


2017

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Murzaku, Ines A. (2017) "Ad maiorem Dei gloriam: The Jesuits in Albania," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 37 : Iss. 6 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol37/iss6/4>

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Ad maiorem Dei gloriam: THE JESUITS IN ALBANIA

By Ines A. Murzaku

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Introduction

When Pope Francis addressed students, teachers, and parents of the Jesuit schools of Italy and Albania in 2013, he discussed the core and the value of a Jesuit-Catholic education, which in essence follows St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*. The Jesuits in all multifarious activities and apostolates put Jesus in the center, thereby making him the prototype. It was Jesus who had trodden a novel way for the Society of Jesus to follow and that meant to live a meaningful life, live well, and live joyfully among the people they were serving. It was Jesus that invited the path was gratuitously provided. Thus, Jesus became the core of the core of a Jesuit education. Education for the Society of Jesus is the formation that brings about and allows room for growth "developing intelligence, but also an integral formation of all the aspects of your personality."¹ Jesuit education inspires students to seek for more and live enthusiastically. Moreover, St. Ignatius of Loyola left a distinctive gem in

¹Address of Pope Francis to the Students of Jesuit Schools of Italy and Albania, Paul VI Audience Hall, Friday, 7 June 2013 <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/june/documents/papa-francesco_20130607_scuole-gesuiti.html >

Jesuit education: teaching and learning the virtue of magnanimity, which means educating to “have greatness of mind; ... great ideals, the wish to do great things to respond to what God asks of us.”² The magnanimity of Jesuit education entails a big heart open to Christ and to the human ideals that correspond to the Gospel.³ Francis concluded his 2013 speech by blessing the audience saying: “The Lord is always close to you, he picks you up when you fall and impels you to develop and to make ever loftier decisions, ‘*con grande ánimo y liberalidad*,’ with magnanimity. *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.”⁴

The same principles of Jesuit education Pope Francis discussed in 2013 were applied in nineteenth century Albania, when the Society of Jesus was established in the country. The Jesuits were faithful followers of Jesus; were Catholic to the core; taught magnanimity, fortitude, and audacity; and encouraged hope and joy and living life with enthusiasm. The Jesuits believe that the world is imbued with the magnificence of God, and that students need to transcend self and find their ultimate call. And there is the crux where they find God.

The activities of the Jesuits in Albania were manifold: educational (Pontifical Albania Seminary, St. Francis Xavier High School); apostolic and charitable activities (Marian Congregation, Apostleship of Prayer, Eucharist Crusade, Sacred Heart Orphanage, etc.) missionary (Travelling Mission); cultural (Jesuit Library Collection, Jesuit Museum); printing and publishing (*Leka*, *Vepra Pijore*) and other activities. The history of the Jesuits in Albania is dialogical—a dialogue of the Society of Jesus with Albania and Albanians while mediating with what Pope Francis calls creative fidelity the indications that come from the Magisterium of the

² Ibid.

³ Kevin Spinale, “The Intellectual Pedigree of the virtue of Magnanimity in the Jesuit Constitutions,” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2, (2015), p. 469.

⁴ Ibid.

Church⁵ to the particular Albanian situation. They followed the Ignatian notion of not imposing on history, but rather conversing with history⁶ and then becoming a part of history and the people who were living the history. The Albanian history of the Society of Jesus was one of enculturation and mutual enrichment, a cross-pollination that happens when the Gospel touches people and history. The Jesuits left an impact on Albania and were affected in return—many of them became Albanians by choice. The Jesuits were faithful to the doctrine of the Church and faithful to and respectful of the culture and the people they were serving.

This article will focus on the history of the Society of Jesus in Albania: Jesuits' educational-intellectual contributions by exploring the history of two major institutions of learning: Pontifical Albanian Seminary and St. Francis Xavier College from 1841-1946, after which religion was banned in Albania and the Church became the Church of the catacombs. After the fall of communism, the Jesuits returned to Albania and the two institutions explored in this article were revived after almost fifty years of suppression. The Pontifical Albanian Seminary, which was closed in 1946, opened its doors on February 8, 1992, under the leadership of the Society of Jesus with 30 seminarians enrolled.⁷ St. Francis Xavier College, now *Pjetër Meshkalla High School*—named after Fr. Pjetër Meshkalla S.J., a Jesuit martyr of the communist persecution, was opened in 1994. In sum, through their educational, cultural, and missionary activities, which are here analyzed based on archival, never-before-published primary sources,

⁵ Pope Francis, Audience with the Community of the Pontifical Campano Seminary of Posillipo, 06.05.2017, <<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/05/06/170506a.html> >

⁶ George Mario Bergoglio, *Chi sono i Gesuiti, Storia della Compagnia di Gesù*, (Bologna: EMI Publications, 2014), p. 14.

⁷ “Relazione sullo svolgimento del 1 anno di vita del Seminario Interdiocesano di Scutari – Albania,” Archive of the Venetian Province, Gallarate, Varese (AVP) pp. 1-2.

the Jesuits were among the principal supporters and custodians of Albania's national, cultural, and religious traditions.⁸

The Jesuits' Indirect-Direct Impact on Albania

In his personal reflections on the Jesuit educational and cultural contributions in Albania, Fr. Fulvio Cordignano S.J. (1887-1952), a distinguished Jesuit scholar, historian, and missionary, answered the question on why the Jesuits went to Albania, given that Albania's Catholics were a minority: "to contribute in preserving ... the traditional Roman Catholic faith ... to help pave the road of civilization and Catholic culture in this region of the world which is a gate to the Orient/East, that same culture and civilization that Scanderbeg, Albanian Catholic hero *par excellence*, fought for."⁹ This is an accurate assessment of the Jesuit mission in Albania. What Cordignano had in mind was probably the permanent Jesuit mission in Albania, which began in 1841. Until then the Jesuits did not have their own mission in Albania, even in the coastal Albanian cities including the city of Durrës on the Adriatic Sea, which historically had kept the channels of communication and relationship with Rome open. However, the Society of Jesus's contacts with Albania and Albanians began well before the nineteenth century. The Society particularly contributed to educating Albanian clergy in Italy via three colleges: the Greek College of Saint Athanasius (1576) in Rome, the Illyrian College of Loreto (1580) in Loreto, and the College of the Propagation of Faith (1627) in Rome.

The Greek College of St. Athanasius is the earliest among Eastern Orthodox Colleges of Rome. Pope Gregory XIII, with the Bull of January 13, 1576, in *Apostolicae Sedis specula*,

⁸ Ines A. Murzaku, ed., "Between East and West: Albania's Monastic Mosaic," in *Monasticism in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics*, (Oxon and New York: Routledge 2016), p. 257.

⁹ Fulvio Cordignano, "L'opera dei PP. Gesuiti nell'Albania del Nord, 1841-1928," Central State Archive of Tirana (CSAT), Year. 1928, Dossier 243, File 134, p. 1.

founded the college,¹⁰ which still functions today. The college was initially put under Dominican leadership, while the Jesuits took over the college's leadership beginning in 1624. The Society of Jesus directed it for almost 149 years (1624-1773) until its suppression in 1773. The college was open and accepted Orthodox, Greek, Italian-Albanian, and Albanian students. Besides Albanian clergy, the Jesuits trained Albanian Orthodox clergy, as Albania at the time lacked all schools and seminaries.¹¹ Additionally, the Greek College of St. Athanasius prepared a large number of *Arbëreches* (Italian-Albanian) clergy of Byzantine tradition coming from Southern Italy—Calabria and Sicily, including Luca Matranga from *Piana degli Greci* in Sicily, who translated the first Albanian catechism published in Rome in 1592. The catechism is considered one of the first literary documents of the Italian-Albanian existence in Sicily and Calabria. Moreover, the Greek College of Rome trained the sixteenth and seventeenth century Basilian missionaries who were sent to Himara, Southern Albania, “to keep alive the Christian faith, to promote Christian morality among the locals, to observe the precepts of the Church, and to celebrate and make the faithful frequently participate in Church's sacraments to seek unity with the Orthodox,”¹² also working on union with the Orthodox.

Besides St. Athanasius, the Illyrian College of Loreto in Italy founded by Pope Gregory XIII in 1580 and put under Jesuit leadership gave an important contribution in the education of Albanian clergy. The college was established in the small Italian town of Loreto next to the Holy House of Loreto and was directed by the Jesuits. The college's mission was to train Catholic missionaries—forty young Illyrian novices per year—who would be ready to preach in regions

¹⁰ Eleuterio Fortino, *S. Atanasio, Chiesa di Rito Greco*, Chiesa di S. Atanasio, Roma 1970, p. 3-6.

¹¹ Carmelo Capizzi, “I gesuiti italiani in Albania nei secoli XIX e XX,” *Atti del Congresso sulle relazioni tra Italia e Albania*, Ancona-Fabriano-Senigallia, 30 genn. - 1 febb. 1992, p. 108.

