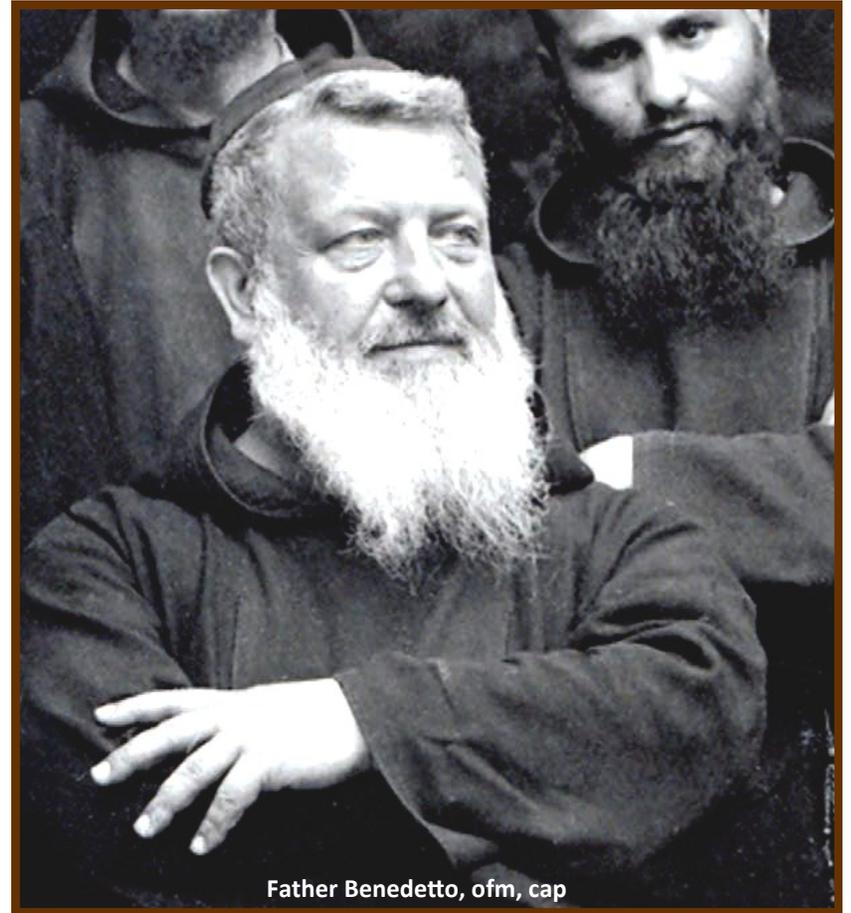




Padre Pio's Family Home in Pietrelcina, Italy

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**Padre Pio –
A Tense Period in the Relationship between
Father Benedetto and his Disciple**



Father Benedetto, ofm, cap

**Father Benedetto was Provincial Superior
from 1909 to 1919.
Observed and described the Wounds in 1918.
Was Padre Pio's spiritual guide from 1909 to 1922.**

Padre Pio – A Tense Period in the Relationship between Father Benedetto and his Disciple

By Bro Luciano Lotti

On 7 March 1915, Padre Pio's Provincial Minister and spiritual director, Father Benedetto of San Marco in Lamis, wrote to Padre Pio telling him that the pontifical permission to reside in his home <*durante infermitate e retento habitu*> had arrived.

The previous time Father Benedetto had written to his young disciple was 14 December 1914, but it was more of a note than a letter in which, as Provincial Minister, Father Benedetto asked him to obtain from the Archbishop of Benevento the authorization for his temporary residence in his diocese. The letter ending rather coldly: "Regretting very much that we can not yet have you in our midst, I bless you and wish you every choice grace from the Infant Jesus" (Letters I).

In all, in 1914, Father Benedetto wrote three letters to Padre Pio and he received seven from him; from the tone and meagerness of their correspondence, even if historians have tended not to dwell on this, one understands that this was a period of great tension between them.

The cause of all this we know well: Father Benedetto did not see in good light his prolonged stay with his family. Already on 13 May 1914, Father Agostino, who was the Provincial Definitor (a counselor of the Father Provincial), had written to Padre Pio: "I saw the Provincial and we spoke about you. Perhaps the Lord has already informed you of this. We poor superiors do not know how to deal with your case" (Letters I).



