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CHARITY AND FAMILY SUBSISTENCE:
FLORENCE IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Charity implies choice; and choice, in turn, usually requires some method of checking. If we leave aside casual or indiscriminate distribution of alms (say, of small change to beggars outside a church, or soup to the needy at the convent gate), the regular and above all the continuous exercise of charity has always necessitated discrimination because of the permanent disproportion between resources and demand. In this sense, charitable institutions in the past functioned in similar manner to contemporary departments of social security, elaborating mechanisms to identify preferences: personal and family information was demanded and classified, such information was checked against anticipated norms or even by direct investigation, and on this basis either rejection or an appropriate level and form of assistance was decided. The distinction habitually made between charity and the welfare system is that, for the latter, need is the sole criterion giving entitlement to assistance (at least until the attacks on the welfare state of the past few years), whereas for the charitable organizations of early modern and modern Europe value judgements of worthiness accompanied assessments of need. In fact, as the literature on the persistence of poverty in the welfare state has amply demonstrated¹, assessments of need are often difficult to arrive at, even with the imposing statistical back-up of modern government, and easily contain value judgements. What is common to contemporary social security organizations and earlier outdoor relief charities is that because both work from the premiss of family needs, they are obliged to elaborate models, or at least Weberian ideal-types, of different family structures or different phases in the family cycle, in relation to their relative earning capacities, against which to test needs and upon which to draw up their regulations. It is this identification by an early nineteenth century Florentine charity of family structures, cycle and subsistence needs that is the main concern of this paper.

The Congregation of San Giovanni Battista was the main outdoor relief organization of Florence, to which a third or more of the poor turned for assistance - an annual average of 8600 in 1810-12, or over 10% of the urban population². By statute, it only assisted the labouring poor of the city, excluding not only non-Florentines, but citizens unable to prove their domicile, some job-skill (however rudimentary) and moral conduct. It was also statutorily limited in the outdoor relief it could offer, which consisted of five objects - cash subsidies, beds, bedclothing, (sheets, occasionally blankets), clothes and bread - some of which were subject to further conditions. These limitations derived from the highly specialised organisation of charity in Florence (as in most Italian and western European cities), by which individual institutions assumed specific responsibilities (such as hospitals for foundlings, conservatories for orphan girls, etc). But our Congregation played a central role in Florence of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as it existed to support the fundamental unit of social life - the family in its home - at moments of particular crisis. Permeating all its assistential activities was the concern to underpin the independence of the family as a unit, to prevent individuals or entire families from becoming permanently dependent on institutional support (for instance, in hospitals, workhouses or asylums), or alternatively from adopting strategies of survival disapproved of by society (theft, prostitution, unauthorised begging, etc).

In an earlier study of poverty, family structure and charity at Florence, I suggested, on the basis of a statistical study, that the Congregation concentrated its efforts on critical moments of the family cycle³. The purpose of the present paper is to explore this conclusion on the basis of a non-statistical analysis of the descriptions and comments made by the deputies of the Congregation about each applica-

tion for assistance. As in my previous article, the evidence is based on a sample consisting of all the applications from a single sestiere, numbering 1219 family units (4498 individuals) or 23% of the series. This second sestiere covered the quartiere of Santa Maria Novella and part of the zone around the cathedral of San Giovanni, typically popular areas of Florence, densely inhabited by artisan and street-trading families.

In order to request assistance, the Congregation required applicants to fill in a printed form, listing information about each individual living in the household: name, relationship to the head of household, age, state of health, job-skill, employer and weekly wage (if any); underneath these details, the applicants specified the form of assistance they hoped for. At the back of the form, the parish priest was asked to confirm the information and add his own comments, which were followed by those of two deputies of the Congregation. It is worth dwelling briefly on these procedures of acquiring information, as it was solely on their reliability that the individuals, units or categories to be assisted could be identified. Four aspects can be noted.

