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The Leper Priest of Louisiana

BY WARREN DICHARRY, C.M.

"Last evening at half past seven o'clock, the *Rev. Charles Boglioli, C.M.*, one of the resident priests of Saint Joseph's Church, on Common Street, departed this life after a lingering illness of two years." Thus began the brief notice in the New Orleans paper, *The Times-Picayune*, on 23 July, 1882.¹ Fortunately, the paper did provide a general and fairly accurate account of his life, adding that "Rev. Father Boglioli was well known throughout the city and state as a man of great learning, pious, affable and courteous to all, and a good friend of the poor."² The obituary concluded with information about the funeral the following day at Saint Joseph's church and interment in Saint Stephen's (actually Saint Vincent's) cemetery.

In the account, however, there was one significant omission, the cause of death. It reported that Father Boglioli "ministered to the sick and dying in the Charity Hospital, which duty he performed until stricken down with the disease, which he is supposed to have contracted in that institution and which terminated in his death."³ What disease? The one whose name was, and still is, more often than not spoken only in whispers—*leprosy*. Or, as it is more sensitively known today, Hansen's Disease.⁴

Why did the newspaper account not identify the disease? Perhaps out of respect for the dead and for the hospital itself, such was the stigma attached at that time, and even now, to the most dreaded disease in history. Much of that stigma was and is based on ignorance, but nevertheless it remains. Only in books and films about the famous Father Damien, whose heroic care of the lepers on Molokai, Hawaii,

¹*New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 23 July 1882. A clipping is located in De Andreis-Rosati Memorial Archives, Saint Mary's Seminary, Perryville, Missouri, hereinafter cited as DRMA.

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*

⁴Named after Dr. Armauer Hansen, a bacteriologist and physician in Bergen, Norway, who discovered the leprosy-causing bacterium, "*microbacterium leprae*," in 1874. While this name has been the official designation of leprosy since 1938, I have generally chosen to use the older terminology not only because it was the only one in use at the time of Father Boglioli but also because it conveys something of the trauma that must have beset its victims.

ended in his death by the disease, do we see leprosy depicted in realistic terms and lepers portrayed, not as pariahs, but as people, and often very remarkable people at that.

Father Boglioli was, indeed, recognized as nothing less than *heroic* by those who knew him best, his fellow Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity, especially those who ministered to the sick poor at Charity Hospital. Father William Ryan, C.M., writing in the *Catholic Union and Times* of 3 August 1882 began thus: "Surely here is a record of a noble life and glorious death revealing a sacrificing of self for Jesus and the neighbor that must appear utterly unintelligible to the indulgent pagan world of today."⁵ A Daughter of Charity, who ministered at Charity Hospital with Father Boglioli but chose to remain anonymous, penned a beautiful tribute to him, including these expressions: "He was truly the one chosen by our good God for the beloved of His Vineyard — the most suffering and afflicted of His poor. The all-watchful Providence of our merciful God permitted the thumb and forefinger of each hand to remain intact, thus enabling him to perform his duties of the sacred ministry for many years in our midst, to the edification of all who knew him."⁶

More recently Sister Roberta Degnan, D.C., superintendent of Hotel Dieu, did not hesitate to refer to Father Boglioli in a letter dated 18 February, 1941 as "our saintly Brother" and even "*our saint*."⁷

Others who truly appreciated Father Boglioli's extraordinary life and character were the doctors who either knew him personally or made him the special subject of their study. Such, for example, was Dr. T.J. Dimitry, a professor at both Louisiana State University and Loyola University, who wrote articles on the history and the nursing care of leprosy in Louisiana and who, in his admiration for Father Boglioli, sadly referred to him as "*the leper sealed in secrecy*."⁸ Such also was Dr. Rudolph Matas who, in a response to Dimitry's historical research, took the opportunity to reminisce as follows:

⁵William Ryan, C.M., in the *Buffalo Catholic Union and Times*, 3 August 1882. A clipping is located in DRMA.

⁶Undated document written by an anonymous Daughter of Charity under Charity Hospital letterhead, DRMA. Hereinafter referred to as Daughter of Charity, document.

⁷Document of 18 February 1941 written by Sister Roberta [Degnan, D.C.] under Hotel Dieu letterhead, DRMA.

⁸Dr. T.J. Dimitry, M.D., F.A.C.S., F.I.C.S., professor of ophthalmology and director of that department, Louisiana State University; professor of special anatomy, Loyola University, "The Early Nursing Care of Leprosy in Louisiana," *Collected Papers of the Hotel Dieu Staff for 1936*.