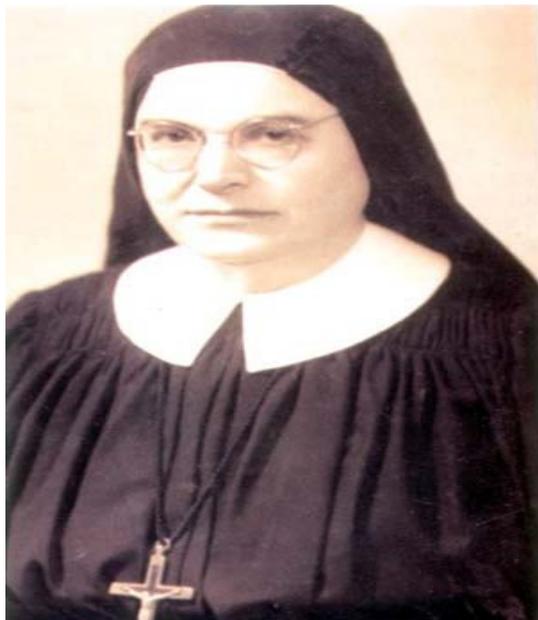
Fr. Agostino

Father Benedetto's Disappointment

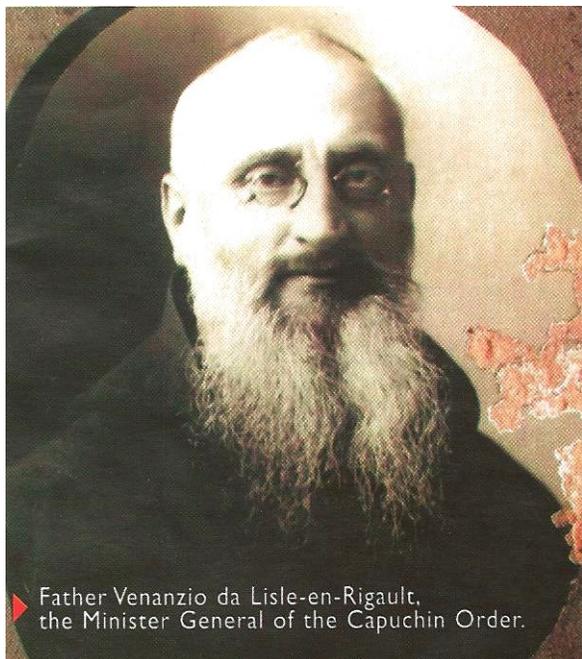
On 9 June 1915, under obedience to his superiors, Padre Pio returned to the fraternity at Morcone, but after five days he was forced to leave and return to his hometown Pietrelcina in pitiful health. Only a few days later did he find the strength to write to Father Benedetto, a letter in which he asked for his forgiveness for the suffering he has again caused him: "Ah, my good Father, do not be angry with me. I just did not know what saint to invoke. I would like to have spared you this new pain, to shoulder the weight of this cross by myself, but this I was not allowed to do!" (Letters I).



The Capuchin Friary of Morcone



Mother Maria Gargani
A spiritual daughter of Padre Pio



Father Venanzio da Lisle-en-Rigault,
the Minister General of the Capuchin Order.

Father Benedetto did not see this in good light at all and was convinced that behind everything was the devil's intervention and he made preparations to send new orders, because he wanted the young friar in the friary, even if this brought about his death. Father Agostino did what he could do to mediate and pointed out that the Provincial Minister's opinion, shared by his counselors too, was not some whimsical notion, since a friar, whether well or ill, was always a friar, and there was no reason why he should be cured outside the friary and so Padre Pio had to prepare himself to obey: "Meanwhile I must tell you in advance that the Lord wants to subject you to another hard trial. The Provincial insists absolutely that you return to Morcone... In this resolute will of the Superior I see the divine will and I exhort you and wish you from the Lord the strength to act according to holy obedience. Do not have any fear, for all will work out for God's glory and our salvation. If you die, you will go to enjoy the beauty of the divine Spouse, as is my wish for you. At all events, the divine plan in your regard must be accomplished. I ask you therefore to prepare for this latest trial, by much prayer and by driving away the insinuations of the enemy. If the Lord were to ask you for a heroic act, would you not perform it? If He asked for your life, would you not give your consent? Hence, *made the Lord's will be done!*" (Letters I).

