

# Luigi Crosio (1835-1916) and the MTA Picture

Research by Fr. Jonathan Niehaus

updated 2008

## 1. Written Sources

From: J. Niehaus, *New Vision and Life* (Waukesha, 2004), p. 112-114  
(with endnotes using abbreviations found there)

### ACQUISITION OF A PICTURE OF MARY

On October 18, 1914, there was no image of Mary in the Shrine. The first such image must have been a small Immaculata statue placed on the tabernacle at the center of the altar. Father Nicholas Wilwers, at least, recalled that Max Brunner spoke his “*Ave, Imperatrix!*” of December 8, 1914, while turned to the statue of the Immaculata. (The larger statues of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary came after the MTA picture, about June 1915.) The sodalists seem to have had a particular love for Mary as the Immaculate Conception, for their preference, even in 1915, was for an Immaculata and not a Madonna and Child. But Divine Providence had other plans.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the months after October 18, 1914, the boys tried to acquire a picture or statue of Mary, but lack of funds prevented them. One of senior sodalists, a native of the nearby Westerland region, recalled a relatively well-known local painter, the Baroness of Oer. He wrote a letter to ask her if she might paint a picture for the sodality, but the rector never mailed the letter since he didn't see how such a project could be paid for. Another sodalist who lay sick in the Vallendar hospital tried to do his part by soliciting donations from relatives and friends, but had little luck.<sup>2</sup>

Then, according to Father Kentenich in one source:

There was a teacher in our school, [Father] Huggle, a former Jesuit. I sat next to him at the table. We talked about it once. He said: I've come across a picture someplace. Maybe we could buy it. It was agreed upon. The picture was a present from him. The package arrived and was opened, and I still know as a fact that the picture was not at all to our liking at first, but since we had absolutely nothing else we hung it up. It grew on us because I carried everything I said into that picture.<sup>3</sup>

Father Eugene Huggle,<sup>4</sup> a Swiss priest and former Jesuit, had seen this picture in an antique

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. HUG (Text), p. 52f, 83 and KLEIN (1952), p. 11. The phrase “*Zur Marienstatue...*” eliminates the possibility that Max Brunner directed this words to the Immaculata image in the sodality banner.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Tagung für Bundespriester 1935*, p. 7; and Menningen/Engling, p. 54. HUG (Text), p. 54f (foot-note) notes that Fr. Kolb, usually favorable to artistic endeavor, faced stiff resistance (from the faculty) to the idea of commissioning a separate work for the Marian Sodality. Regarding the hospital efforts, see SCHULTE (1932), I 194f.

<sup>3</sup> *Tagung für Bundespriester 1935*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene Huggle was born in 1870, entered the Jesuits in Austria in 1897, and was ordained a priest in Holland in 1903. He taught German, Latin, and French and either taught or studied in Austria, Holland, England, and Denmark. He is no longer listed in the Jesuit catalog beginning in 1914, indicating that he left the Society in 1913, at which time he must have come to the Schoenstatt school. See e-mail to the author from Fr. William Mugan, SJ, archivist of the Midwest Jesuit Province, St. Louis, Missouri, October 20, 2003.

shop in Freiburg in southwest Germany on one of his trips from Switzerland to Schoenstatt. He paid about 23 Marks for the picture.<sup>5</sup> It was a color print of a Madonna and Child in an octagonal frame.

According to later research done by Father Heinrich Schulte, the picture arrived by train in Vallendar. Two Pallottine brothers, Brother Joseph and Brother Christian, were sent to retrieve the crate on Good Friday, April 2. Because technically it was a holiday, the officer at the train station did not want to release the shipment until Monday, but Brother Joseph's perseverance won the day. At last, the two brothers brought the picture to Schoenstatt on a small cart. The first anniversary of the founding of the sodality was, in all likelihood, the moment the picture was installed in the shrine. This was the Sunday after Easter (Low Sunday), April 11, 1915, the day (as noted above) when more new members were admitted to the Junior Sodality.<sup>6</sup>