When as an intern at the Charity Hospital in 1879, I was in charge of a leper ward. There were about 15 lepers who had been segregated in that ward for lack of any other place to put them. Father Boglioli was the hospital chaplain for the Catholic patients at that time, a very benevolent priest who had virtually consecrated his life to his ecclesiastical duties. I still remember him visiting the sick and administering the last sacrament and otherwise living in the hospital and in the community without the least social restriction. I was so interested in the patients in the ward that I had seriously considered writing my graduation thesis on my hospital observations, and particularly the case of Father Boglioli himself, who was the only person known to have contracted the disease in the long history of the hospital . . . I have always thought of him as the *Father Damien of Louisiana*.⁹

How ironic! Father Boglioli, the almost unknown leper-priest of Louisiana, was compared favorably with Father Damien, the renowned leper-priest of Molokai. Ironic because, as a matter of historical fact, Father Boglioli was born twenty-six years before his illustrious fellow-priest, left his native Italy for ordination in the New World the very same year that Father Damien was born, began (after twenty-four years as professor, pastor, missionary, and army chaplain) to minister to the lepers at Charity Hospital eight years before his counterpart did the same on Molokai, continued that ministry at least as long as Father Damien, contracted the disease eight years before him, and died seven years earlier than he. Yet Father Boglioli was lauded as the Father Damien of Louisiana when rightfully Father Damien should have been praised as the Father Boglioli of Hawaii!

But comparisons are odious! There is no intention here to take anything away from Father Damien's fame; still less, to engage in a form of religious competition. No claim is made that "our leper is better than their leper!" In fact, there is not even a commitment to make the story of Father Boglioli widely known throughout the Church and the world. It cannot be denied, however, that he merits to be much better known among his Vincentian brothers and his sisters not only that they may accord him the honor he deserves but also, and primarily, that they may derive inspiration and example from his life and death. With this in mind, then, let us take a closer look at this remarkable person.

⁹Dr. Rudolph Matas, M.D., "Introduction of Leprosy into Louisiana, and the First Leper Hospitals," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 90 (September 1937):113-121. The citation appears on page 21 of a reprint of the article, DRMA.

Charles Boglioli was born 1 December 1814 in the Duchy of Parma and diocese of Piacenza,¹⁰ his city of birth being reputed as either Canressi¹¹ or Oppido Cango.¹² At the age of twenty-one, on 15 November 1835, he was received into the Congregation of the Mission and on 25 Januar, 1838, at the age of twenty-four, he pronounced vows as a Vincentian.¹³ It seems clear, however, that he had begun his seminary studies before he joined the Little Company, for it is recorded that he completed three years of philosophy and six years of theology at the Seminary of Piacenza,¹⁴ conducted for the diocese by the Vincentian Fathers, before departing for America in 1840.¹⁵

From the number of years devoted to seminary studies, it should not be inferred that young Charles Boglioli was a slow learner. In fact, quite the opposite was the case, for he is said to have mastered "about twelve languages,"¹⁶ Many years later, not only did he have the privilege of hosting the renowned philosopher-writer, Orestes Brownson, for three weeks at Donaldsonville, Louisiana (of all the unexpected places), but was even singled out by the latter as "the only philosopher I have ever met in America."¹⁷

Arriving in Louisiana in 1840, Boglioli was ordained a subdeacon and deacon on 24 and 28 February respectively in the year 1841 by Bishop Antoine Blanc of New Orleans at the church of the Ascension in Donaldsonville.¹⁸ Finally, on 2 March 1841 he was raised to the priesthood by the same prelate at Saint Mary's church in New Orleans.¹⁹

His first assignment was apparently as a professor in the Vincentian college at Cape Girardeau, Missouri.²⁰ How long this lasted is unclear, but evidently his teaching and example were more than satisfactory, for he soon became professor and vice-rector of Saint Francis Seminary in Brown County, Ohio.²¹ There he remained until 1845 when he was transferred, first to Saint Louis and then to the mission stations of Louisiana, where he devoted sixteen of the most fruitful and fulfilling

¹⁰*New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 23 July 1882; *The De Andrein*, May 1946; *Heri-Hodie*, May 1947.

¹¹*New Orleans Katholische Volkeszeitung*, 12 August 1882.

¹²Charles Boglioli, personnel files, DRMA; *Heri-Hodie*, May 1947.

