

20 March 2009 -- ROME. Convention: "From Document to Monument" -- The Procura was very pleased that the Director of the Roman Congregation's Archives was invited by the Regional Government of the Province of Lazio to participate in this Convention. Dr. Alberto Bianco made a presentation describing the renovation and reorganization of the Archives, which commenced in 2006 with public funding. Experts in the field have acclaimed it as an extremely successful accomplishment.

The Archives of the Congregation of Rome are an essential instrument of research into the Oratory's history, and a very valuable legacy for the entire Oratory family. Its website may be found at: www.aco-roma.org.

Here follows the text of the interview that the Office of Communications had with Dr. Alberto Bianco:

- When did you begin your work in the Archives of the Roman Congregation?

I began in 2006, while the previous archivist, Fr. Alberto Venturoli, was still alive. He and I met through my work in the Procura's secretariate. I was working there when Dr. Aldo Giuliano, the Congregation's liaison with the Regional Government of Lazio, asked me to assist him in the renovation project. This work, directed by the architect Anna Di Falco, involved a complete restoration of the rooms that house the Archives, as well as a thorough reorganization of the Archives' substantial patrimony of historic documents, music manuscripts, books, and works of art. Fr. Venturoli died in April of 2008, and in September the Congregation entrusted the management of the Archives to me, and in this capacity I have continued my work in this important area of the Roman Congregation's activity.

- After your studies in history at the University of Turin, you pursued further studies at the Vatican's school for archival organization and library science. The Regional Government's high esteem for your work in the Archives must give you great satisfaction.

I would be less than honest if I denied that. True, the Lazio Government's assessment is flattering, and it recognizes the demanding work that has resulted in providing expanded services to the academic and cultural worlds. This would not have been possible without the generous help and competence of my co-workers, especially Dr. Francesco Cantone and Dr. Barbara Costantini, to whom I am grateful.

The Archives are very important, not only because of their value to the Congregation and the wider Church, but also because of the many contacts that are made with institutions and cultural centers in other countries. So it is a great honor to work here and to serve the Congregation in a field that the Oratory has traditionally considered a special part of its many apostolic activities. One only needs to read Fr. Edoardo A. Cerrato's concise study of the Congregation of the Oratory's commitment to learning to see how this can be documented. This article has recently been published on the Procura's website.

- Would you say something about the Archives' relationship with other institutions and cultural centers?

Yes. In the past, the Archives have had contacts with scholars, and I can say that these contacts have been increasing lately -- to name just a few of the institutions with which we have recently had contact: the Morgan Library in New York, the Albertine Academy in Vienna, the National Gallery in Mexico City, the Roman Academy of San Luca, the German and Austrian cultural institutes here in Rome, the Vatican's Secret Archives, the Italian Institute of Music History, and the Roma Tre and Tor Vergata campuses of the University

of Rome. We have also collaborated with scholars in various cultural exhibitions and displays. The Archives preserve valuable materials regarding the history of the arts – some of the things are very valuable: one only has to think of what is there that pertains to Borromini. Chiesa Nuova and the adjoining rooms that were left for the Congregation's use after the well-known troubles caused by the Risorgimento are an incomparable artistic treasure, and the documentation about these treasures that the Archives provides are a mine of indispensable information.

I should also mention the meetings of scholars where I have represented the Archives: there were conferences in Cassino and in Sora to commemorate the fourth centenary of Baronio's death where I spoke about the archival material we have about this great church historian. I also attended a convention in Tolentino last November which was a meeting of the Center for Historical Studies of Macerata, as well as a convention in Camerino about the Baroque architect Aninori.

- *Could you describe the wide range of work that has been done in the Archives?*

Besides the restoration and renovation of the rooms, some of the artistic treasures in the Archives have been restored: for example, a 17th century bust of St. Philip Neri, and many paintings, some of which are quite valuable.

Regarding the reorganization of archival material, I can tell you that there was first a general fumigation to purify the archives of any pests. This was followed by a general review and audit of the existing inventory, and then an examination, selection and organization of various documents that had not yet been inventoried. We wanted to create a virtual inventory on the Internet that would be available to scholars who want to do research at the Oratory, and so we have also begun a search for archival materials that are now preserved in other institutions, due to the break-up of our own collection following the confiscation of ecclesiastical property by the new Kingdom of Italy in 1870 and the years immediately following.

A special section of the Archives houses the valuable complete collection of 190 land office maps and architectural plans for Chiesa Nuova as well as the adjoining building complex designed by Borromini. In addition to producing a computerized catalog of these documents and restoring them where necessary – a project that is presently underway -- we are moving ahead on our organization of these items in acid-free protective cases.

Our music collection is a very interesting piece of heritage, not only for the history of music, but for the history of Rome itself. Although this collection was sadly scattered with the passage of time, we have managed to retrieve more than 1800 valuable manuscripts, either originals or copies.

We are nearly finished with our project of cataloging all of the books in our archival collection.

Finally, a video was produced for the Convention, which can be found on our website. This video, through the use of many photos and few words, very eloquently describes the work done thus far in the Archives.

- *What is being planned for the future?*

Our work goes on, aided by the indispensable sponsorship of public and private agencies. We will continue what we have been doing thus far, aware of the importance – indeed, the vital necessity – of this resource for anyone who wants to study the history and spirituality of the Oratory. The Archives is a service that the Roman Congregation performs for the other Congregations of the Oratory, as well as for the world of culture. We also aim to develop the Archives and Library as a qualified center of Oratorian studies. There are

more than a few members of the Confederation who are deeply aware of the need for such a center (but in addition to this awareness, there is also a need for active collaboration in our work, and a willingness to support it financially). Moreover, the wider world of education and culture is very aware of the need for this center, so we won't let up in our efforts to search out the necessary sponsors from that sector.