¹² Ines A. Murzaku, “The Basilian Monks and their Missions in 17th-18th centuries to Chimara (Himara) Southern Albania,” *The Downside Review*, Sage Publishing, 2017, Vol. 135(1) p. 24.

threatened by Protestantism, Orthodoxy, and Islam.¹³ The Albanian bishop Frang Bardhi (1606-1643) was trained by the Jesuits at the Illyrian College of Loreto and later in the College of Propaganda Fide in Rome. Prior to becoming a bishop of the diocese of Zadrina in Albania, he published among other studies the *Latin-Epiroticum Dictionarium* (Latin Epirotic Dictionary) in 1635, which remains a fundamental work for the Albanian language history and lexicography with 5,640 entries, and *Georgius Castriottus Epiensis vulgo Scanderbegh* (George Castrioti of Epirus commonly called Scanderbegh), which was a biography in Latin focusing on Albania's national hero George Kastrioti Skanderbeg, published in Venice in 1636. Another distinguished Jesuit-educated Albanian first in the Illyrian College of Loreto and later the College of the Propagation of Faith in Rome was Pjetër Bogdani or Pietro Bogdano in Italian (ca. 1630-1689), who held degrees in philosophy and theology and is one of the most important and original figures of early Albanian literature. Bogdani was appointed Bishop of Shkodër (Scutari) in 1656, and in 1677, Archbishop of Skopje and Administrator of the Kingdom of Serbia. Bogdani authored the first substantial theological work published in Albanian and Italian entitled *Cuneus prophetarum* (The Band of Prophets). The two volumes were published in Padua in 1685 through the financial assistance of the Venerable Cardinal Marc Antonio Barbarigo (1640-1706). Bogdani's work is the masterpiece of Albanian literature noted for its artistic and high literary sophistication.

First Jesuits in Albania—The Men behind the Mission

In 1841, three Jesuit missionaries from the Reign of Two Sicilies, Frs. Vincenzo Basile, Giuseppe Guagliata, and Salvatore Bartoli arrived in Albania. The Congregation for the Propagation of Faith had secured a commendation from the Austrian embassy, and a special

¹³ John V.A. Fine Jr., *When Ethnicity Did Not Matter in the Balkans: A Study of Identity in Pre-Nationalist Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), footnote 478, p. 429.

recommendation from the Prince of Metternich¹⁴ for the missionaries to be settled in the city of Shkodër, northern Albania, which had a concentration of Catholics, a minority in Albania. The authorization was needed as Albania, at the time, was under the Ottoman Empire and an Ottoman territory. The question is: who were the first three Jesuit missionaries on mission in Albania?

Fr. Vincenzo Basile S.J. (1818-1882) was the founder of the Albanian Jesuit Mission.¹⁵ Born in Sicily, in the Diocese of Agrigento (Girgenti) on December 29, 1811, Basile entered the Jesuit novitiate of Palermo at the age of sixteen.¹⁶ After finishing the course of study, excelling in both theology and philosophy, he taught humanities in Marsala, Trapani (Sicily), where he also worked and served the Catholic population. In the third year of probation, he developed an interest in sacred pilgrimages, gave public spiritual exercises, and lead spiritual retreats for the local parishes. In 1841, Basile was appointed to Albanian missions of the Society of Jesus and later to Dalmatia. For more than three decades, the Sicilian Jesuit worked relentlessly to spread the Gospel and instruct the people of Albania, Trebinje in Herzegovina, Ragusa, and other Slavic areas. In 1872, his superiors called him back to Agrigento, and later he retired and died in Palermo on March 3, 1882.

Fr. Giuseppe Guagliata S.J. (ca. 1814-?) was from Palermo, Sicily. He finished his studies in Collegio Massimo dei Gesuiti (Jesuit Massimo College) founded in 1586 and entered the Society of Jesus in 1827 at the age of sixteen. Before his Albanian mission, Guagliata taught in Palermo and Salemi in Trapani (Sicily). Fr. Guagliata was a man of many talents. He excelled

¹⁴ Vincenzo Basile, "Il ventinove gennaio del MDCCCXLIII in Scutari di Albania." Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu, Rome, Italy (ARSI), *Missones Albaniensis et Illyrico-Dalmatia*, 1834-1940, *Missones Albaniensis et Illyrico-Dalmatia*, 1834-1940 (MAID), vol. 1, Fasc. 2: "Missio Scodrensis (Scutari in Albania), April. 1841-Jan. 1843," p. 16.

¹⁵ Vincenzo Basile, founder of the Albanian Mission of the Jesuits. Obituary, CSAT, Y. 1938, D. 103, F. 134, p. 1.

¹⁶ Leanza, to the provincial, CSAT, Y. 1938, D.103, F. 134, p. 1.

in the study of sacred sciences, foreign languages, music, and design. As he was the only child, his parents who were very attached to him were not happy when their son decided to go on mission in far-away foreign lands and wrote letters to the Superior General of the Jesuits, begging him to convince their son to reconsider his decision to enter the Jesuits. Guagliata, who knew of his parents' correspondence with the superior, wrote another letter informing the superior that his decision was final. Fr. Giuseppe Valentini S.J., one of the most distinguished Jesuit scholars of Albanian history, wrote that Guagliata's mother came from the Marchese's family, of ancient Albanian origin, probably originating from the Albanians who moved to Southern Italy from Albania and Greece during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Valentini observed that even currently among Italian-Albanians of Sicily, there is a Marchese family.¹⁷ In all probability, Guagliata had learned Albanian-Arbëreche language, from his mother, because when he first set foot in Shkodër, he was quickly able to speak and write, and converse in the Gheg (one of two major dialects of Albanian) and within a few months, he was able to publish a catechism in Albanian.¹⁸ The work proved to be a milestone in the history of the Albanian language.

Fr. Salvatore Bartoli S.J. (?) was also a Sicilian by origin, from Mazzarino, Caltanissetta. Very early in life, the future Fr. Bartoli developed an intense desire to serve the poor and the marginalized. Even when he was a teacher first in Palermo and later in Caltanissetta, Bartoli never rested. After long hours of instruction, he worked as a laborer in the afternoon. Moreover, Bartoli was known for his prison ministry in Vicaria—public prison of Palermo—which became the set of the successful fable written in Sicilian dialect entitled: *I Mafiusi di la Vicaria* (The Mafiosi of the Vicaria). Bartoli brought hope and solace to prisoners of Vicaria and their

¹⁷ Giuseppe Valentini, "La missione dei gesuiti e la cultura albanese," *Spiritualita*, 1974, p. 18.

¹⁸ Ines A. Murzaku, *Catholicism, Culture, Conversion: The History of the Jesuits in Albania (1841-1946)*. Orientalia Christiana Analecta 27, (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2006), p. 68.

families. Vicaria was notorious for the cruel, inhuman, and degrading conditions in which the prisoners lived. The prisoners were also deprived of any spiritual assistance. With the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, the situation in Vicaria became even worse as prisoners were completely abandoned and deprived of any spiritual sustenance¹⁹ by religious orders. The Sicilian experience in instruction and prison ministry proved beneficial for Bartoli when he left Sicily for Albania. In Albania, Bartoli was known especially for his teaching skills and working closely with students. He taught Latin grammar and arithmetic, and this latter subject proved to be a highly useful and needed skill for Shkodran students who after school assisted in their family businesses. In addition, Bartoli taught sacred history and geography.

In 1840, the Superior General of the Jesuits, Jan Roothaan (1785-1853), summoned the three Sicilian Jesuits, Bartoli, Basile and Guagliata to Rome. They were probably surprised when they received news from the superior that their mission was to be in Albania. Basile, in his letter to Roothaan, thanked the superior for assigning him to foreign missions of the Society,²⁰ so he must have been pleased to go to foreign missions in general. Guagliata was more than optimistic about his missionary assignment: “I will go and convert souls to God,”²¹ he wrote in an 1840 letter to the superior general of the Jesuits. In November 1840, the three missionaries departed by sea, reaching Naples and then Rome. As soon as they arrived in Rome, they had a private meeting with the superior. The Superior Council of France had donated 17,000 francs. Six thousand from the donation were allocated to the Albanian mission.²² When the three

¹⁹ Alessio Narbone, *Annali Siculi della Compagnia di Gesù 1805-1859*, Volume Quarto, Deca Quarta - II Quinquennio, 1840-1844, p. 36. <https://archive.org/stream/annalisticulidell04narb/annalisticulidell04narb_djvu.txt> accessed on June 5, 2017.

²⁰ Giuseppe Guagliata, to Roothaan, Palermo, March 26, 1840; Bartoli, to Roothaan, Caltanissetta, April 6, 1840; Basile, to Roothaan, May, 11, 1840. MAID 1, Fasc. 1: “Origo Missionis Albaniensis (Scodrensis) Prima Sociorum expedito (1834-1839) Jan. to April 1841,” p. 1-3.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ines A. Murzaku, *Catholicism, Culture, Conversion: The History of the Jesuits in Albania (1841-1946)*. Orientalia Christiana Analecta 27, (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2006), p. 68.

missionaries were in Rome, they were able to receive additional training in missions, special instruction in the history and culture of Albania, and some basic medical training, which had proven to be beneficial to the missionaries in the past. Before departure, they consecrated their journey and the new Albanian mission to the greater glory of God—*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, the motto of the Society of Jesus.

However, the three Sicilian Jesuits were not the first Jesuits to set foot in Albania. More accurately, they were the second contingent of missionaries to Albania. Bartoli, Basile, and Guagliata were “following in the footsteps of the sixteenth century predecessors, Aleksandar Komulovich and Tommaso Raggio S. J.”²³ who had visited Albania in 1595.²⁴ Komulovich and Raggio were highly experienced missionaries. Raggio was a Jesuit and had a previous experience in the Balkans as he was head of the 1574 mission in Cattaro at the summons of the bishop Paolo Bisanti.²⁵ Four years later, in 1578, after the apostolic visit of Cattaro and Albania, Raggio was in mission to Mount Lebanon to hold talks with the Maronite patriarch. He was expected to report back to Rome on the beliefs of the Maronites.²⁶ Komulovich, who was not a Jesuit, was an experienced diplomat and missionary from Split who was working under the direction of Pope Clement VIII on organizing a Pan-Slavic military action against the Ottoman Turks to liberate the South Slavs. In preparation for their Albanian mission, Komulovich and Raggio had begun the translation and publication of the first catechism in Albanian. They ordered the printing of 500 copies, which Raggio took with him and distributed among the people during his visit to Albania.²⁷ Unfortunately, no copy of this catechism remains. Albania was part of their apostolic

²³ “Il contributo culturale dei Gesuiti al risorgimento nazionale Albanese,” CSAT, D. 134, F. 134, p. 1.