Father Kentenich refers to the gift of the picture in a letter to Josef Fischer written April 30, 1915:

Just before the beginning of May, we received a beautiful altar picture from Father Huggle (Madonna with Child).<sup>7</sup>

The picture, as would only later come to light, had been printed under the title *Refugium Peccatorum* (Refuge of Sinners), the work of an Italian artist named Luigi Crosio (1835-1915<sup>8</sup>). Clear to the boys was its Italian quality with gentle features that did not immediately impress these young men. For their German taste it seemed much too sweet and Italian! But a gift is a gift, and soon they would have no other picture. As Father Kentenich later noted:

I used the opportunity to read into (...) and out of this picture everything I had to say about Our Lady. And so [the boys] gradually associated their personal, interior sentiments with this image.<sup>9</sup>

The net result was a deep attachment to this picture that now graced the most prominent place in their little chapel.

(Additional note on page 115:)

We have already seen how the picture of Mary arrived. Other items also came together to make the little chapel quite homey. As Father Kentenich wrote in a letter dated May 12, 1915:

In the short time that you have been away, our little chapel has taken on quite a different look. St. Michael has had to give way to a beautiful picture of Our Lady (Madonna and Child) – a gift from Rev. Fr. Huggle. He [St. Michael] has been given a pedestal on the gospel side up front in the sanctuary. He is enthroned there as guardian of the Blessed Sacrament. The wide sanctuary arch sports a fine embroidered work: *Ave Maria*. Brother

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. SCHULTE (1932), I 195; TzV Sch, p. 210; and research by Fr. Walter Plein.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. HUG (Text), p. 54-63, especially 60f. This includes reference to SCHULTE (1955), p. 5, where one must correct the date of anniversary from April 19 to April 11 (Low Sunday vs. the calendar day).

<sup>7</sup> LETTER TO J. FISCHER, April 30, 1915.

<sup>8</sup> *Research since 2004 by Fr. Michael Savage has corrected the year of death previously found in art historical works from 1915 to 1916. The artist's actual date of death was January 15, 1916.*

<sup>9</sup> Series 1963 (January 8), 67.

Franz worked on it in his free time for 1½ years. The woodworker who framed it for us (for 17.50 Marks) estimated its worth at 300-400 Marks. That may be a bit exaggerated. But we are pleased with our chapel and feel more at home there than ever. You should feel equally at home. You, of course, receive a high rate of interest on the capital of grace which we are gathering here this May – provided that you contribute something to the capital on your part. You understand...<sup>10</sup>

From: J. Niehaus, *New Vision and Life* (Waukesha, 2004), box article, p. 114-115

## THE MTA PICTURE

The Crosio print which became Schoenstatt's picture of grace is by no means an old classic and yet has a life of its own in many respects. The original painting from which the prints originate was long the exclusive property of the Kuenzli Brothers firm in Zurich, Switzerland until both painting and rights were acquired by the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary in the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> In answer to an inquiry, the firm once wrote the following:<sup>12</sup>

The creator of the painting "Mother Thrice Admirable" – the original title was "Refuge of Sinners" – is Luigi Crosio; he painted quite a few pictures for the Kuenzli Brothers firm: religious pictures, scenes from everyday life, from operas, and others .... Thus, there is a declaration written and signed by Luigi Crosio and dated "Turino, October 10, 1898" giving Kuenzli Brothers the right of ownership of, and the exclusive right to reproduce the painting "Refuge of Sinners." The picture, therefore, must have been painted in that year.

The Kuenzli Brothers who had personal contact with Crosio are long dead. "Oral tradition" among the members of the firm, however, had it that the daughter of the artist had posed as model for the painting in question and for other pictures of the Madonna. I can recall having seen documents involving a copier in a legal process (but this was some decades ago). The copier – as such people do it – took his chance and maintained: One would have to prove that he had copied from Crosio and not Crosio from him. At that time Kuenzli Brothers offered to produce family photos of Crosio which proved that one of Crosio's daughters had been the model for the picture of the Madonna... I have no information about the model for the Christ Child.<sup>13</sup>

...The last paintings which the Kuenzli Brothers bought from him were made in 1911.