First, the quantity of information demanded was considerable and can be compared, without impropriety, to that required by contemporary social service offices. In a substantially illiterate society, the compilation of these forms must have frequently (usually?) required the collaboration of someone outside the household (parish priest? deputy of the Congregation? a neighbour or relative?), whose very participation can be read by us ambivalently as implying either a check on the veracity of the information or collusion with the suppliant (or both). But, perhaps more importantly, the quantity of information required must have discouraged the casual applicant (that Florentine yesteryear equivalent of the "scroungers" living off social

security, so useful to our English and American neo-liberal critics of the welfare state). It could have been no light matter applying to the Congregation, not something to be tossed off, like a football pools coupon, on the off-chance of a useful supplement to one's income; but a desperate measure, often a final resort, in the face of total indigence, destitution or worse. Indeed, the humane, upright and conscientious deputies of the Congregation must have reinforced this austere impression by their automatic dismissal of applications "because of inadequate information", or its "improper presentation", not only by the supplicants, but by the parish priest ("because of the limited information provided by the priest", "because the curate has written his usual general phrase"). Full presentation of this substantial corpus of information was thus a bureaucratic prerequisite, failure to comply with which risked the chilling response of one deputy: "Refused in that providing little information implies no great need"⁴. Only the genuinely needy or skilled rogues (our present-day "scroungers") were likely to go the trouble of applying. And the latter, although they did not know it, were rapidly identified in the deputies' registers and rejected, if they had ever before obtained assistance ("already assisted other times")⁵.

The second point to be noted about the applications is the character of the data demanded. The information about family relationships and age (common to many census-type sources) was essential to the deputies, in a general sense to set against their ideal-type families, and in an immediate sense to judge the nature and urgency of their intervention (e.g. separation of pubescent daughters from the parental bed). State of health and job-skills were more unusual, both serving (like weekly earnings) as component elements towards a composite judgement about levels of vulnerability; but also useful as discriminatory information,

both negative and positive: to decline responsibility for those without any job-skills (another statutory prerequisite), to elicit information about alternative supplementary benefits (was the applicant in receipt of "the usual subsidy for new-born babes from the Innocenti hospital"?), to recognise the drastic consequences of the illness or even worse the hospitalization of a head of household ("the grave and serious illness of the head of the family")⁶. Earnings, both individual and of the household unit, obviously represented a crucial element in the deputies' decision and (as we shall see) were subjected to some scrutiny.

The third aspect we must note is the procedure of visitations. A few families were at once excluded because they lacked the parish priest's confirmation of good conduct: "the family is not of good morals and for this reason has not been visited"⁷. On receipt of an application, two of the seventy-two deputies proceeded to a visit of the room in which the applicants lived. Such personal contact was an essential ingredient of nineteenth Catholic charity, shortly to be fixed in its definitive mould by de Gérando in his best-selling Le Visiteur du Pauvre (1820) as the most effective method "of recognising true indigence, and rendering alms useful to both donors and recipients"⁸. In practice, the visitation permitted the deputies to assess the applicants' living conditions (although presumably not to verify earnings). A negative judgement from the deputies ("very poor, but not of the most needy") was virtually equivalent to rejection⁹. Following the comments of the visitor-deputies, another deputy, acting as rapporteur, wrote his proposal for a decision, which was then submitted to the Congregation's bureau (six deputies, acting in rotation). This rapporteur's proposal was almost always clear-cut, accompanied by a brief explanation. But on rare occasions he expressed uncertainty and left the decision to the

bureau, as in the case of an unauthorised beggar (technically disqualified from further assistance) whose family lived "in great and extreme misery", or the wife, forced by her husband's hospitalization to change to a cheaper but totally empty room, asking for a bed and bedclothing which the regulations did not permit¹⁰. Applications were occasionally rejected in the absence of adequate information from the visitor-deputies ("given the little verification of the request by the deputies"), even through their failure to check the age of a starving widow¹¹. An obligatory requirement for a subsidy to pay for a wetnurse was a visit by a doctor, sometimes (always?) the Congregation's doctor, whose report occasionally led to refusal¹².