²⁴ Murzaku, *Catholicism, Culture, Conversion: The History of the Jesuits in Albania (1841-1946)*. p. 69.

²⁵ Antal Molnar, “A Forgotten Bridgehead between Rome, Venice, and the Ottoman Empire: Cattaro and the Balkan Missions in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Hungarian Historical Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2014, p. 504.

²⁶ Alastair Hamilton, *The Copts and the West, 1439-1822: The European Discovery of the Egyptian Church* (Oxford-Warburg Studies), (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 68.

²⁷ Robert Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History*. (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2005), p. 31.

visitation of the Balkans. Moreover, Raggio was the first rector of the Illyrian College of Loreto in Italy, whereas Komulovich had not taken his final vows when he was in mission in the Balkans. The missionaries visited the main Catholic centers of the region including Prizren, Shkup, Janjevo, Novobërdë, Trepçë, Prokuple, Nish, and Pristinë.²⁸ The importance of their mission to the Balkans was that Raggio and Komulovich left behind reports of the places they visited in the Archive of the Propaganda Fide in Rome and in the private Archive of the Jesuit Curia in Rome. One of the main recommendations that Raggio and Komulovich made was the opening of schools and instruction for the young generation of Albanians.

Since September 1834, the Propaganda Fide and Jan Roothaan S.J., the Superior General of the Jesuits, had been discussing the possibility of founding a seminary in Albania. In a letter of Propaganda Fide, dated September 14, 1834, addressed to Roothaan, Propaganda Fide argued in favor of building an inter-diocesan seminary in the city of Shkodër. The seminary was planned to serve all Albanian cities and dioceses and provide training to future national clergy. From the correspondence of the Bishop of Shkodër, Luigi Guglielmi, with Roothaan, it is apparent that the bishop preferred the Jesuits take the leadership of the seminary, which besides the initial plan of serving the dioceses of Albania, would also serve the nearby dioceses Serbia and Macedonia.

The three Jesuits, Basile, Bartoli and Guagliata, reached the city of Shkodër in mid-April of 1841. In a letter to Roothaan, on April 22, 1841, Guglielmi wrote that the Jesuit missionaries were welcomed in the city and he promised to the Jesuit superior that he was going to “consider them (the missionaries) as his sons.”²⁹ The three Sicilian Jesuits received welcome visits from the principal authorities of the city, who for the most part were Muslims. In fact, according to their extensive correspondence with Rome, it took them three days to welcome and

²⁸ Gasper Gjini, *Ipeshkvia Shkup-Prizren*. (Prizren: Drita 1992), pp. 155-164.

²⁹ Luigi Guglielmi, to Roothaan, Shkodër, April 22, 1841. MAID 1, Fasc. 2, p. 4.

then exchange visits with the city dignitaries, following Albanian local customs. The impressions the missionaries had of Shkodër were described in detail in their long and frequent correspondence with Roothaan and with their friends and families in Italy. Shkodër was, for the most part, plains made up of 30,000 inhabitants, of whom 20,000 were Muslim. The missionaries were impressed by the Rozofat citadel, which sits at the top of a mountain overlooking, and in a way ruling over, the entire city of Shkodër.³⁰ In addition, they were impressed by the particular architecture of the Shkodran houses: high, whitewashed walls surrounded the houses and in the inside, there was usually a well-taken-care-of either vegetable or flower garden. The city was “very aesthetic” in taste and architecture, as Bartoli described it in his letters.³¹ As for the quality of life, Shkodër had a lot to offer. One could find everything at a reasonable price. With as little as three *piastres* a day, which corresponded to three Sicilian *carlins*,³² one could make a good living in the city. The city, according to the missionaries’ reports to Rome, had flourishing commerce, but poverty was also noticeable and quite profound, as in all countries under the Ottomans.³³ The land in Shkodër was fertile, but was abandoned and not cultivated.³⁴ The meadowlands were abundant and pleasing to the eye. The public market, which was only two miles away from the city center, had unique architecture. It had 3,000 specialized shops and boutiques. When the missionaries arrived in Shkodër, the city was subject to the Sublime Porte, and the Catholic faithful the Jesuits were going to serve were a minority. Besides the majority of Muslim Albanians, there were Roma and Montenegrins—who were of mixed religion (Catholic and Orthodox); and Albanian Eastern Orthodox living in Shkodër.

³⁰ Murzaku, *Catholicism, Culture, Conversion*, p. 73.

³¹ Salvatore Bartoli, to L. Bartoli, Shkodër, May 9, 1841. MAID 1, Fasc. 2, p. 5.

³² Money used in various regions of Italy, especially in the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

³³ “Breve relazione della missione di Scutari in Albania, June 30, 1842.” MAID 1, Fasc. 2, p. 7.

³⁴ A. Murzaku, *Catholicism, Culture, Conversion*, p. 73.

However, the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries was not viewed positively by several outspoken individuals in the Muslim community. Muslims believed that the arrival of foreign missionaries from Rome was indicative that more Italian missionaries were on the way. The Muslims of Shkodër were known for their intolerance and disobedience to the sultan, well before the arrival of the missionaries. The missionaries noticed that almost all Muslims were allowed to carry weapons, something not allowed to Christians.

Nevertheless, the missionaries noticed strong faith among the Shkodran Catholics. Bartoli, in one of his 1841 letters to his family in Italy, gave a vivid description of the celebrations of Holy Week, especially Holy Thursday in Shkodër, where 8,000 men and women participated. As churches were very scarce in Shkodër at the time, Holy Week was celebrated in an open field. According to Bartoli's letter, neither the torrential rain nor the burning sun held the Albanian faithful back from attending the events of the Holy Week.³⁵ To western missionaries, seeing the faithful sitting *alla Turka* ³⁶ at Mass was a novel experience. However, in spite of the profound faith among Catholics, the missionaries noticed old superstitions. "To tell the truth the Shkodrans were full of ancient faith mixed with superstitions,"³⁷ Bartoli wrote. Albania provided a vast field of apostolate: to evangelize and sanctify, baptize and hear confessions, preach and teach and engage in other spiritual exercises with the people.

A Hard Beginning Makes a Good Ending: The Pontifical Albanian Seminary's Hard Beginnings

The founding of the Pontifical Albanian Seminary made history, as the unsteady political-religious situation in Albania and its stakeholders were all at play. The founding of the inter-diocesan seminary and its construction was full of perils and persecution which led twice to

³⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

³⁶ Sitting on the floor usually with crossed legs.

³⁷ Salvatore Bartoli to L. Bartoli, Shkodër May 9, 1841. MAID 1, Fasc. 2, p. 6.

abandoning the construction enterprise and the seminary project altogether. Just when initial construction work of the seminary building was finished, the Ottoman authorities intervened, halting further work on the building and forcing the Jesuits to return to Italy.³⁸ Here is how the history of the seminary developed.

On February 24, 1842, Guglielmi wrote to the Superior General of the Jesuits, Jan Roothaan, that Propaganda Fide had approved his request for the foundation of the local seminary.³⁹ The bishop and the local Catholic clergy of Shkodër, who had provided hospitality to the Jesuits for a year and witnessed their work, were impressed by the zeal and hard work of the missionaries, their instruction in schools, and other missionary activities they were working on during their first year in Albania. The general consensus was that the Jesuits would contribute to spiritual regeneration of the Albanian dioceses by taking charge of the new seminary and training the seminarians who would impact the future of Catholicism in Albania.

The first matter to resolve was the location of the seminary. The bishop and clergy seemed to agree that the house where the Jesuits were currently holding a school would be an appropriate location for the inter-diocesan seminary. The house was big and could be remodeled to fit the needs of the new institution. It seemed that the Christian leaders of Shkodër had resolved the issue of the gathering of the Catholic faithful in a predominantly Muslim neighborhood with the city authorities. Moreover, Guglielmi, given his position as bishop and procurator of the church of Shkodër, had purchased the property in his name on June 26, 1842, through a public act which was registered at the office of the Ottoman *qadi*⁴⁰ following the Ottoman-local rules and regulations for property purchasing. Two weeks later, on July 10, 1842,

³⁸ Palok Plaku, "The Jesuits in Albania. A Century of Service to Christ and Country," *Albanian Catholic Bulletin*, IX, 1988, pp. 55-56.

³⁹ Luigi Guglielmi to Roothaan, Shkodër, February 24, 1842. MAID 1, Fasc. 2, p. 12.