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<sup>10</sup> Kantenich, letter to one of the sodalists (probably Ferdinand Kastner), 12 MAY 1915. in KASTNER, p. 336.

<sup>11</sup> *The picture was purchased by the Quarten Province of the Sisters in 1966, who gave it as a gift to Fr. Kantenich. For many years it remained in the Provincial House in Quarten; in the 1980s it was transferred to the Mother House in Schoenstatt, where it is kept in the archives of the Sisters and used as original for the authentic prints of the MTA picture.*

<sup>12</sup> OIKIA, Vol. 6 (1972), p. 11-12, based on REGNUM, Vol. 3 (1968), p. 43f.

<sup>13</sup> A number of Crosio paintings published in art auction catalogs verify both his style and the use of his daughter as model for the MTA. See the Sotheby's catalog (New York), March 8, 2000, item 108: Portrait of the Artist's Daughter Dressed as a Shepherdess from Piedmont, 1879 and Christie's catalog (New York), October 15, 1989, item 200: Sister's Homecoming, undated. According to the 2002 appraisal of the internet site artcult.com, works of Crosio generally have a value of \$10,000 to \$15,000 on the current market.

Luigi Crosio (1835-1915<sup>14</sup>), a native of Alba, Italy, lived and worked in Turin, where he died in 1915, the same year that his picture – unknown to him – came to Schoenstatt. He was an artist of only modest renown who did works of a classical and operatic style, and is not well-known in modern museums. He was probably surprised that the “Refuge of Sinners” image would find such a worldwide audience through the Kuenzli Brothers. In fact, the original distribution has often surprised Schoenstatt members with the discovery of “their” picture in totally unexpected places, like in South Africa and South America, where it was widely known,<sup>15</sup> or in Ireland, where it went by “Refuge of Sinners”<sup>16</sup>, or in Milwaukee, where a couple married in 1900 received a large rectangular print as a wedding gift – hardly two years after the contract with the Kuenzli Brothers!<sup>17</sup>

In 1966 the Swiss Province of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary were able to purchase the original painting and the copyright from the Kuenzli Brothers; they presented it as a gift to Father Kentenich. It is currently kept in the possession of the Sisters of Mary in Schoenstatt, Germany, where it still serves as the original for printings of the MTA picture. At least three other canvas “originals” exist from Crosio’s hand, perhaps indicating his own love for this image. His signature appears on two of the copies.

A final point of interest is “Why this picture?” Why didn’t they bring the picture of the “Mother of Divine Love,” Vincent Pallotti’s favorite, into the “Madonna-less” shrine? A suitable copy hung in the oratorium of the New House. Or why not the copy of the original “Mother Thrice Admirable” of Ingolstadt, which hung in the dining room?<sup>18</sup> The best answer that we have is that nobody ever really gave it a serious thought, and as to the Ingolstadt connection, we need only refer to Father Kentenich in 1935:

First came the picture, then came the story with the *Colloquium Marianum* in Ingolstadt. You may ask, why didn’t we choose the actual MTA picture from Ingolstadt, which was already in the house – it seems to me across the hall from Father Auer? I didn’t want to bother the house with asking [for things] unless absolutely necessary. Besides, we hadn’t yet heard of the *Colloquium Marianum*....<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Actual death date: 1916 (see note 8 above).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Series 1963 (January 8) (DD 2, 69).

<sup>16</sup> *Maureen Lutgen of Ivanhoe, MN (native of Ireland) witnessed to its wide distribution in Ireland when she was growing up in the 1940s and 1950s, where it was known as “Refuge of Sinners.”*

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 12. This picture from the year 1900 now hangs in the house of the Schoenstatt Fathers in Waukesha, Wisconsin USA.