¹³Boglioli, personnel files, DRMA; *Heri-Hodi*, May 1947; *De Andrein*, May 1946.

¹⁴*New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 23 July 1882; *Katholische Volkeszeitung*, 12 August 1882.

¹⁵Albert Proctor, "Physician and Priest Worked Untiringly to Assist Afflicted," *Hammond Louisiana Progress*, 1 April 1938.

¹⁶*Katholische Volkeszeitung*, 12 August 1882.

¹⁷*New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 23 July 1882; *De Andrein*, May 1946.

¹⁸Diocesan Book of Ordinations, chancery office of the archdiocese of New Orleans.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 23 July 1882; *De Andrein*, May 1946; *Heri-Hodie*, May 1947.

²¹*Heri-Hodie*, May 1947.

years of his life to the Donaldsonville and Bayou Lafourche areas. Interesting information about this period comes from Roger Baudier, author of *The Catholic Church in Louisiana*, and from various letters in the archdiocesan archives of New Orleans.

Writing to Stanley Stein, editor of *The Star*, a publication of the Public Health Hospital (for Hansen's Disease) at Carville, Louisiana, Baudier referred to Father Boglioli in part as follows:

You will note that he served for four years at Plattenville [on Bayou Lafourche], where the Diocesan Seminary was located, serving as professor at the nearby seminary and helping out in the parish church, which is Assumption Church, still standing and still functioning. From there on weekends, the Vincentian Fathers, including Father Boglioli, ranged over a vast territory which included the civil parish of Assumption on both banks of the Mississippi. Some of these missionaries trudged back all the way to the Amite River, French Settlement, and Port Vincent. They took care in those days of Donaldsonville's church also — Ascension Church — and visited plantations to give instructions to negro slaves, besides providing services and spiritual ministrations to the plantation owners and their families. The Vincentians from Plattenville went westward in their mission work as far as Atchafalaya, including Belle Riviere, where they erected a chapel.²²

For these far-ranging missionary labors, Boglioli was uniquely suited, not only possessing spiritual zeal in abundance but also being endowed with extraordinary physical powers. The *Katholische Volkeszeitung* of New Orleans, on 12 August 1882, gave a brief physical description: "Father Boglioli was an extraordinary, large, powerfully built, strong and healthy man whom no danger could intimidate."²³ The few photographs available, even the ones taken after he was already being ravaged by leprosy, clearly attest to his robust physical qualities, an unusual complement to his great spiritual and intellectual gifts.

Letters of this period (1845-1861) not only confirm but expand the picture of the widespread labors of Vincentian missionaries in this part of Louisiana, particularly those of Father Boglioli. Addressed mainly to Bishop Blanc (after 1851 archbishop of New Orleans), letters from Boglioli's superiors and coworkers placed him at such far-flung loca-

²²Roger Baudier to Stanley Stein, 5 June 1955, DRMA.

²³*Katholische Volkeszeitung*, 12 August 1882.

tions as Donaldsonville and Plattenville on Bayou Lafourche,²⁴ Attakapas Canal and Bayou Boeuf in the Atchafalaya Basin,²⁵ New River and Saint Michael's east of the almost uncrossable Mississippi,²⁶ a total territory of up to 5,000 square miles, more than one-tenth of the State of Louisiana.

More impressive than the distances involved, however, are the glowing reports of Boglioli's selfless apostolic zeal. "If it is possible, I would like to get some priests from the seminary to help me and the sick, preferably a courageous priest like Father Boglioli," wrote Father Menard to Bishop Blanc in 1853.²⁷ The following year Reverend Anthony Penco told him: "Prudence keeps me from sending Father N. back to Donaldsonville for the present. I think it would be better to assign Father Boglioli there, for he succeeded very well in Assumption Parish."²⁸ "I believe that Father Boglioli will do great good at Donaldsonville, where he is very favorably known," commented Father Anthony Andrieu a month later. "His good manners and polished sermons have already attracted the esteem of many persons. There will be many complaints in the parish he leaves."²⁹ In late spring 1854 Andrieu informed the archbishop that "last Sunday Father Boglioli returned from New River where he had spent six days. His influence was so great and the desire to receive the sacraments so compelling that he decided to do all he possibly could for them. This resulted in twenty-two first communions and ninety paschal communions."³⁰ No one was excluded from Boglioli's pastoral zeal, even those in society's lowest caste. "Could you come [to Donaldsonville] for confirmation?" his superior asked Blanc in 1859. "Father Boglioli has prepared forty of Narcisse Landry's slaves for the sacrament."³¹

²⁴Joseph Giustiniani, C.M., to Antoine Blanc, 13 May 1850, Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, hereinafter cited as AANO. The originals of the letters (most in French, a few in English) are preserved in the archives of the University of Notre Dame. AANO contains summaries in the third person which I have taken the liberty to reconstruct in the first person in order to approximate the original letters.