⁴⁰ An Islamic judge, scholar, and religious teacher.

according to Guiglielmi's letters to the Propaganda Fide, the bishop had prepared a private document, which prescribed the transfer of the rights of ownership in perpetuity to the missions of the Society of Jesus in Albania. Besides housing the seminary, the property was going to be used as a residence for the missionaries, and a chapel was planned to be built inside the residence. Most importantly, the property, located near the Muslim neighborhood, had the benefit that it had an exit to the Catholic neighborhood of the city, which was going to be used in order not to disturb the Muslim neighbors. However, from the extensive correspondence of the Jesuit missionaries with the superior general Roothaan, it seems that Roothaan might have been against building a residence without first having in hand the *firman*, or permit, from Constantinople, which Basile himself was very conscious of not having at the time the construction started. Basile in his letter to Roothaan admitted that Ottoman law absolutely prohibited foreigners from digging even a handful of land in Ottoman territories, which was the case with Albania. In fact, according to the missionaries' correspondence, the *firman* from Constantinople did not arrive until December 10, 1842, when construction of the seminary was well under way.⁴¹

Additionally, not all Muslims were pleased with the presence of Jesuit missionaries in Shkodër and their mission-residence, which was located near a Muslim neighborhood. Some Muslim families who lived in the vicinity of the Jesuit house complained to the Ottoman Municipal Council of the city and then to Abdi Pasha, the local *pasha*,⁴² that they did not want the missionaries living near them and their mosque. One of the Muslim neighbors, Ali, threatened to burn down the Jesuit residence. He seemed to have no problem with the seminary but did not like the Jesuits taking residence near his house. Other Muslim neighbors raised issues

⁴¹ Murzaku, Ines, *Catholicism, Culture, Conversion*, p. 87.

⁴² Title of a high rank officer in the Ottoman Empire.

regarding the Catholics gathering or passing by continuously through the streets of the Muslim neighborhood.

Abdi Pasha, who respected and held in esteem the Jesuits and the Society of Jesus in general, had publicly stated that “nobody would molest the missionaries in exercising their ministries,”⁴³ but he also recommended that Jesuits avoid big crowds and gatherings of people in the streets for the sake of peace and tranquility in the city and not to stir any controversy with Muslims. By the end of 1842, the Austrian Vice Consul of Shkodër, Dr. Vincenzo Ballarini, and Abdi Pasha strongly recommended that the Jesuits move to the new residence as soon as possible. Abdi Pasha, who was supportive of the Jesuit mission and the inter-diocesan seminary was near the end of his term as governor and with a new governor in power, obstacles could arise for the successful completion of the Jesuit complex-project. The city leaders thought that once the building was completed, there would be no room for controversy and opposition on the part of the Muslims. After much hard labor on the part of the missionaries who worked side by side with the builders, the Jesuits were able to move to the new residence on January 22, 1843 in the middle of winter. The new house was damp and cold, but time was pressing. No one had ever imagined that the missionaries would stay in the new home for only eight days. No one would have also imagined that an edifice built with so much toil over six months would have been demolished in only six days.⁴⁴

On January 29, 1843, Osman Pasha, the newly appointed pasha of Shkodër who replaced Abdi Pasha, and his supporters restricted the practice of Catholicism in the city. All liturgical functions were suspended for Catholics. The Jesuits and Catholic clergy were prevented from celebrating Mass, even in their private chapels. The reasoning behind the Catholic persecution

⁴³ Antonio Bassich to Roothaan, Kotor, February 21, 1843. MAID 1, Fasc. 2, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Murzaku, *Catholicism, Culture, Conversion*, p. 90.

was that the Pasha and the Muslim leaders did not want foreign priests and bishops in the city, which was an Ottoman territory. The Jesuits' contacts with the Catholic faithful were curtailed. The missionaries were put under surveillance, and sometimes they feared for their lives. The new government prohibitions and restrictions on Catholic religion paralyzed the mission of the Jesuits in Albania all together. In only six days, the new construction complex of the Jesuits was entirely leveled to the ground and the Jesuits were expelled from their new residence and ordered to return to Italy together with the Bishop Guiglielmi.

After five years, in 1848, a second attempt to build the inter-diocesan seminary was undertaken by Claudio Stanislao Neri S.J. and the new Bishop of Shkodër, Giovanni Topich, which again proved to be abortive and stirred more controversy on the part of Muslim fanatics. As Bartoli, Basile, and Guagliata before him, Neri was banned from the city and forced to flee Shkodër.

In 1856, a third attempt was made to build the Albanian seminary. This time the Albanian religious situation had attracted international attention and had created a crisis in international affairs between Austria—the protecting power of Albanian Catholics—and the Ottoman Empire. On June 13, 1856, the Austrian government reacted militarily by deploying a squadron of warships to the mouth of the Bunë (Bojana) River near Shkodër under the command of Massimilian II.⁴⁵ The Austrian squadron was ready to undertake swift military intervention upon request of the Imperial Austrian consulate of Shkodër and if the Muslim revolt against the seminary continued the Austrian troops were ready to invade Shkodër, rather than give up it up to the Muslims.⁴⁶ On June 14, 1856, the Austrian commander issued a protest against the governor of the city, asking for a reimbursement of the costs of the demolition of the seminary

⁴⁵ “Një degë e zhvillimit kulturuer në Shqipëri,” CSAT, F. 134, Y. 1934, D. 87, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Fulvio Cordignano, “L’opera dei PP. Gesuiti nell’ Albania del Nord, 1841-1928,” CSAT, F. 134, Y. 1928, D. 243, p. 3.

ordered by the local authorities. Additionally, two warships, a British and a French, also joined the Austrians in the support of the Catholic cause—bringing back the Jesuits and building the new inter-diocesan seminary. The French consul joined forces with the Austrian consul to resolve the crisis in Shkodër peacefully and resume negotiations with the Muslims. They left the military intervention as a second option in case negotiations failed to produce the desired outcome. Consequently, the Internuncio of Constantinople was notified that the *divan*⁴⁷ had agreed to compensate for all material damages caused to Christian-Jesuit property, punish the guilty, and make amendments for the excesses committed against the Christians.⁴⁸

Thusly, the third attempt to rebuild the seminary and to establish the Jesuit order in Albania was successful. The inter-diocesan seminary was officially inaugurated in 1861 as Kolegja Shqyptare (Albanian Seminary) for the Missions of Albania, Serbia, and Macedonia, and a year later in 1862, it became the Pontifical Albanian Seminary, one of the only two Pontifical Seminaries outside of Rome.⁴⁹ The Congregation for the Propagation of Faith entrusted the direction of the seminary to the Venetian Province of the Society of Jesus.

After the construction was finished, the Jesuits were back in Shkodër. The first three Jesuit professors at the Pontifical Albanian Seminary were the rector, Antonio Voltolina S.J. Stanislao Neri S.J. and Gaetano Stevani S.J. The inter-diocesan seminary was off to a good start. Twenty seminarians were accepted in 1862. The seminary's curriculum, similar to curricula of other seminaries directed by the Jesuits worldwide, focused on philosophy, dogmatic and moral theology, sacred scripture, ecclesiastical history, and principles of canon law. The Congregation of the Propagation of Faith made a particular request that Albanian seminarians receive special

⁴⁷ A legislative body in the Ottoman Empire.

⁴⁸ Claudio Stanislao Neri, (July 30, 1856) "De Seminario Albaniae Centrali Scodrae instituendo et committendo curae societatis, 1854-1859." In *Missones Albaniensis et Illyrico-Dalmatia 1834-1940* 1 (10). Rome: Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu.

⁴⁹ Giuseppe Valentini, "La missione dei gesuiti e la cultura albanese," *Spiritualità*, 1974, p. 55-60, 1975, pp. 17-30.

training in pastoral theology, preaching, and catechesis, so that upon finishing the seminary training, they would be ready to participate in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. The goal was that in four years of intensive seminary training, Albania would have its first contingent of home-trained clergy.

The Congregation for the Propagation of Faith decided that the number of seminarians would increase gradually and progressively, in proportion to the economic status of the institution and space availability, with a limit of no more than thirty seminarians distributed among the dioceses of Tivar, Durrës, Shkup, Shkodër, Lezhë, Sapë, and Pult. The number of students accepted was the main factor determining the budget allocation from the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith. The local bishops were encouraged to finance on their own any additional student who was promising for vocation to priesthood, in addition to the quota provided to the diocese by the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith. However, it was the responsibility of the apostolic delegate and the seminary's rector to have the final say and determine the acceptance of any additional students.

Moreover, Pieter Beckx S.J., the superior general of the Jesuits, and Antonio Voltolina S.J., rector of the seminary, developed specific guidelines and requirements for seminary admissions,⁵⁰ which were used in Jesuit seminaries worldwide. Beckx and Voltolina invited feedback from all bishops of Albania, Serbia, and Macedonia and formed a committee which would help with drafting the seminary's guidelines. After careful deliberation, the committee decided that the candidates for the seminary ought to be no older than fourteen. The academic curriculum should match the needs and particular circumstances of the country and other rules for the acceptance of the candidates. The bishops were in favor of an intensive curriculum so that

⁵⁰ Antonio Voltolina, to Beckx, Shkodër, March 5, 1860. "Progetto di regolamento per la direzione del Seminario centrale di Scutari." MAID 2, Fasc. 1, pp. 4-8.

after completing the training in the seminary, the candidates would be able to take care of parishes, catechize, and administer the sacraments, as the Catholic population in the Albanian dioceses was in dire need of priests. The local bishops seemed to oppose an academic curriculum that would spend too much needed time on abstract sciences.⁵¹ This attitude caused controversy and disagreement between the Jesuits and Propaganda Fide, on one side, and the local bishops, on the other side, who wanted quickly-trained priests to serve in their dioceses. Moreover, it was decided that students were not allowed to leave the seminary without completing the seminary requirements and training, which culminated in ordination to priesthood during the seminarians' last year of training. In order to keep close collaboration with the bishops, the Jesuits decided that if the bishops desired to be informed of the academic and spiritual progress of the candidates from their respective dioceses, the rector would write a detailed semester evaluation to be mailed to the bishop.