<sup>18</sup> This particular copy of the Ingolstadt MTA now hangs in the house of the Institute of Schoenstatt Priests on Mount Moriah, Schoenstatt.

<sup>19</sup> *Tagung für Bundespriester 1935*, p. 7.

## **About Fr. Huggle, who Donated the Picture**

*Source: E-mail of October 20, 2003 from Fr. William Mugan, SJ  
Archivist of the Midwest Jesuit Province, St. Louis, Missouri*

Dear Fr. Niehaus,

Eugene Huggle, a former Jesuit, was born October 30, 1870 (in Switzerland?) and entered the Society of Jesus November 21, 1897 at Feldkirch, Austria. After two years of Novitiate in Austria, he studied philosophy at Ignatius College in Valkenburg, Holland. Then he taught German, Latin, and French for several years at St. Aloysius College in Stittard, Holland and the Jesuit College in Feldkirch, Austria. His Theology studies were pursued in Innsbruck (then in Tirol, Italy) now Germany, St. Mary's College in Canterbury, England, and St. Ignatius College in Valkenburg, Holland where he was ordained in 1903. After ordination, he taught for a few years at St. Andrew's College in Copenhagen, Denmark. Fr. Huggles' name does not appear in the German Province catalogue for 1914, so he must have left the Jesuits in 1913. We have no information about him after that time.

As you know the German Jesuits were expelled from Germany from 1869 until after the First World War. That is why the members of the German Province entered the Society, studied, and taught in so many different locations in Europe.

I gathered this information from the German Province catalogues which we have here in the archives. For more info you might e-mail Dr. Clemens Brodkorb: [archv.gse@t-online.de](mailto:archv.gse@t-online.de) (the North German Province), and Dr. Rita Haub: [rita.haub@jesuiten.org](mailto:rita.haub@jesuiten.org) (the Upper German Province).

I hope this information is helpful. If I can be of anymore assistance in anyway, please let me know.

Fr. Bill Mugan, S.J., Archivist  
Midwest Jesuit Archives  
4511 West Pine Blvd.  
St. Louis, MO 63108-2191

## Fr. Kentenich on the MTA Picture

### 1. How the MTA Picture came to us

DD 2 (*Talk of January 8, 1963*), p. 66f, emphasis added

How did we end up with this picture? It was not chosen through deliberation, after much thought and discussion, but rather: it was in God's plan, given to us through the law of the open door.

Nowadays you can hardly understand the situation we were in back then. I had to naturally keep my plans for our young [seminarians] in utter secrecy and silence [because it would have seemed to bold for the rest of the faculty]. This was also true after we had identified with the Shrine imploring a place of grace and education. It made a great deal of sense, already because of young people's need for things to see and touch (the same need of popular thinking [and piety]), to find a picture. Of course, our great concern was: where will we get a picture?

At the time we moved so much in the shadows [of the seminary], in the cellar as it were, that we simply thought again and again: we must not draw attention to ourselves, we must remain so much in the shadows that no one notices what our true intentions are.

And so it happened that, at first, we were in a great bind. I have already told you about one of our boys, Bezold was his name. To be very blunt, he later hanged himself. Our history really mirrors all the highs and lows of humankind. (...) And at that time there lived in his neighborhood, the area he came from, the Baroness of Oer. And the way teenagers are when they are excited for something (and she had made a beautiful painting of the Immaculata), he decided to write and ask her to paint us a picture. He wrote the letter, but it was never sent. The Rector intercepted it.

And now there was a former Jesuit with us, Huggle by name, who always sat next to me at the meals. And as things go, in conversation we came to talk about pictures of Mary and he said: Why, I say a very beautiful picture of Mary in an antique store in Freiburg. I told him, he ought to have them send it to us. I wanted to pay him for it. To my recollection it cost about 23 Marks and some odd cents. He did not want anything for it, of course. One can say: this is helplessness. I always see all these little things as the law of the open door.