²⁵Anthony Andrieu, C.M., to Blanc, 31 June 1853, AANO; same to same, 21 July 1853, *ibid*.

²⁶Andrieu to Blanc, 5 June 1858, AANO; Mother Annette Praz, R.S.C.J., to Étienne Rousselon, 26 January 1855, *ibid*.

²⁷Father Menard, C.M., to Blanc, 15 September 1853, AANO.

²⁸Anthony Penco, C.M., to Blanc, 22 February 1854, AANO.

²⁹Andrieu to Blanc, 7 March 1854, AANO.

³⁰Andrieu to Blanc, 5 June 1858, AANO.

³¹Andrieu to Blanc, 29 June 1859, AANO.

The following incident illustrates the priest's humility and prudence. When the chapel at Bayou Boeuf in the Atchafalaya Basin was completed, the faithful there begged Blanc to send Boglioli to bless it, "as it was he who made the first subscription." Eager for his presence, the parishioners added, "We would like to see him once again among us."³² Although the archbishop commissioned Boglioli to do the honor, the missionary excused himself. "I received your letter with authority to bless the chapel at Bayou Boeuf," he wrote to Blanc,

but I do not know if it can be done just now. We have only two priests in the parish with the departure of Father Michael Calvo for one month to six weeks. . . . Those whom I appointed guardians [at Bayou Boeuf] have set themselves up as trustees and have told Father De Marchi that he could come once or twice a month and stay with different families. This, as you know, makes a priest lose confidence. . . . It would seem more fitting for the one who is going to serve the chapel to bless it.³³

There are other letters as well, but most of them are dated between 1863 and 1865. In the meantime the Civil War had erupted, and Father Boglioli had become chaplain for the Donaldsonville Cannoneers, ultimately accompanying them to the battlefields of Virginia where he remained more than a year.³⁴ There is little or no information about this interesting and dangerous time in his life. The *Katholische Volkeszeitung* offers only this comment: "Pitying the condition of the poor southern young men and old who were obliged to take up arms and leave their homes to die in the battlefield, he volunteered to share their hardships and try to save their souls as he could not save their bodies. The rest is known to God."³⁵

Upon his return from Virginia, Father Boglioli resumed his ministry at Donaldsonville and the surrounding areas, as indicated by a number of letters from him and others to Archbishop Jean-Marie Odin, a fellow Vincentian who, after laboring in Texas as vice-prefect apostolic, then vicar apostolic, and finally first bishop of Galveston, succeeded Blanc as the second archbishop of New Orleans. One of these letters in particular

³²F. Dellucky and others to Blanc, 3 May 1855, AANO.

³³Boglioli to Blanc, 11 May 1855, AANO.

³⁴Baudier to Stein, 5 June 1955, DRMA. Baudier quotes a Mr. Marchand's book *Flight of the Century*, comprising excerpts from the Donaldsonville newspaper in the mid nineteenth century. This source indicates that the cannoneers were not formed at the outbreak of the war but had existed since the 1840s or 1850s. They were accustomed to celebrate the feast of their patroness, Saint Barbara, with colorful ceremonies at Saint Louis cathedral in New Orleans.

³⁵*Katholische Volkeszeitung*, 12 August 1882.

testifies to Boglioli's unquestioning obedience. "I received your letter of the 10th instructing me to discontinue meeting at Mrs. Winchester's, he wrote to Odin. "I began this mission at Archbishop Blanc's order and I will discontinue it at your order. As to New River, I will do all I can to persuade them to build a church or chapel."³⁶

At the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865, Boglioli is said to have been stationed for a time at Point Barre on Bayou Terrebonne in order to negotiate indemnity for church property that had been destroyed during the war.³⁷ Then, late in 1865 or in 1866, he took up residence in New Orleans at old Saint Joseph's church, established in 1844 and conducted by Vincentian Fathers since 1858.³⁸ It later became Saint Katherine's church for negro Catholics after construction of the present Saint Joseph's in 1892. With the advent of integration, Saint Katherine's was discontinued in 1964 and ultimately demolished. Old Saint Joseph's was located on Common Street, renamed Tulane Avenue in 1886, directly across from Charity Hospital, the largest state hospital for the indigent in the entire country.³⁹ Founded in 1736 as Saint John's Hospital and rebuilt as the Hospital of San Carlos after the disastrous storm of 1779, it has been known as Charity Hospital since 1832 when it was entrusted to the care of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. From 1866 until his death in 1882, Charity Hospital became first the "parish" and ultimately the "home" of Father Boglioli.