In 1868, during his special visit to the Albanian seminary, the Jesuit Provincial and rector emeritus of the Gregorian University (1864-1867), Giovanni Marcucci S.J. encouraged the Jesuits to make the study of Albanian language their focus and to gradually begin replacing Italian with Albanian as language of instruction. Marcucci, due to his tenure in academia, was knowledgeable of all difficulties created for students when they were forced to learn in a foreign language, which in the case of Albanian, became more complicated due to the lack of published literature and textbooks in Albanian. To resolve the textbook issue, Marcucci proposed to begin translating into Albanian the major theological-philosophical thinkers and core texts which were needed for the seminary instruction. He was confident that the translation enterprise would have a double benefit for students and the Albanian people and culture. Once the texts in Albanian would be published, it would be much easier for seminarians to grasp the theological and

⁵¹Ibid., p. 4.

philosophical concepts in their mother tongue. Moreover, the translation of the works of major Catholic thinkers into Albanian would contribute to the development of Albanian culture, education, and language.⁵²

With the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation, the Pontifical Albanian Seminary concluded a period of slow but continuous growth. According to Fulvio Cordignano S.J., the seminary's first fifty years were probably the best period in the institution's history considering the progress and results achieved in the difficult field of training Albanian clergy.⁵³ In the first fifty years, Jesuits succeeded in refining their pedagogical approach; adapting the curriculum to the needs of the country, and contributing to the Albanian history, culture, and language. Through their academic priestly-formation work in the Albanian seminary, the Jesuits gave their contribution to the nation.⁵⁴

The Society of Jesus directed the Pontifical Albanian Seminary until 1945, when the communist government of Enver Hoxha came to power and the Albanian Church became the Church of the catacombs. Under Jesuit leadership, the Pontifical Albanian Seminary flourished for more than eighty years, training generations of Albanian clergy. The seminary was one of the major religious and educational activities of the Jesuits in Albania, one that left a permanent mark of the history of Albania, but also marked the Society of Jesus in return.

The primary goal of the Jesuit missionaries in Albania was training of the seminarians, the propagation and preservation of Catholic faith, the Society of Jesus contributed substantially to Albania's education and culture through other institutions of learning, including the Jesuit St. Francis Xavier College otherwise known as Xaverianum.

⁵² Murzaku, "Between East and West: Albania's Monastic Mosaic," in *Monasticism in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics*, p. 256.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jup Kastrati, "Disa të Dhëna mbi Arsimin në Shkodër," *Arsimi Popullor*, No. 3, 1964, p. 66.

St. Francis Xavier College (High School)

Jesuit Saint Francis Xavier High School was founded on October 17, 1878, in the city of Shkodër.⁵⁵ The founder was Luigi Ignazio Mazza S.J. The mission statement of the new Jesuit institution was “the moral and intellectual education of the city boys.”⁵⁶ Xaverianum began with a small budget of 30,000 Italian liras donated by the founder, Mazza.⁵⁷ From the start, the institution had to struggle financially as Shkodër was poor and few families were able to afford the tuition fee. Due to severe financial problems, in 1889, the Jesuit provincial Fr. Joachim Vioni S.J. was considering closing the high school and he would have, if it were not for the intervention of Austria-Hungary, which was quick to provide 2,000 francs to maintain the school. With Austria-Hungary’s financial assistance, the Jesuits were able to distribute free textbooks to the students. Additionally, the Venetian Province of the Jesuits contributed a considerable amount toward purchasing the school facility.

Initially, the academic curriculum of Xaverianum had a purely classical-humanistic orientation. This was the direction to which Mazza aspired, following the recommendation of the Jesuit provincial Marcucci. However, the citizens of Shkodër preferred a more hands-on-technical-commercial institute, where students would be able to study Italian language,⁵⁸ given the commercial exchanges between Italy and Albania were growing considerably. Another reason for a technical-commercial curriculum, was that families deplored the fact that their sons had to leave the country and go to Italy, Austria, or France to get technical-commercial training. Parents thought that the period their sons spent abroad resulted in them “losing faith and

⁵⁵ In the *Catalogus Provinciae Venetae Societatis Jesu*, Saint Francis Xavier High School begins to appear only in 1879, one year after its foundation.

⁵⁶ Bettini to Martin, Sartirana di Brianza, November 10, 1898. MAID 2, Fasc. 5, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Joachim Vioni, to Anderledy, Modena, January 10, 1889. MAID 2, Fasc. 5, p. 13.

⁵⁸ “Il contributo culturale dei Gesuiti al risorgimento nazionale Albanese,” CSAT, F. 134, D. 134, p. 2.

Albanian traditions.”⁵⁹ Additionally, the young men found it hard to adjust to the poor conditions of Albania when they returned from studying in the West and opened businesses in Shkodër. So, home and commercially-trained men was the parents’ preference.

The Jesuits took the parents’ concerns and the needs of Albania seriously and adjusted the curricula to include a technical-commercial orientation in addition to the humanities, liberal arts focus. For those students who desired a humanities tack, the Jesuits provided the option that these students, while remaining students of the Xaverianum, could join the seminarians at the Pontifical Albanian Seminary for humanities’ specialized courses. Among the students who took this option was Luigj Gurakuqi, a Shkodër native who became an important writer, thinker, and politician of the Albanian National Awakening and Albania’s minister of education in 1912.

In the years that followed, the need for elementary education arose in Shkodër and the Jesuits responded by adjusting the curricula distribution. They added a preparatory class for the elementary school, four elementary classes, a preparatory class for the middle school, three technical classes, and three commercial classes. The teaching staff of the Xaverianum were Jesuits, with two exceptions: the teacher of Turkish language and the elementary school teacher. The technical-commercial orientation of the high school continued uninterrupted until 1915, which marked the first stage in the development of the institution.

The main focus of the institute as stated in its regulations was to train young boys in Italian, French, and Albanian languages as well as in history, geography, physics, chemistry, mathematics, statistics, elements of natural philosophy, natural, civil and commercial law, administration, accounting, and book-keeping. Courses in Latin were also offered. To those students who wanted to pursue a language-literature and art concentrations, additional courses in the Turkish, German, and English as well as courses in art, design and music were provided at an

⁵⁹ Ibid.

additional tuition fee. The study of Catholic faith remained a permanent feature and a core requirement for all orientations: technical-commercial and humanities. Xaverianum was open to non-Catholics, Muslims, and Eastern Orthodox. The high school regulations specify that non-Catholics, Muslims, and Eastern Orthodox boys were welcome to attend the institute and were not required to take religious education.⁶⁰

The instructional curricula at Xaverianum included Albanian language classes, even when Albania as a nation was subjugated as part of the Ottoman Empire and the study of Albanian was forbidden. Additionally, the Jesuits introduced recreational activities in Albanian, where students practiced speaking and writing in learned and literary Albanian getting rid of swear words from their vocabulary.⁶¹ This exercise had a significant impact, as the young boys brought their education home to their siblings and families. In 1898, following the lead of the provincial, Fr. Marcucci, for more focus and development in the field of the Albanian studies, the Jesuits started working on preparing geography and history textbooks in Albanian. The biggest problem they were having was getting the books printed, as printing in Albanian was forbidden by the government. The Jesuits were using Giacomo Jungg S.J.'s *Albanian Grammar* and *Sacred History* written by Pashk Babi in 1882 in Albanian.⁶²

Despite chronic poverty and shifting of political systems, including the events that led to the proclamation of Albania's independence in 1912, Saint Francis Xavier High School continued to serve the citizens of Shkodër. In 1915, enrollment increased to a record high of 300 students.⁶³

⁶⁰ "Regolamento dell'Istituto Commerciale di S. Franc. Sav. in Scutari d'Albania, diretto dai P.P. della Compagnia di Gesù." (ALBANIA I), p. 1.

⁶¹ Domenico Pasi, to Turchi, Shkodër, April 24, 1881. MAID 2, Fasc. 3, p. 1.

⁶² "Risposta al Memoriale, to Legatum Austriaca 1898." MAID 2, Fasc. 5, p. 1.

⁶³ Giovanni Battista della Pietra to Ledochowski, Shkodër, February 24, 1915. MAID 2, Fasc. 8, p. 17.

Saint Francis Xavier High School maintained a high profile since its foundation in 1878. Some of the most influential Albanian elites were alumni. They became prominent national, political, cultural, and religious leaders in Albania. In 1934, it was calculated that more than 280 students of Xaverianum were employed in federal offices of the Albanian capital Tiranë. Also among the Jesuit-trained elite were Filip Shiroka, Mati Logoreci, Luigj Gurakuqi, Faik Konica, Gaspër Gurakuqi, Lazër Shantoja, Hilë Mosi, Zef and Ndue Saraçi, Mark Harapi, Kolë Thaçi, Ernest Koliqi, Stef Curani, Zef Harapi, Gaspër Mikeli, Karl Gurakuqi, Kolë Thaçi, Ndoc Vasija, Gjush Sheldija, Pjerin Simoni, Gjon Ujka, Injac Zamputi, Henrik Lacaj, Guljelm Deda, Kolë Jakova, and Rrok Zojzi.

As explained above, Xaverianum's curriculum changed and adjusted to address the needs of the Albanian people; it changed with the times but was able to remain timeless. Through Xaverianum, the Jesuits contributed substantially to the progress of Albania and the Albanian people whom they viewed as so "rich in intelligence and glorious in ancient traditions."⁶⁴ The Jesuits discerned the will of God in the daily life of Albania and Albanians, and this involved seeking new ways and new paths to accomplish their Catholic mission.