This is the fact of the matter. Now the picture was to no one's liking. But because we had nothing else... You see, you can only understand that when we understand our helplessness, our "arcane discipline" [i.e. remaining in the shadows]. This is how different and incomprehensible our aims were to the rest of the community and the rest of the house!

And as you know, I then used every *opportunity to read into this picture and then read out of this picture everything which I had to say about the Blessed Mother. As a result, with time the personal, interior sentiments [which the boys had for Mary and about life] became associated with this image.*

In retrospect you really ought to examine what God's intention was with this, should I say, "mistake"? Interpret it as you want, but at least from the standpoint of the style of art [which would appeal to the boys] it was the wrong picture. But what was the divine intention behind this?

## 2. Finding our Image of Mary in the MTA Picture

*Der marianische Mensch, April 26, 1924* (further illustrating Fr. Kentenich's way of leading the community experience of Mary to the MTA Picture)

{26} Einen Einwand lese ich im Herzen einiger von Ihnen: Ich bin schon oft hier gewesen, aber ich finde mein Idealbild nicht von der Muttergottes. Mir scheint sie als Weib mit der Krone auf dem Haupte, über den Wolken schwebend. Wir verlangen nicht, daß das Bild der Gottesmutter bei allen gleich ist. Jeder hat sein eigenes Marienbild. Ein Bild ist mir ins Herz gegraben... Bewahren wir unser Marienbild. Aber können wir unser Marienbild der Kindheit nicht wieder finden in unserem Bilde der MTA? Schwebt unser Gottesmutter nicht über den Wolken, lässt sie sich nicht die Krone aufsetzen? Wenn ihnen das Bild der Gottesmutter als Orante gefällt, können sie dieses Bild nicht auch in dieses hineinragen? Die Mta kann doch auch für uns beten, indem sie den Heiland für uns bittet. Uns liegt viel daran, den großen Einheitsgeist zu finden, verkörpert in unserem Bilde. Jeder Titel findet seinen Widerhall in der MTA.

I can detect a misgiving in the hearts of some of you present. [You say:] "I have already been here many times but I do not find my ideal image of the Mother of God. For me she is the woman with the crown on her head, floating on the clouds." [My answer:] We do not require that everyone have the same image of Our Lady. Everyone has a different image of Mary. "An image is written in my heart..." [poem]. Let us keep this image of Mary. But can we not also find our image of Mary [such as the one] from our childhood contained in our picture of the MTA? Does not our Blessed Mother sit upon the clouds? Does she not let us place the crown on her head? Or if you like the image of Mary as the "Orante"<sup>20</sup>, can you not also picture this in our [MTA] picture? The MTA can pray for us by interceding to Christ for us. And much depends on finding the great spirit of unity embodied in our picture. Every title finds its resonance in the MTA.

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<sup>20</sup> Mary praying with her arms outstretched, a popular image of Mary in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s (including in the liturgical movement).

## 2. Artwork by Crosio

Commentary by Fr. Jonathan Niehaus,  
May 26, 2001

Crosio seems to have been a prolific painter, much of it apparently contract work. Because his works have not advanced to major museums, he is little known and examples of his work are difficult to track down. With the aid of internet indices available at the Milwaukee Public Library, along with their collection of major art auction house catalogs, I was able to find some valuable examples of his work. These include

1. Unidentified example of operatic scene, undated
2. *The White Dove*, 1878
3. *Portrait of the Artist's Daughter Dressed as a Shepherdess from Piedmont*, 1879
4. *Sister's Homecoming*, undated
5. *Refugium Peccatorum* (MTA Picture), 1898

Common features of these works are their clear lines, the proficient use of light and shadows, attention to detail (some might call it “quaint”), the central role of persons, an idealistic tone.

