Counsel, was under the care of the religious of St. Augustine.

“Suddenly”—a historian narrates—“the bells of the high campanile, which stood before their eyes, began to peal, though they could

see and knew that no human hand touched them. And then, in unison, every church bell in the town began to answer in peals as festive. The crowd were spellbound, ravished, and yet full of holy feeling. With eager haste, they filled the enclosure. They pressed around the spot where the cloud remained.

“Gradually, the rays of light ceased to dart, the cloud began to clear gently away; and then, to their astonishment, there remained disclosed a most beautiful object. It was an image of Our Lady, holding the divine Child Jesus in her arms, and she seemed to smile upon them and





**Where had this miraculous fresco come from? “From Paradise!” some promptly said**

The altar of the Mother of Good Counsel, in May of 2015

obliged to choose between fleeing the country or dying in the confrontation with the invading forces.

“But—alas!—it had to be admitted that devotion [...] had grown cold. Schism worked its blighting way in Albania. The morals of the people decayed with the purity of their religion. Devotion to Our Lady languished even in Scutari itself. The Turkish invasion, a clear punishment sent from Heaven, could not call the mass of the population to repentance. As a writer on the subject feelingly complains, ‘the young men and maidens no longer delighted to place flowers on the altar of Mary of Scutari; and therefore, their punishment could not be far distant.’”<sup>3</sup>

In this desolate situation, two Albanian soldiers were praying before Our Lady of Scutari when the fresco detached itself from the wall and commenced a miraculous voyage, heading toward the Adriatic Sea. Gripped with holy enthusiasm, the two followed her, first on solid ground, and then striking out to sea, walking on the water!

In this way, without losing sight of the venerated image, they reached the Italian Peninsula. But when they came to the outskirts of Rome, they were plunged into perplexity when their beloved Mother disappeared from sight... Where had she gone? While they searched for Our Lady of Scutari in the Eternal City, the miraculous fresco continued on to Genazzano...

***Promise to Blessed Petruccia***

This city, located 47km from Rome, was the site chosen by Provi-

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to say, ‘Fear not I am your Mother, and you are and shall be my beloved children.’”<sup>1</sup>

Where had this miraculous fresco come from? In view of such a miracle, some promptly said: “From Paradise!” But, as we shall see, it was not long before the enigma was solved, through two Albanian soldiers who arrived in Rome in search of the portrait of their beloved Patroness.

***Our Lady of Good Offices***

Since the thirteenth century, this fresco had been venerated in Albania under the invocation of Our La-

dy of Good Offices. Of unknown authorship, many people to this day do not hesitate to affirm that it is the work of Angels.

In 1467, with the death of the Albanian prince Scanderbeg, there remained no one capable of curbing the advance of enemy hordes which devastated Catholic Albania. It is said that upon learning of his death, Sultan Mehmed II exclaimed: “Finally, Europe and Asia are mine. Disaster has struck Christianity! She has lost her sword and her shield!”<sup>2</sup> Albania gradually succumbed, and all those who desired to remain steadfast in the Faith were



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**In this desolate situation, the fresco detached itself from the wall and commenced a miraculous voyage**

The fresco leaves Albania, by Prospero Piatti - Shrine of the Mother of Good Counsel, Genazzano (Italy)

dence to serve as the treasury for the precious image of the Mother of Good Counsel.

Nestled in a mountain range, Genazzano stands out for its charming simplicity. Compassed about by centuries-old Roman or medieval walls, its enchanting churches are the hideout for artistic treasures; narrow and winding streets offer a host of surprises; humble dwellings with palatial airs captivate pilgrims; the castle of the noble Colonna

family still displays the architectural lines drawn up by Cardinal Odone Colonna, later Pope Martin V (1417-1431); and friendly inhabitants vie with one another in showing devotion to the *Madonna*...

Several years before the arrival of the holy fresco, the Blessed Virgin had revealed to a Genazzano widow—the Augustinian tertiary Petruccia de Nocera—in dreams, her decision to leave Scutari and settle in this secluded corner of Latium. Accordingly, the spiritual daughter of St. Augustine undertook the task of rebuilding the dilapidated and abandoned church of Our Lady of Good Counsel, with the goal of making it worthy to receive her.