Jesuit Publications

In 1870, the Jesuits printing press was inaugurated. Initially, it was called *Shtampa e Seminarit* (Seminary's Printing Press) and, later, *Shtypshkroja e Zojës së Papërlyeme* (Immaculate Conception Printing Press). The printing press was established illegally, as the Ottoman authorities allowed no publication in the Albanian language to circulate among the

⁶⁴ Fulvio Cordignano, "L'opera dei PP. Gesuiti nell'Albania del Nord, 1841 1928," CSAT, Y. 1928, F. 134, D. 243, p. 10.

people. The Jesuit printing press was the only printing press in the country for almost forty years, until 1908, when other printing presses were established in Albania.⁶⁵

The first book in Albanian printed by the Jesuit press was *Doktrina e Kërshten* (*The Christian Doctrine*), by Engjëll Radoja, published in 1876. It was followed by *Regole Grammaticali sulla Lingua Albanese* (*Grammar Rules of the Albanian Language*), by Giacomo Jungg S.J. published in 1880, and the *Sacred History*, by Pashk Babi, published in 1882. The Immaculate Conception Printing Press published devotional handbooks: ascetic, historical and instructive publications in Latin and Italian. By 1934, the Jesuit press had produced 21 religion books, 20 grammar books, three dictionaries, five Albanian literature textbooks, 10 textbooks of classical and modern languages, 19 scientific textbooks, and six textbooks of history and geography.⁶⁶

The Sacred Heart Messenger Magazine

In April 1891, the Immaculate Conception Printing Press published the first issue of the magazine *Elçija e Zemrës së Krishtit*. In 1914, two years after Albanian independence, the Turkish name *Elçija* was replaced by the Albanian name, *Lajmëtari i Zemrës së Krishtit* (*Sacred Heart Messenger*). The religious-cultural monthly periodical *Lajmëtari* is the oldest Albanian-language magazine published in Albania. The first director of *Lajmëtari* was Giacomo Jungg S.J. who served as chief editor of the magazine for almost 25 years. In 1894, the great Jesuit missionary, Domenico Pasi S.J., succeeded Jungg in directing the publication of the periodical. Noted Jesuits appeared one after the other on the editorial board of *Lajmëtari*; they included Francisco Genovizzi, Shtjefën Zadrime, Busetti, Antonio Xanoni, and Ndoc Saraçi. For twenty

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “Nji degë e zhvillimit kulturuer në Shqipni,” CSAT, Y. 1934, F. 134, D. 87, p. 2.

years, the magazine was the only periodical of Albanian culture and language in Albania. The Jesuit magazine promoted good literary taste and correct Albanian orthography.

The magazine was widely read in and outside Shkodër. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the *Sacred Heart Messenger*, the editorial staff received many letters of congratulation from Albanian clergy. The Bishop of Sapë, Vinçens Prendushi, a regular collaborator of *Lajmëtari*, congratulated the Jesuits on this occasion writing: “I wish this periodical, the oldest in our native language, to always continue its sacred mission, in spreading the Gospel in the service of the nation,”⁶⁷ followed by: “*U a dijtë e u a shpërbleftë Zoti!*” (God blesses you for all your work).⁶⁸ Prendushi was representing the clergy and people of his diocese as *Lajmëtari* was widely read among the Catholic faithful of the Sapë diocese. Many Albanians, especially the mountaineers, learned how to read and write in Albanian via *Lajmëtari*.

The seminarians of the Pontifical Albanian Seminary, on the occasion of *Lajmëtari*’s fiftieth anniversary, wrote to the editor: “At a time when the Albanian people were suffering under the Ottoman yoke, *Lajmëtari* began to spread its golden pages everywhere in Albania. It enlightened many hearts and minds and revived the Catholic faith in the hearts of the people. It developed the native tongue ... its blessed pages traveled around the cities, villages, mountains, and spoke in Albanian, on faith, culture and progress.”⁶⁹ The magazine contributed significantly to national unification, being the first to adopt a unified Albanian alphabet as decided by the Congress of Manastir (Bitola in present-day Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) held on November 14-22, 1908, focusing on standardizing the Albanian alphabet.

⁶⁷ Vinçens Prendushi, Bishop of Sapë, to Saraçi, Nenshat, February 2, 1940, CSAT, F. 134, D. 92, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁶⁹ Xhakojt e Seminarit Papnuer Shqiptar to Jesuit fathers of the editorial staff of *Lajmëtarit të Zëmres së Krishtit* (*Sacred Heart Messenger*), Shkodër, February 11, 1940, CSAT, F. 134, D. 92, p. 1.

The focus of the magazine was “to offer the readers topical articles,”⁷⁰ which were intended not only for Catholics but also for people of other religions or no religion. Given the popularity of the magazine, the leaders of the Muslim community of Shkodër had a subscription to the magazine. The magazine continued until the communist takeover of the country in 1945. In a report of Fr. Antonio Toldo S.J., who became the editor in chief of the magazine in 1945, on the internal conditions of the community and the activities of the Society of Jesus in Shkodër, Toldo described “a new path”⁷¹ for the periodical marked by the ecumenical activity of Fr. Giovanni Fausti S.J., an initiator of a Christian-Muslim dialogue in Albania.⁷² Fausti’s contributions transformed the magazine into a “religious periodical, able to attract people ... even non-Catholic, since there were two other magazines focusing exclusively on Catholicism.”⁷³ Fausti reached out to Muslim and Orthodox Albanians, living in middle and lower Albania. Moreover, the magazine reached Albanians of Prizren, Prishtinë, Gjakovë, Pejë, Mitrovicë, and Shkup, and the Italo-Albanians (Arbëreshes) of Southern Italy.

The magazine had a distinguished cast of regular collaborators and columnists including clergy and laity: Ndue Bytyçi, Pashk Babi, Ndrë Mjedja, Llazër Mjedja, Luigj Bumçi, Gjergj Fishta, Pjetër Gjura, Mark Shiroka, Luigj Gurakuqi, Mati Logoreci, Lazër Shantoja, Nikoll Sheldija, Jozef Qefalia, Vinçenz Prendushi, Ndoc Nikaj, Nikoll Kaçorri, and Pashk Bardhi.

⁷⁰ “Relazione della Miss. Alb. di PP. Gesuiti” to Ledochowski, Vladimiro, Tiranë, November 24, 1933. HCP 1930-1936, p. 1.

⁷¹ Antonio Toldo to Bianchini, “Relazione sulle condizioni interne della comunità e delle opere della Compagnia di Gesù in Scutari d’Albania, Gennaio 1945.” AVP, *Historiae Coll. Pontif.* (1841-1883; 1862-1882; 1885-1905; 1853-1904; 1841-1905; 1930-1936; 1942-1946), (HCP) 1942-1946, p. 13.

⁷² The writings of G. Fausti on Christian-Muslim dialogue in Albania were collected and published in the book entitled: *L’Islam nella luce del pensiero Cristiano* (Islam in the Light of Christian Thought) (Rome 1933). Fausti was executed by the communist government in March 1946.

⁷³ Antonio Toldo to Bianchini, “Relazione sulle condizioni interne della comunità e delle opere della Compagnia di Gesù in Scutari d’Albania, Gennaio 1945.” HCP 1942-1946, p. 14.

Vepra Pijore

Vepra Pijore—named Pijore honoring of Pope Pius X, was founded by two Jesuits, Shtjefën Zadrima S.J. and Francisco Genovizzi S.J. in 1908. The focus of the periodical, which initially was the bulletin of a society with the same name, was the publication of literary works including short stories on Church history, books on natural history, apologetics, translations of parts of the Holy Scripture, lives of saints, and other works which were of interest to Albanians.⁷⁴ *Vepra Pijore* had a long life and produced more than 50 volumes on literature in Albanian prose and poetry.

Additionally, *Vepra Pijore* produced an annual publication named *Kalendari i Veprës Pijore* (*Calendar of the Pius Work*), which later became *Shqypnija e Ilustrueme* (*Illustrated Albania*). The *Calendar of the Pius Work* was published from 1912 until 1927. In 1928-1929, it became *Illustrated Albania*, which published valuable articles and illustrations on the cities of Shkodër and Tiranë.

Leka

On December 9, 1928, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of Xaverianum high school, the rector Lanfranco Steccati S.J. supported the proposal for the foundation of a student organization named Leka. The name Leka stands for *Lidhje* (Union), *Edukatë* (Education), *Kulturë* (Culture) and *Argëtim* (Entertainment). The goals of the student organization were to foster and promote relations among students and alumni of Xaverianum and to be a vehicle of education and culture among Albanians. The rector also supported the plan for the publication of a monthly cultural magazine for the student organization.

⁷⁴ Namik Ressuli, “Contributo dei missionari Italiani allo sviluppo della cultura Albanese. P. Giuseppe Valentini,” *Studi Albanologici, Balcanici*, p. 28.

A year later, in 1929, the first issue of *Leka* was published. *Leka* was the continuation of a long Jesuit tradition in publishing in Albanian that had begun in 1891 with the *Sacred Heart Messenger*. In 15 years—the last issue of the magazine was published in 1944—*Leka* contributed a significant number of quality publications to the general public and to Albanologists and specialized audiences all over the world in the fields of literature, folklore, history, and sociology. The magazine served the cultural and educational emergence of Albania as an independent nation. Following the principle of fraternity among Albanians regardless of religious and regional affiliations, *Leka* accepted the collaborations from scholars of different religions, Catholics and Muslims. Among the regular contributors to *Leka* were scholars: Kolë Kamsi, Filip Fishta, Injac Zamputi, Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi, Llukë Karafili, and Hamdi Bushati. Jesuit scholars and Albanologists were also contributors to *Leka*. This included distinguished scholars like Giuseppe Valentini S.J. Andrea Mjedja S.J. Fulvio Cordignano S.J. Brother Gjon Pantalija, and others.