The image with the most significant relationship to the MTA picture is the *Portrait of the Artist's Daughter...* which almost certainly portrays the daughter who posed as the Madonna for *Refugium Peccatorum*. (the oral tradition of the Kuenzli Brothers says his daughter posed as Mary). This picture antedates *Refugium Peccatorum* by nearly 20 years. Crosio was 44 years old and his daughter must have been about 20. The value of *Portrait* is that it almost certainly portrays his daughter as she was (albiet in costume). If this same daughter did indeed pose as Mary in 1898, she must have been close to 40 years old. The image of Mary as painted by Crosio, however, does not betray such an age, except perhaps in the eyes. Either she kept her youth well, or Crosio was able to recapture her youth as he painted. But a third factor may also be in play: Other nuances in the face of Mary (compared to *Portrait of the Artist's Daughter*) give us reason to believe that while his daughter posed, Crosio's main inspiration was his own image of Mary as “Refuge of Sinners.” In the end, one can make a strong case that the woman he painted was not his daughter. The outward features are patterned after his daughter, but the inner light – deep-seated youth fused with maturity, wisdom, love and keen concern for those she looks upon – is Mary's. It is indeed a painting of the Mother of God.

*Sister's Homecoming* may give us a different clue – about the Child Jesus in *Refugium Peccatorum*. The two girls in *Homecoming* have the same kind of golden, curly locks found in the Child Jesus. The oral tradition does not say who posed as the Child Jesus... perhaps a grandchild? the memory of a grandchild? If the woman in the chair in *Homecoming* portrays his own daughter (the same as above?), it would seem that the two girls are his grandchildren. If so, the features of the Child Jesus reflect features in the Crosio family.

Finally, the multiple versions of the MTA picture receive some attention in the following collection, if for no other reason than to try and discern if the signed version is a copy from the hand of Crosio (the two versions studied are very close but seem to show minute differences). If they are distinct, might this painstaking copywork show a particular attachment of Crosio to this image?



Luigi Crosio,  
unidentified.  
From internet.



(Detail)

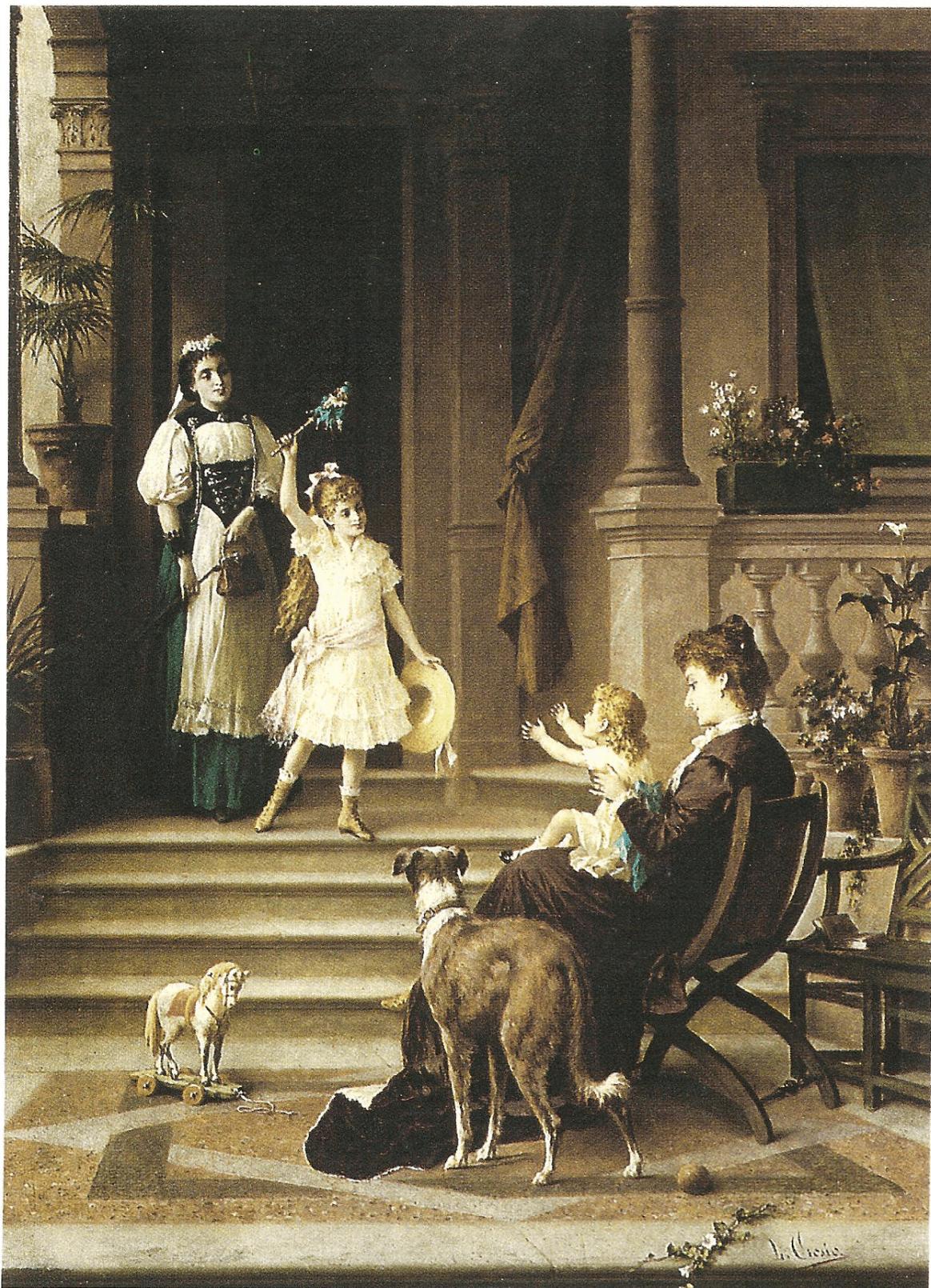
Luigi Crosio, *The White Dove*, signed and dated 1878 (oil on canvas, 13 x 9¼ in.).  
Christie's East Catalog, October 26, 1989, lot 94.