Petruccia began by applying all of her inheritance to the rebuilding of the church; then, to bolster her dwindling resources, she sold her personal belongings, keeping just enough to live. But despite her generosity, she barely managed to erect a few walls... scoffing and mockery greeted the “crazy visionary” who had squandered all her belongings. Undaunted, she trusted in the promise of the Lady who was to come, affirming: “Do not worry, my little children; before I die”—she was by this time of an advanced age—“the Blessed Vir-

gin and St. Augustine will complete the restoration work on this church.”<sup>24</sup>

What joy Petruccia must have felt as she witnessed the miraculous arrival of the fresco of Mary in Genazzano, coming to rest alongside one of the church’s walls. She joyfully repeated the phrase of the Apostle: “Hope does not disappoint” (Rom 5:5)! We say *alongside*, for the fresco did not attach itself to the wall, but remained suspended in the air, above the ground, without being fastened from behind, as the historian Raffaele Buonanno confirms: “All these marvels are ultimately summed up in the continuous prodigy that, until today, the image remains in the same place and manner as when it was left there by the cloud on the day of its appearance, in the presence of all the people, whose joy it was to see it for the first time. The fresco hovered not a great height from the ground, at approximately a finger’s width from the new and rustic wall of the chapel of St. Blaise, and there it remained, suspended without any support.”<sup>25</sup>

***Gesture overflowing with love***

A number of faithful souls at once arose, eager to finish the rebuilding of the church, rendering it a fitting dwelling place of



the *Madonna del Paradiso*, the Lady of Genazzano or Mother of Good Counsel, as she came to be known, since she had settled in a church with this invocation.

With the passing of the years, the original church was gradually transformed into a beautiful basilica visited by numerous devotees.

Fervent pilgrims cross the threshold and hasten directly to Our Lady's altar, where they remain in filial colloquies with the Queen of Heaven, or simply wrapt in wonder by her maternal expression.

Contemplating the image of Mary with the Child Jesus, we see that His "right arm encircles the noble and delicate neck of His Mother in a gesture of intense affection. His left hand securely clasps the upper portion of her dress as if to say, "Thou art all Mine!"<sup>6</sup> And the Mother, "even while in sublime adoration of her Son, as though seeking to penetrate His thoughts, still regards the faithful kneeling at her feet. As Mediatrix of all graces, she wel-

comes their prayers and presents them to God Our Lord."<sup>7</sup>

***The "Codex of Miracles"***

Ever since her miraculous arrival in Italy, the *Madonna* of Genazzano has not ceased to work spiritual and physical miracles on behalf of those who devoutly commend themselves to her protection. Proof of this are the reports in the *Codex of Miracles*, a compendium of miraculous episodes occasioned by the

intercession of Our Lady of Genazzano.

There are countless instances of lame, paralytic and the blind persons who were entirely cured of their infirmities upon stepping into the chapel of Our Lady of Good Counsel. In the 110 days following the arrival of Our Lady, 161 miracles were recorded!<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the impressive cures, there are reports of exorcisms, and apparitions of Our La-



**What joy Blessed Petruccia must have felt as she witnessed the miraculous arrival of the fresco of Mary Most Holy in Genazzano, coming to rest alongside one of the walls of the church**

"La Venuta" by Prospero Piatti - Shrine of the Mother of Good Counsel, Genazzano (Italy); above, view of Genazzano with the tower of the Shrine standing out from the cityscape, and the Colonna Castle on the right

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dy to those who pray confidently to the Mother of Good Counsel, even at great distances from Genazzano.

### **All saw the dead man raise his head**

This codex recounts the episode of a nobleman, Lord Antonietto de Castelnuovo, who, dejected at the sudden death of his faithful servant, Costantino de Carolis, gave vent to his sorrow in a flood of tears. He finally cast himself on the floor beside the body and exclaimed: “O Most Holy Virgin of Genazzano, I implore thee, if it be for the best, beseech God on my behalf to return my servant, and I promise to bring him to Genazzano before thy holy image.”<sup>9</sup>

The sovereign Empress of Heaven, Mary, the Most Holy Mother of Good Counsel was pleased to heed this ardent and sorrowful supplication, made with such lively faith. At that very instant, all present were astonished to see the servant raise his head, open his eyes and assume a sitting position. He himself appearing to be startled. He looked at his grieving master and, regaining the use of his speech, he said: “Out of charity, give me a little something to eat.”<sup>10</sup> He then stood up and, ad-

dressing those who surrounded him, declared himself to be cured and free from any discomfort or suffering.

Without delay, they both joyfully set out on the road to Genazzano to offer thanks before the holy fresco for such a great favour.

### **Liberation of a criminal**

In addition to loosening spiritual shackles, the Lady of Good Counsel has not failed to heed those sentenced to death when they turn to her for pardon and help.

Giovanni di Andrea di Sarzano, a malefactor detained in the prison of Siena, had been sentenced to death. A priest tried to convince him to receive the last Sacraments, but in vain, for the condemned man refused to believe he would die...

After unsuccessfully employing every possible means to lead the man to repentance, the priest had nothing left to do but remark: “If the newly-appeared miraculous *Madonna* in Genazzano does not free you from death, you will undoubtedly be in eternity tomorrow.”<sup>11</sup> Exasperated, he left the jail.