Leka made a significant scholarly contribution by publishing studies on Pjetër Budi, an important seventeenth century writer and bishop of Sapë by Ndrë Mjedja. It also provided a critical edition of *Catasto Veneziano (Venetian Cadastre)*, which was first published in 1416. Another important work for Albanian culture was the publication of *Nomenclator* as a supplement to *Leka*. *Nomenclator* was an important bibliographical dictionary of Albanian and the first Albanian historical encyclopedia. However, *Nomenclator* was never finished due to conditions in Albania when the communists took over in 1944.

During its 15 years of publication, *Leka* enjoyed the respect and praise of lay readers and clergy for its high-quality publications. Gaspër Thaçi, Archbishop of Shkodër, wrote that *Leka* achieved its objectives and had become an indispensable part of Albanian Catholic publishing.⁷⁵

The good name and reputation of *Leka* was closely linked with the name of the noted historian and Albanologist Giuseppe Valentini S.J. Fr. Zef, as the Albanians called him, was the chief editor of *Leka* in 1932. In the pages of *Leka*, Valentini manifested all his passion as a Jesuit, his scholarship and interests, and was able to give *Leka* a prominent patriotic orientation.⁷⁶ Valentini arrived in Albania in 1922 and taught Italian, Latin, Greek, religion, and natural history at the Pontifical Albanian Seminary and the Xaverianum. What sets Valentini apart from other scholars and especially Albanologists is the fact that unlike Austrian, Serbian, Hungarian, Croatian, or Italian-Albanian scholars, Valentini wrote most of his work in Albanian. He not only spoke and wrote perfect Albanian, but was also able to translate from Latin, Italian, and French into Albanian.⁷⁷ The most notable historical work of Valentini is *Acta Albaniae Veneta* (*The Venetian Acta for Albania*). Primary sources on the history of Albania, which were preserved in the State Archive of Venice, were critically edited and published in the numerous volumes of *Acta Albaniae Veneta*⁷⁸ by Valentini.

Jesuit Brother Gjon Pantalija also played an important role in the publication and promotion of *Leka*. A native of Prizren, Kosovë, he took care not only of the administration of

⁷⁵ Gaspër Thaçi, March 1, 1940. *Albania, Corrispondenza Epistolare dei Nostri, Missione Volante, 1846-1945*, (ALBANIA II), AVP, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Namik Ressuli, "Contributo dei missionari Italiani allo sviluppo della cultura Albanese. Padre Giuseppe Valentini," *Studi Albanologici, Balcanici*, p. 29.

⁷⁷ Murzaku, *Catholicism, Culture, Conversion*, p. 258.

⁷⁸ Carmelo Capizzi, "Un'Opera Decisiva della Storiografia Albanese: Gli Acta Albaniae Veneta di Giuseppe Valentini S.J." in *Dissertationes Albanicae in Honorem Josephi Valentini et Ernesti Koliqi Septuagenariorum*, München, Trofenik, 1971, pp. 9-19.

the Jesuit magazines, but also of preparing the articles for publication once the review process had concluded.⁷⁹ Most of Brother Gjon's articles appear under editorial staff.

By the end of 1939, when the Kingdom of Albania was under Italian occupation, the Apostolic Delegate to Albania, Leone G. B. Nigris S.J. expressed some concern regarding some of the articles published in *Leka*. Nigris took issue with the editorial staff and particularly with the editor-in-chief Fr. Valentini. Nigris considered *Leka* an agnostic magazine that could have been published by any secular person.⁸⁰ He was uncomfortable with *Leka's* "pure intellectualism"⁸¹, which according to Nigris, undermined the missionary spirit and in a way went against the magazine's founding mission. For Nigris, Albania was a missionary land and Jesuits should be missionaries in every aspect of their life in Albania, including the press. Thus, culture ought to be in service of the spread of the word of God.⁸²

Despite the controversy, to the end, *Leka* remained one of the most important means of the Jesuit apostolate in Albania and an informed-scholarly vehicle in support of national culture, ecumenism, and inter-religious dialogue with Orthodox and Muslims.

The Albanian Studies Xavier Academy and the Institute of Albanian Studies

In 1937, with the approval of the provincial, an Albanian Studies Xavier Academy was founded with the participation of the most distinguished friends and collaborators of *Leka* magazine. The purpose of the academy was to maintain an active and on-going forum and scholarly discussion on Albanian studies. To serve this purpose, the Jesuits made available to the

⁷⁹ Antonio Toldo, "Relazione sulle condizioni interne della comunità e delle opere della Compagnia di Gesù in Scutari d'Albania, Gennaio 1945." HCP 1942-1946, p. 15.

⁸⁰ Leone G. B. Nigris to Chiesa, Shkodër, December 28, 1939. ALBANIA II, p. 1.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

academy's national and international members the document collections of the Jesuit library and archives, and the St. Francis Xavier museum.⁸³

Noted international scholars in the field of Albanian studies including Matteo Bartoli, Antonio Baldacci, Nilo Borgia, Papas Petrotta, Georg Stadtmüller, Kurt Hassert, and Tihomir Djordjevitch were members of the Jesuit Albanian Studies Xavier Academy. In 1940, the academy counted 16 academics, of whom three were Albanians, two Italian-Albanians, five Italians, two Germans, one Hungarian, and three Yugoslavians. Among the members, there were nine university professors and four priests.⁸⁴

Three years later, in 1940, the Jesuits founded the *Institute of Albanian Studies*. Antonio Toldo S.J. in his correspondence with the Jesuit superior, informed Rome of his participation in the first meeting of Albanian studies, which concluded its proceedings with the foundation of Institute of Albanian Studies.⁸⁵ After the Albanian Ministry of Education and Culture, the Jesuit Institute of Albanian Studies was the second principal organization to foster scholarship and scholarly encounters between the Albanian and international scholars. Muslims and Orthodox were invited to be part of the institute.

Conclusions

Through their instructional, pedagogical, scholarly, and printing activities via the Pontifical Albanian Seminary, St. Francis Xavier High School, *Sacred Heart Messenger*, *Vepra Pijore*, *Leka*, the Albanian Studies Xavier Academy, and the Institute of Albanian Studies, the Jesuits contributed to the religious and moral formation of the Albanian people and became one of the principal supporters of Albanian national culture. The Jesuits creatively and persistently

⁸³ "Un asilo di antiche grandi tradizioni. Il Collegio Saveriano di Scutari," CSAT, F. 134, D. 163, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Giuseppe Valentini to Ledochowski, "Promemoria del P. Valentini sulla questione della rivista Leka, Shkodër, January 24, 1940." *ALBANIA II*, p. 1-2.

⁸⁵ Murzaku, *Catholicism, Culture, Conversion*, p. 269.

discerned the will of God in the daily life of Albanians and that involved enculturation. Jesuits were successful in becoming one with the people of Albania they were serving. Thus, the Jesuits through their activities proved to be doubly faithful to the Catholic doctrine and to the Albanian culture and people. As Pope Francis said, “they were faithful to the totality of the doctrine and at the same time they were faithful to respecting the culture of the people to whom they were sent.”⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Bergoglio, *Chi sono i Gesuiti, Storia della Compagnia di Gesù*, p. 20.

Epilogue

Long live Christ the King! Long Live Albania

**A Jesuit Martyr. Blessed Fr. Giovanni Fausti S.J. - A Witness of Mercy and
Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

On November 5, 2016, more than 20,000 people attended Mass in and outside the cathedral of St. Stephen in the city of Shkodër, northwestern Albania, for the beatification of 38 martyrs who refused to renounce their faith and were executed by Albania's communist government of Enver Hoxha. In April 2016, Pope Francis officially recognized the martyrdom of 38 priests and consecrated persons who had died in labor camps or prisons, or were executed from 1945-1974. The message Pope Francis wanted to convey through the martyrs' beatification was clear: the centrality of martyrdom, forgiveness and mercy. And in these three areas, he emphasized a favorite theme of his pontificate: the ecclesiastical and geographical periphery—in this case, the Catholic Church of Albania. The new 38 martyrs (37 men and one woman) were from a marginal and marginalized country, in Europe but not of Europe, a country with a Muslim majority where the Catholics are a minority—they make up 10 percent of the population of 300,000—have a message to convey: the redemptive power of suffering. Timing is also significant for the Catholic Church: the beatification was held only 15 days before the conclusion of Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. Locally, the beatification of 38 martyrs was being celebrated only one day before the memorial Mass celebrated on November 4, 1990, in the cemetery of Rrmaj (Varrezat e Rrmajit) in the outskirts of the city of Shkodër. November 4, 1990, was a memorable day in the hearts and minds of the people of Shkodër and of all Albanians, a day that testified that faith was alive and never abandoned the suffering people of Albania. Five thousand

people, Catholics and Muslims, participated in a Mass celebrated by Fr. Simon Jubani, who had been in the communist prisons and labor camps for 26 years and was released in 1989. The cemetery was the only holy ground left in Albania at that time. The churches and mosques were either razed to the ground, transformed, or re-purposed. Albania was showing signs of resurrection. It was in the same Rrmaj cemetery of Shkodër that Blessed Fr. Giovanni Fausti S.J., one of the 38 martyrs, was executed and buried in a collective grave on March 4, 1946. The historic cemetery, where the martyrs found their end, was anticipating the resurrection of faith and the fall of communism.

Who was Blessed Fr. Fausti S.J.?