Many and beautiful are the descriptions of his faithful ministry there to the sick poor, especially the lepers. Albert Proctor, who rightly attributed to Father Boglioli the inspiration for the establishment and operation of the leprosarium at Carville, Louisiana, conducted by the Daughters of Charity since 1896, summarized the priest's ministry as follows: "In 1866 he was back in New Orleans, stationed at the old Saint Joseph's church across from Charity Hospital. For fourteen years thereafter the kindly priest with his erect, military bearing and his shock of snowy hair, faithfully made his daily rounds among the sick and dying of the wards. At that time lepers, as well as sufferers from other chronic diseases of contagious nature, were hospitalized at Charity."⁴⁰ The anonymous Daughter of Charity quoted above continued her tribute to Father Boglioli thus:

³⁶Boglioli to Jean-Marie Odin, 13 August 1863, AANO.

³⁷Proctor, "Physician and Priest," *Louisiana Progress*, 1 April 1938.

³⁸Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1939), 367, 392.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 130, 199, 316.

⁴⁰Proctor, "Physician and Priest," *Louisiana Progress*, 1 April 1938.

He said Mass daily in our little chapel and, as he was most exact in the fulfillment of every duty, never did he fail in this most sacred one, coming each morning most punctually at the appointed time, never causing a moment's delay. He was the Sisters' confessor and also kept their retreats, but rarely except in cases of necessity did he exchange a word with a Sister, viewing them as he remarked to a person "as the Spouses of Jesus Christ" and in meeting them he bowed and raised his biretta.

To the doctors and students he showed the utmost deference and was by them most highly respected. With the poor he was at home, attending most faithfully to their spiritual wants and in meeting the convalescent patients or in visiting the wards, he passed a few pleasant words, thus cheering their poor and sad hearts; he was truly a kind father to all with whom he came in contact. He promptly answered the many calls to administer to the sick and dying, which occurred night and day. In order to prevent unnecessary talk and to establish order in regard to sick calls, he proposed to Mother Regina, of happy memory, to have the Sisters to place a little cushion in the sacristy a slip of paper on which were the numbers of the ward and bed of the sick requiring his assistance, and each day when he made his two customary visits he would look on the cushion and see where he was needed and then faithfully repair to the place and attend faithfully to the call unless some more urgent call required him to repair elsewhere.⁴¹

This detailed and somewhat lengthy examination of Father Boglioli's dedicated life prior to his final illness has been made in order to demonstrate that he was not just someone who happened to contract leprosy and die of it, but one whose entire life was nothing short of heroic, culminating in his inspiring death by that most feared of diseases. If it is true that the end crowns the work, then certainly Father Boglioli's life of service was crowned with an extraordinary ending indeed!

Although some have questioned whether Father Boglioli's illness was really leprosy or rather another form of skin disease, there was unanimous agreement among the doctors who diagnosed or researched his case. According to Dr. Dimitry, citing the *Annual Report of the Board of Health*, "the first symptoms appeared in 1875. It began with a severe catarrh in the head. In 1877, he came complaining of this catarrh. In 1878 he developed a sore on his left leg."⁴² Dr. Matas added his own personal observation: "Long before his retirement his features gradually assumed the leonine and most characteristic facies of the disease."⁴³

⁴¹Daughter of Charity, document, DRMA.

⁴²Dimitry, "Early Nursing Care," 4.

⁴³Matas, "Introduction of Leprosy," 21.

The anonymous Daughter of Charity offered the following description of Boglioli's final years.

Father was a great sufferer at times, but always kept faithfully at his duty, 'till the latter part of the year 1878 [1880?], when he gradually grew worse, keeping up with difficulty. Expressing a wish to die where he had labored, a room in our hospital near the chapel was fitted up for him and a good faithful old man, who had long served him at Holy Mass, was appointed to assist a Sister in caring for him; here he could hear Holy Mass, receive Holy Communion, and live near his dear Lord, whom he had so faithfully served.