In no time at all, Giovanni was face down in the ground, weeping

and exclaiming: “O Most Blessed Virgin, if you grant me this great grace, I will go immediately and prostrate myself at thy feet to thank thee for such a tremendous miracle.”<sup>12</sup> Having said this, the shackles on his ankles broke asunder, and filled with fear and the urge to flee, he set his sights on a small prison window. It was very high, but Giovanni was able to dexterously clamber up to it as if by an invisible ladder. Having gained the top, he looked down with dismay into a yawning chasm. It would be impossible to jump without being broken into pieces... “Taking heart and filled with a lively faith for having seen the shackles miraculously rent asunder, and having been able to ascend to that window without knowing how, he made the Sign of the Cross, fervently commended himself once again to Mary Most Holy of Genazzano and promptly leapt, saying repeatedly as he fell: ‘O Holy Mary of Genazzano, help me.’ Lo, a miracle worthy of the Empress of Heaven! What could be described as a small heavenly cloud lowered him to the ground, safe, sound and in one piece.”<sup>13</sup>



Gustavo Kralj

**Mary’s desire to help troubled souls is so great that even in the ruins of her church in Scutari, she performed stupendous prodigies**

At left, the Church of Our Lady of Scutari today; at right, façade of the Shrine of Good Counsel

## ***Ardent devotee of the Mother of Good Counsel***

**S**t. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, guarded as his greatest treasure a painting of the Mother of Good Counsel which, upon his writing desk, presided over his prolific work of over a hundred books covering delicate theological and moral questions.

Fr. Dillon recounts that the spiritual daughters whom St. Alphonsus guided along the ways of perfection for many years, requested a memento of him when they learned that he would soon depart for eternity. He sent them his beloved painting, with this message: "I leave you my heart."

Alain Patrick



Above, a painting representing the Saint; at left, the writing desk, kept in the cell in which he died in Pagani (Italy)

## ***Reproductions which work miracles***

**F**ollowing close upon the first wonders worked by the Mother of Good Counsel in Genazzano, copies of the fresco began to abound, which also gave rise to extraordinary occurrences.

In 1796, in a beautiful replica of the image of Genazzano venerated in the private oratory of the Ciceroni family, in Frosinone, Our Lady's eyes closed and opened, and moved in different directions. The phenomenon lasted for six months. In the Collegiate Church of St. Isidore, the former Cathedral of Madrid, a painting of Our Lady of Good Counsel spoke with a human voice to St. Aloysius Gonzaga several times, counselling him to enter the Company of Jesus. In São Paulo, Fr. José de Campos Lara, SJ, received a beautiful portrait of this invocation from an unknown youth, who asked him to consign it to the future Jesuit College which would be founded there.



Above, old copies of the fresco venerated in Steyr (Austria) and Modena (Italy); in larger size, the painting of Fr. José de Campos Lara, today in the internal chapel of São Luís College, in São Paulo

## *Suspended in mid-air for five centuries*

Ever since arriving in Genazzano, the Holy Fresco has remained inexplicably suspended in the air close to one of the walls of the church, without, however, touching it. The chief historians of the Shrine offer the following reports.

Fr. Angelo Maria De Orgio, OSA, wrote in the eighteenth century: “The celestial painting was upheld by divine power one finger’s distance from the wall, suspended without being fastened to it, and this is a miracle all the more stupendous if we consider that the image in question is painted in vivid colours on a fine layer of plaster, with which it separated itself from the church in Scutari, Albania. And it is, moreover, a fact proven by experiment and by observation that, when touched, the holy image yields.”

In the following century, Fr. Raffael Buonanno pointed out, as we have seen, the “continuous prodigy that, until today, the image remains in the same place and manner as when it was left there by the cloud on the day of its appearance [...] The fresco hovered not a great height from the ground, at approximately a finger’s width from the new and rustic wall of the chapel of St.



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Blaise, and there it remained, suspended without any support.

And Msgr. George F. Dillon, after extensive research, confirms with absolute assurance: “1) that the holy image has never withdrawn from the position which it so miraculously chose; and 2) that all those who have examined it over the course of the centuries have attested that they consider it to be completely isolated, without any support whatsoever.”

Hearing the news and aware that the supernatural intervention had spread far and wide, the municipal authorities freed the man. Repentant, overjoyed, and grateful, Giovanni headed for Genazzano for an encounter with his maternal liberator.

### *The fresco of the Mother of Good Counsel*

The holy fresco of Our Lady is especially remarkable for one point in particular: the Lady of Genazzano not only counsels by making her messages felt internally in souls; quite often, she also manifests them externally.