(Detail of signature)



Luigi Crosio (Italian, 1835-1915), *Portrait of the Artist's Daughter Dressed as a Shepherdess from Piedmont*, signed, painted in 1879 (oil on canvas, 39 x 27½ in.). Sotheby's New York Catalog, March 8, 2000, lot 108.



Luigi Crosio (Italian, 1835-1915), *Sister's Homecoming*, signed (oil on canvas, 36 x 26½ in.).  
Christie's New York Catalog, October 25, 1989, lot 200.



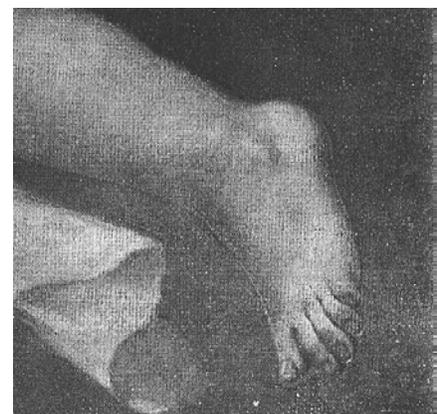
Luigi Crosio (Italian, 1835-1915), *Refugium Peccatorum* (Refuge of Sinners), painted under contract for the Künzli Brothers Printing House, Zurich, 1898. Since 1915 also known as *Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt*.

Alternate Canvas 1: “Somber<sup>21</sup>,” with Crosio’s signature

(Composite of two photocopies of picture located in Shrine sacristy, Waukesha, WI USA, printed c. 1960s with relatively extensive circulation at that time)