The Ways of Providence

We know however, that the ways of the Lord are infinite, and that they do not necessarily follow man's designs. The Minister Gen. of the Capuchin Order, Father Venanzio da Lisle-en-Rigault, came on a visit to the religious province of Foggia, and was informed of Padre Pio's situation as well as his good faith, by Father Benedetto, who even though officially disappointed with the proceedings was open to the mystery being realized in his disciple and obtained from the Superior General an answer that perhaps he was hoping for: "Since it is God's will, let it be done; we will obtain for him the Brief of Exclaustration and he will continue to wear the habit (*breve ad tempus, habitu retento*). The good Friar will continue to pray for the order to which he always belongs" (Letters I).

Even if reassured by Father Venanzio, Father Benedetto continued, at least officially as we have seen, to maintain his distance with his disciple, however when on 7 March 1915, he was finally able to officially communicate to him that he could remain at home, his words gave away his affection for his disciple as well as all his interior suffering: "The expenses involved will be paid by the Province. Although we are not obliged to do this, we willingly perform this act of charity and hope to be fully repaid by your grateful prayers" (Letters I).

But the real evidence that Father Benedetto was never really antagonistic to the young Friar are found in the words with which he opened his heart in great humility to him: "I myself am going through a period of severe humiliation which, added to the habitual mortifications, is weighing heavily on me. At times I think that God has abandoned me and then it seems to me that all prayers are useless. Unfortunately I deserve this, but it is possible that the heavenly Father's mercy is to be outdone by my wickedness? Recommend me to Him urgently." Then in conclusion he confided to him a great suffering to his priestly soul: "That soul in Barletta is about to give in under the weight of her heavy trials, to what her ordinary confessor writes to me. I am very displeased with this. What have you to say about it?" (Letters I).

Brothers United in their Love for God's Reign

Padre Pio was moved: "My dear Father, I had abandoned all hope of your fatherly benevolence towards this unworthy son of yours." He comprehended the difficulty of his Provincial torn between affection and duty and asked him again for his forgiveness for the difficulty he had caused him and expressed to his spiritual father what was their shared hope: "My most heartfelt thanks also to you, dear Father, and please forgive this unworthy son of yours. Will Jesus grant me at least the grace to die in that place to which, in His immense fatherly goodness, He called me?" (Letters I).

Reading again these events that took place so many years ago, I feel myself agreeing with Father Benedetto who saw in all this the hand of the devil. However, I see Satan's hand not in an attempt to make Padre Pio remain in Pietrelcina, but rather in a plan to cause misunderstanding, discord and division between the two spiritual directors and their disciple.

Their shared anxiety for "that soul of Barletta," Margherita Tresca and who has been forced to remain at home despite her vocation to become a nun, takes on special significance within this wonderful fraternal relationship that Satan attempted to destroy. Father Benedetto's anxiety seems to find an echo in his disciples response: "I am really very sorry for that poor soul in Barletta! The Lord were never permitted her to be lost!" Here we see the brother friars come together in their passionate love for the reign of God.



Margherita Tresca

Marianna lafelice writing in her series of articles on women who were spiritual children of Padre Pio, said that this passionate love for the reign of God was the driving force behind his spiritual direction: so that "he will become for many women a 'companion of their souls,' a relationship that is perhaps hard to comprehend in today's hedonistic world with its false and shallow image of women."

Brother Luigi Lavecchia in his book, "Padre Pio of Pietrelcina's Journey of Faith in his Letters" (L'itinerario di Fede di Padre Pio da Pietrelcina nell'Epistolario) presents conformation to Christ as the principal goal of Padre Pio's life and that would be translated into a conformation of his mission to Christ's mission. If we read again the testimonies of those who knew Padre Pio, we observe how these souls saw in him a person conformed to Christ.

Brother Modestino of Pietrelcina wrote a book: "Padre Pio, like the Man of the Gospel" (Padre Pio, come l'uomo del Vangelo) in which he brought out with the simplicity of the Franciscan hagiographers of the past, how many moments in the life of his saintly fellow friar were expressions of this conformation. And we find similar testimonies from Mother Gargani and many other spiritual children.

Padre Pio's whole mission then should be seen in this unceasing "Christifying" of his life. However this journey of transformation, it is necessary to say – and the Letters testify to it excellently – was possible because of his living relationship of affective and spiritual communion with his fellow friars, particularly with his two spiritual directors.

They will be the ones, in fact who not only direct him to his apostolate of spiritual direction, but who will assist and guide him in these first steps. They will be the ones, above all, to inspire and to arouse in his heart his great desire that he will described as a "bartering for the salvation of souls."

This was for Padre Pio, we can truly say, a passionate love for his brothers and sisters that he shared first of all with his brother friars.



Padre Pio happy among his fellow capuchin friars