Probably one of the most well-known victims of Albanian religious persecution was Fr. Fausti S.J. a man of great faith, an intellectual, philosopher, professor, missionary, and a pioneer of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Fausti was born on October 9, 1899, in Brozzo, Val Trompia in Brescia, Italy, the first of 12 children of Antonio Fausti and Maria Sigolini. He was born to a deeply religious and happy family. At the age of 10, he was accepted at the seminary of Brescia, where he became friends with Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Blessed Pope Paul VI. Two childhood friends who would become “Blessed” spent vacations together. At the age of 18, Fausti was drafted into the army and in 1920, after attending a course at the Military Academy of Modena, he was sent into service in Rome where he attended the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the Sapienza University. Discharged from military service with the rank of lieutenant in the armed forces, he resumed his studies at the Pontifical Lombard Seminary in Rome. Ordained a priest at the age of 23, on July 9, 1922, he graduated with degrees in sacred theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University and philosophy from the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) in Rome. A year later, he returned to his native Brescia to teach

philosophy at the seminary. On October 30, 1924, he entered the Society of Jesus's novitiate in Gorizia.

After five years of training as a Jesuit, in 1928, Fausti was sent to Albania where he served as a professor of philosophy at the Pontifical Albanian Seminary (Kolegjia Papnore Shqyptare) of Shkodër, which was founded and run by the Society of Jesus. In three years, from 1929 to 1932, he was able to learn, speak, and write Albanian and made significant progress in his studies of Islam, Sunni, and ascetic or mystic Islam, including Bektashi, Khalwati, Rufai, and other Sufi orders that were part of Albania's Islamic landscape. His research and first-hand findings with the Muslim communities of Albania resulted in a series of articles (1931-1933) published in *La Civiltà Cattolica*. In 1932, Fausti returned to Italy (Mantova) as a professor of cosmology where he suffered from tuberculosis, which he had detected when he was serving in Albania. He underwent aggressive treatment in Italy and Switzerland before he was able to resume his teaching at the Jesuit Institute of Philosophy *Aloisianum* in Gallarate (Milan), where, on February 2, 1936, he took his solemn vows. During the six years he taught philosophy at Gallarate, he was known for his exceptional intellectual gifts of teaching and research in the field of Muslim-Christian dialogue, which was a pioneering field of research and thinking. In 1937, he founded the League "Friends of Islamic Orient," which at the time was widespread in Italy and abroad. In July 1942, Fausti returned to Albania, serving as rector of the Albanian Pontifical Seminary in Shkodër and during the Italian occupation and World War II, he moved to the capital, Tirana, to serve the population devastated by the war, misery, displacement, and famine. Wounded by a German bullet that hit his healthy lung and broke his collarbone, he continued his works of mercy, serving the people of Albania.

After the war, in 1944, the communists led by Enver Hoxha took over and the persecution of Albanian religions started. Physical elimination or long prison terms for the political and cultural opponents of communism were swiftly applied. Intellectuals like Fr. Fausti became the communist party's target. He was executed on March 4, 1946, at the Rrmaj cemetery.

Intellectual Apostolate and Pioneer of Christian-Muslim Dialogue

“An idea shines bright in my mind, and it was not born yesterday but I find it mixed in my first impulses towards the Sanctuary. I thought of it as an inconsistent fantasy ... but this idea of missions comes back in various forms and ... in different stages of my life,” Fausti wrote in his diary when he was 20 years old. The life of the missionary in foreign and unknown lands, where men and nature lived in harmony, to help and educate people was calling him. From his unpublished diaries, we see that he seems to have almost feared his concentration on scholarly pursuits, academics, and specifically the study of philosophy. His calling was to be a missionary. He considered the tough life in mission as the palestra where a priest could learn and give back, where he could touch the wounds of the people and be touched in return. He considered the life in the mission as a must in the priest's training. He felt ready to embark on the universal mission of salvation “even to the very ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) very early in life. However, what is particular to Fausti is that he was able to combine his love of mission and philosophy into one, which he called intellectual apostolate. In 1928, when Fausti began his first period of apostolate in Albania, he was able to combine his teaching at the seminary with hands-on apostolic experience as a director of the Marian Congregation. He was “a missionary-professor,” as he described himself, willing to imitate the prototype: Jesus' infinite patience.

Through his intellectual philosophical studies and his preaching, the 29-year-old Fausti was trying to understand and penetrate into the thinking of the Muslim faithful of Shkodër, a city with a Muslim majority that was divided between Christian and Muslim neighborhoods—a city that had few Christian churches, and several mosques and madrasahs. In Shkodër, the bells of the Christian churches mingled with the calls for prayers of the muezzins, but all believers belonged to one and the same nation and abided by the same norms of Albania’s centuries—old canons and *Besa*—truce and honor. Albania is at the crossroads of civilizations and a microcosm of the Mediterranean cultures and religions, a frontier where Christianity encounters Islam, which for a frontiersman and Jesuit as Fausti presented an incredible wealth of first-hand experience in the living experiences of Islam and Christianity in contact, and why not in dialogue. Until his arrival in Albania, Fausti’s knowledge of Albanian Islam was learned from books. However, he was quick to observe the particular distinctiveness of Albania’s Islam. The majority of Albanian Muslims were Sunni following the Quran; some were *laramani*—motley or crypto-Christians who although Muslims in appearance had retained Christianity at home. Usually men converted to Islam to secure government jobs, while women and children followed the Christian faith. Moreover, Albania provided Fausti with the exceptional opportunity to study mystical or what he called “spiritual Islam.” The Bektashi *tekkes* (convents), dervishes, and communities had a long history and presence in the nation. Fausti’s first-hand experience with the forms of mystical brotherhoods and their convent-communal life opened new opportunities for dialogue and apostolic perspectives on Islam as well as for drawing parallels between Islam and Christianity.

Fausti was passionate about digging deep and understanding the origin and philosophical-theological foundations of Islam with the intention of building bridges of comprehension and understanding between Islam and Christianity as these religions were lived in Albania. He

believed that what was needed was “mutual understanding,” as he wrote in 1931: “the two worlds, Christian and Muslim, know too little of each other. And because of this they seem to be one against the other with arms (in armed conflict). We have to talk to the Orient to understand it and not to insult it.” His advanced studies in Arabic language and Islamic culture combined with his expertise in philosophy made Fausti able to discern parallels and points of convergence between Christianity and Islam, especially in the theological understanding of one God and Heaven. Another point of agreement between Christianity and Islam, according to the writings of Fausti, rested on common understanding on morals and values. He reflected on Islamic mysticism or spirituality of Islam, which he described as “ascending through ascetic steps from repentance of sins to denial, to uncovering of the spirit which led to union with God and to the most passionate outbursts of divine love.” To better understand the other, one needs to become an interior-spiritual guest hosting the other, and this is a dynamic process of learning and exchanging. Fausti went beyond tolerance in his model of Christian-Muslim inter-religious dialogue. For him, tolerance meant that one can live and let live, everyone in his own circle, each walking his own paths. What Fausti was proposing was comprehensive hospitality, where paths cross and the exchanges become natural, and thus the dialogue becomes more profound. For Fausti, unity of spirit translated into brotherly love, mutual support, building a community, and sacrificing for the good of the brother. The Christian-Muslim dialogue Fausti was suggesting did not water down the faith or adjust theological principles to fit into the dialogue. Instead, each religion engages in dialogue while preserving its authenticity. Fausti identified charity, especially Christian charity, as an important ingredient in Christian-Muslim dialogue, hoping that the time of the fraternal embrace was not very far in the future. Fausti’s research and findings in Islam anticipated the teachings of Vatican II’s *Nostra Aetate* and the call for “mutual understanding”

and working together (Christianity and Islam) “to preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.” In sum, Fausti read with lucidity and intelligence the signs of the time and pioneered a dialogical approach between Christianity and Islam as these religions were lived in Albania. Fausti’s studies and encouragement of dialogue with Islam had an impact on Pope Pius XI, who appreciated the Orient and called it “the Orient that prays.”

The Road to Martyrdom

Fausti returned to Albania for the second time in 1942, two years before the conflict between the Catholic Church and Communist state in Albania began, which would eventually lead Albania to proclaiming itself the world’s first atheist state in 1967. Fausti was arrested on December 31, 1945, together with another Jesuit, Daniel Dajani S.J. Dajani was serving as the Rector of the Pontifical Seminary, a post Fausti had held until 1943, while Fausti was the Provincial of the Jesuits at the time of their arrest and execution. The Jesuits were accused of organizing “United Albania—an organization to overthrow the regime,” “intelligence with the Anglo-Americans for an airborne intervention in Albania,” and other uncreative accusations which were repeated with every clergy member who went through the arrest and trial process. On February 22, 1946, Fausti and Dajani were sentenced to death by execution. In the early morning of March 4, 1946, both of them and six other clergy were brought to the cemetery of Rrmaj of Shkodër, the place of their execution and martyrdom. At 6 AM, the order was given to soldiers to execute them. Fausti was given a chance to pronounce his last wishes: "I am happy to die fulfilling my responsibility. Give my best to my Jesuit brothers, deacons, priests and the Archbishop." As soon as his last wishes were pronounced, a chorus of strong voices of those who were going to be executed joined in singing: "Long live Christ the King! Long Live Albania. We forgive those who kill us." And Albania and her people lived to see her martyrs like

Frs. Fausti and Dajani beatified. Faith, which lived for 45 years in the hearts and minds of the people subjected to the most severe religious persecution in Eastern Europe, returned with the fall of communism.

The martyrdom of Fausti and the 37 other martyrs captures the core meaning of martyrdom as witness. After reading his writings, letters, and personal diaries, one feels as though one has touched and been touched by the martyrs, or as Pope Francis said after his 2014 visit to Albania, “Let us go home thinking: today we have touched martyrs.” Fausti is indeed a martyr.