He seemed like a father in the midst of a loved family; every want was carefully attended to and every pain was soothed as far as possible, but as the just must gain merit by suffering, as we see in the life of Saint Vincent, so our poor Father was to continue on his bed of pain many long months, there to edify all those who assisted or visited him.⁴⁴

While this sister was precise in her memories of Father Boglioli and very sensitive in her descriptions, she was apparently off in her dates by about two years. For instance, she placed the beginning of Boglioli's hospital ministry in 1864 when all other sources mentioned 1865 or, more probably, 1866. She indicated 1878 as the date of his forced retirement, while others placed it as late as 1880. Finally, she gave 22 July 1880 as the day of his death when official records clearly make it 22 July 1882. These discrepancies are mentioned not only for the sake of accuracy but also because there are indications that Boglioli was still active in 1878 in a very heroic way. For instance the *Heri-Hodie*, a publication of the Eastern Province of the American Vincentians, reported the following account:

In 1878, the yellow fever was spreading over Louisiana and, as might be expected, the Charity Hospital received a great many patients. Not wishing the younger priests of the parish to expose themselves to the plague, Father Boglioli made himself a voluntary prisoner in the hospital in order to attend to the plague-stricken. He succeeded in weathering this epidemic without suffering any ill effects from the dread disease.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Daughter of Charity, document, DRMA.

⁴⁵*Heri-Hodie*, May 1947.

On 22 April, 1882, exactly three months before Boglioli's death, Sister Agnes Slavin wrote a letter from New Orleans to an unnamed sister in Paris, part of which reads as follows: "M. Boglioli, the worthy and holy missionary who for a long time has fulfilled the difficult functions of chaplain at the hospital in spite of his infirmities, is very sick; we fear that the good God is about to take him from us forever."⁴⁶ So he did. The anonymous Daughter of Charity recounted Father Boglioli's death and funeral.

Finally in the July of 1880 [actually 1882], the Feast of St. Mary Magdalen, he passed peacefully away from this vale of tears to enjoy, I hope, the vision of that God whom he had so faithfully loved and served. The news of his death spread throughout the house and universal regret was manifested by all; many were the prayers offered for him, although all felt that he needed but few prayers after his long and meritorious sufferings. His body was taken by his confreres to Saint Joseph's Church, being laid in a coffin in which all could gaze on that loved and revered face, and on the morning of the 24th, they had Solemn High Mass celebrated for him and from thence [his body was] taken to St. Vincent's Cemetery (on Soniat Street), where he was placed in the tomb of his dear Brothers [Vincentians] and near that of his Sisters [Daughters of Charity]; thus surrounded by his Brothers and Sisters on earth, we may truly hope that he is in their happy company in a blissful eternity with St. Vincent, whose faithful child he ever proved himself to be, and where, I trust, we may one day join the same happy family.⁴⁷

One final note about the burial. The article by Albert Proctor contains these mysterious lines: "Father Boglioli's services were of the type that spurn recognition. As he lived, quietly and selflessly attending to his duties, so he succumbed to the disease which science has from time immemorial been able to arrest but never cure. He was buried secretly in the night, and only lately has it been discovered that he found his last resting place in the Soniat Street cemetery in New Orleans."⁴⁸ Does this "secret burial" contradict the previous account of his funeral? Perhaps not. It may well have been decided that, in view of the universal fear of leprosy (and of yellow fever) in Louisiana at that time, it would be wise to bury Father Boglioli secretly and quietly at night. The same fear may also explain why a careful search of the records at Charity Hospital reveals not a single mention of either his admittance or his

⁴⁶Sister Agnes Slavin, D.C., to Sister N., 22 April 1882, printed in *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 47 (1882):590-601.

⁴⁷Daughter of Charity, document, DRMA.

⁴⁸Proctor, "Priest and Physician," *Louisiana Progress*, 1 April 1938.

death. For that matter, it may also account for the almost total lack of knowledge on the part of Vincentians and Daughters of Charity today about this extraordinary priest.

For too long, the secrecy surrounding the death and burial of Father Boglioli has been a symbol of the silence that continues to envelop the Vincentian "leper sealed in secrecy." At least among his Vincentian Brothers and Sisters, let there be a renewal of interest in the extraordinary life and death of this exemplary confrere whose heart was as great as his body and who challenges us today and every day to "spend ourselves and be spent"⁴⁹ in the service of the Lord. With Saint Paul, this leper-priest reminds us, "continually we carry about in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that in our bodies the life of Jesus may also be revealed."⁵⁰

⁴⁹2 Cor 12:15.

⁵⁰2 Cor 4:10.