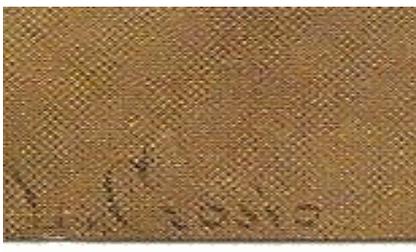
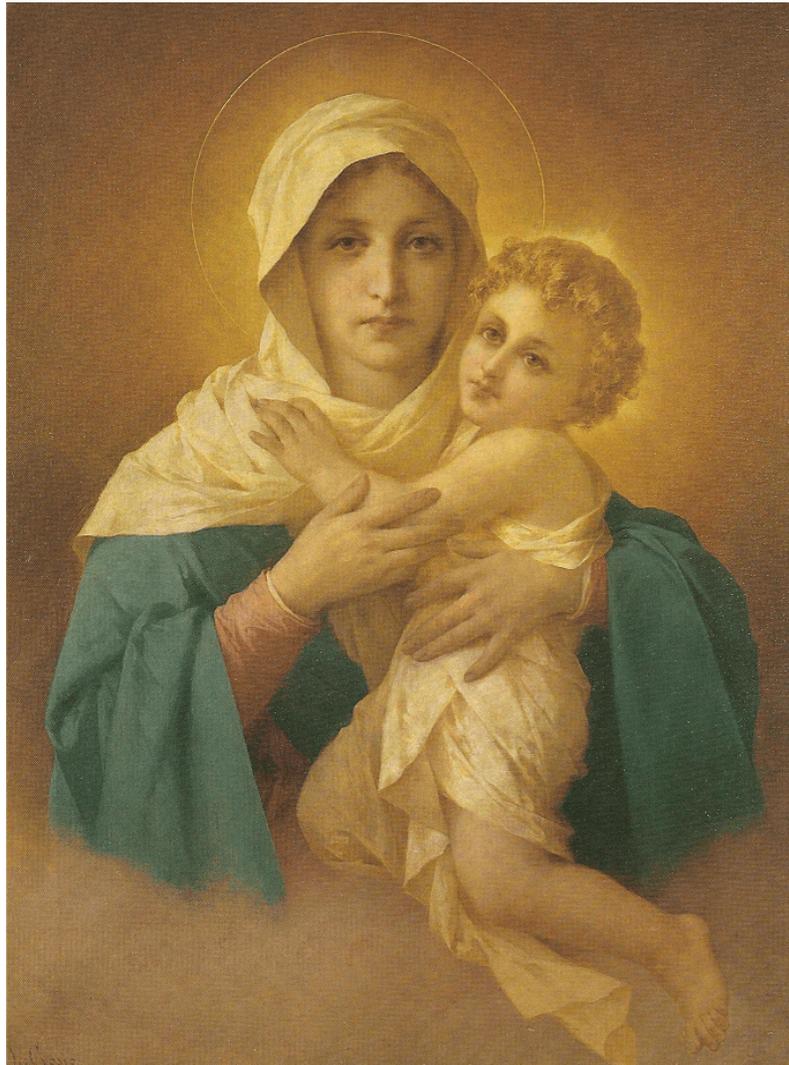


(Detail of foot of the Child Jesus that shows sharper outlines than in the standard canvas)



Alternate Canvas 2: “Golden<sup>22</sup>,” with Crosio’s signature

(Print)



(Detail of signature,  
lower lefthand corner)

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<sup>22</sup> So named because the colors show a brighter color with stronger yellow and golden hues than the standard canvas.

## St. Joseph Image by Crosio

The March 2006 issue of *Vinculo* (Santiago, Chile) featured this picture and included the following explanation:

For some time we have had this image of St. Joseph, thinking to use it for some edition of the magazine. We wanted to investigate a little into its origin and so we took up contact with Maria Rocio and Carlos Trascasa of Spain, who sent us the picture in the first place. There was not much they could tell us. These were their answers:

“Dear brothers in the covenant, we have received, as members of the editorial staff of *Tiempos Nuevos*, our message about the image of St. Joseph with the same child



held by our MTA. At the time when the *Hoja Informativa* of Madrid was published, we were, with our group 4 (“Families of Father”) of the Family Branch, the editors of this little bulletin. We remember that the image was made available to us by Barbara Aymerich...”

“Yesterday afternoon we had a group meeting with Fr. Eduardo Aguirre and talked about your request. We can say that the image came to Spain by way of Argentina. Fr. Eduardo told us that the picture was painted by the same artist who painted the MTA.”