It is well known that the fresco of Our Lady of Good Counsel acts in varied ways with faithful, depending on what she wishes to say. Her colouring and facial expressions fluctuate during her “conversion” with her devotee. She smiles if she wants them to feel her joy, but shows a serious mien when she wishes to convey her displeasure with some situation. Some affirm that they have seen her breathe! This is why photos taken on different occasions depict the image with a variety of nuances.

We grow in admiration for Our Lady of Good Counsel when we learn that for almost 550 years, the fresco behind the silver retable is inexplicably suspended in mid-air, close to the wall of the chapel, as numerous proofs indicate.<sup>14</sup>

But the Mother of Good Counsel also works marvels similar to those of the original fresco in copies spread worldwide, even with similar

<sup>1</sup> DILLON, George F. *The Virgin Mother of Good Counsel*. Rome: Propaganda Fide, 1884, p.78-79.

<sup>2</sup> PASTOR, Ludwig von. *The History of the Popes*. 2.ed. London: Kegan Paul,

Trench, Trübner & Co, 1900, v.IV, p.90.

<sup>3</sup> DILLON, op. cit., p.106.

<sup>4</sup> AMBROGIO, apud ADDEO, OESA, Agostino Felice. *Divinamente apparve questa immagine il 25 aprile 1467. Storia e tradizione*. 2.ed.

Genazzano: Santuario Madonna del Buon Consiglio, 2003, p.33.

<sup>5</sup> BUONANNO, Raffaele. *Memorie storiche della immagine di Maria Santissima del Buon Consiglio che si venera in Genazzano*. 2.ed.

Napoli: Tipografia dell’Immacolata, 1880, p.44.

<sup>6</sup> CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. *Mãe do Bom Conselho*. São Paulo: Artpress, 1995, p.30.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, p.34.

physiognomic changes. Mary's desire to help troubled souls is so great that even in the ruins of her church in Scutari, she performed stupendous prodigies.<sup>15</sup>

***“Remember her in all your difficulties”***

While devotion to the miraculous fresco is most well known in Italy, the invocation has spread worldwide. There are devotees of the Mother of Good Counsel in all of Europe, as well as in Brazil and in several other countries of the Americas.

Many Popes and Saints have borne a deep filial affection for Our Lady of Good Counsel, including St. Pius V, Urban VIII, Blessed Pius IX, Leo XIII, St. Pius X, St. John XXIII, St. John Paul II, St. Alphonsus Maria Liguori, Blessed Stefano Belle-sini—parish priest of Genazzano and a great devotee of the Queen of Good Counsel<sup>16</sup>—, and St. John Bosco among others.

The Holy Mother of God, called by the Fathers of the Church *Universal Counsellor*,<sup>17</sup> certainly stands ready to help one and all in the great battle of life, for “She is charitable. She is generous, helpful, protective, and caressing. She forgives, restores, and blesses. She calms the storms, solves the unsolvable, assists us in all dangers, and defends us from our enemies. [...] What does she ask in return for so many benefits? One thing only: that you remember her in all your difficulties.”<sup>18</sup> She could not ask for less... ✧



**“She solves the unsolvable, assists us in all dangers, and defends us from our enemies; and in return, she asks one thing only: that you remember her in all your difficulties”**

Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP, before the miraculous fresco, in October of 2002

## ***The Story of Mater Boni Consilii told by Msgr. João***

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and amplified edition of the book, “Mãe do Bom Conselho” [Mother of Good Counsel] by Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias has just been released.

Deeply devoted to the Madonna of Genazzano, the author undertook this project in thanksgiving for a very special favour received. It details the enchanting story of the extraordinary fresco of the Virgin Mary and some of the uncountable

miracles experienced by devotees of the Mother of Good Counsel, which have brought about true transformations in souls.

The timing of the new edition could not be better. With society immersed in chaos, man finds himself more in need of good counsel today than ever before.



<sup>8</sup> Cf. DE ORGIO, Angelo Maria. *Istoriche notizie della prodigiosa apparizione dell'immagine di Maria Santissima del Buon Consiglio, nella chiesa dei Padri Agostiniani di Genazzano*. Roma: S. Michele, 1748, p.86-115.

<sup>9</sup> Idem, p.51.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Idem, p.58.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> Idem, p.59.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. ADDEO, op. cit., p.185.

<sup>15</sup> Today the church of Our Lady in Scutari has been rebuilt.

<sup>16</sup> See a brief biography of the Blessed in: CAMPOS, EP, Juliane Vasconcelos Almeida. Under the Shield of “Good Counsel”. In: *Her-*

*alds of the Gospel*. Nobleton. Vol. 4, No. 28 (Feb., 2010); p.34-37.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. LEO XIII. *Decretum Urbi et Orbi*, 22/4/1903.

<sup>18</sup> CLÁ DIAS, op. cit., p.245-246.