This complex procedure based on personal knowledge brings us to the final point - verification of the veracity of the information. Here the most delicate item was the declaration of earnings. There were no direct means by which the deputies could check the amounts earned from intermittent (mostly textile) putting-out work or street peddling; nor, in this instance, could they rely on the parish priest, little better able than they to check and more likely to confirm than to deny (and hence ensure the rejection of) the declarations of worthy and genuinely needy parishioners. The deputies, in fact, were suspicious and rejected a fair number of applications on the explicit grounds of "greater earnings than those declared", "must earn more than declared", "untrue declaration of personal earnings", "false declaration of earnings", and similar verdicts. Usually we do not know on what evidence they based their conclusions. But on occasion they point to specific skills, such as the silk-weaver's (where work was not lacking and hence earnings must be higher than declared) or the coach-builder's (who must be earning something); or deny that it is possible for a family to declare no earnings; or comment that the age and good health of the individuals mean that they must be earning more than they declare¹³. There can be no doubt about

the scepticism of the deputies over the precise earnings declared, nor about their direct knowledge of wage levels. But not only is the proportion of applications rejected on these grounds minimal (perhaps 60 out of the total 1219); more important is the statistical evidence that the declared earnings of three quarters of all applicant families provided less than minimal subsistence, so that even substantial under-declarations would not have removed them from the most vulnerable category of poor¹⁴. At best, gross or inept under-declaration of earnings served the deputies as a further means of discrimination amidst a multitude of desperately needy families.

That the deputies were aware that virtually all applicants were not only poor but in critical circumstances is evident from the terminology they employed. "Poor" (povero) described a permanent condition, "wretched" (miserabile) a state of urgent need, a "poor" family was presumed able to find the means of ensuring its subsistence, a "wretched" one was clearly beneath the poverty line. For the families themselves the distinction between povero and miserabile was tenuous and mobile, a continuum rather than a contrast, for both labels not only included families practising the same (usually low level) skills and living in the same houses, but could describe the same family at different moments of its cycle. For the Congregation, the distinction was definitive: "Poor to the utmost, but not of the most needy. Rejected"¹⁵. The operative words for serious consideration by the deputies - which applied to the overwhelming majority of applicants - were "wretched" or "needy" (bisognoso), around which was woven a miniature tapestry of qualifications: "wretched enough", "very wretched", "extremely wretched", "most wretched", "state of wretchedness", "truly needy", "state of extreme need", in short, appurtenance to

what was significantly called "the class of the wretched". Given these variations on the term miserabile, visitor-deputies were obliged to employ alternative signals to highlight the most urgent cases, such as "maximum indigence" or "total destitution"¹⁶.

It is evident that such terminological distinctions served a function of discriminatory choice, in exactly the same way as the rejections through inadequate information. The deputies never explain what they mean by "poor", at most affirming that the applicants earn or, given their condition, could earn enough for their subsistence. It is rare to find so explicit a statement as "not appropriate to be assisted, as sufficiently provided with everything"¹⁷. In like manner, and far more frequently, the deputies took refuge behind their regulations. A substantial number of rejections (38% of all applications were rejected) were justified generically as "contrary to the regulations". In specific instances the refusal might be because the application was for something not included among the Congregation's items for outdoor relief - a dowry for a daughter, assistance to train a son as coach-driver. Alternatively, the application would be rejected because it came from a beggar, whose licence to beg from the Congregation automatically precluded further assistance. Families applying for blankets in the summer were not granted them as it was not yet the right season¹⁸. Yet again, the rejection might be based on the non-conformity of family conditions with the specifications of the items requested - the fact that a mother was actually suckling her new-born babe, even though she was starving, when the regulations stipulated a physical inability to breast-feed; clothing for adults, even when they were literally in rags, as only children were statutorily entitled; refusal of a bed, because the children were too small to require separation, even if there were many of them¹⁹. As one would expect, some rapporteurs were more meticulous than others in their interpretation of the

rules. It is possible to point to extreme cases of bureaucratic-minded deputies who had lost sight of the human distress staring out at them from the applications, such as the refusal of a wetnurse subsidy because the babe's incapacity to suckle (as distinct from the mother's to feed) was not foreseen in the regulations. Red tape most clearly smothered the direct contact on which the charity operated on those rare occasions when the rapporteur decided primarily or exclusively in terms of maintaining a rough balance of charity between the parishes: "refused, given the multiplicity of subsidies needed by this parish [San Lorenzo]", "granted, given the few subsidies that this parish [Ognissanti] has obtained"²⁰.

But it would be misleading to place too much weight on a legalistic approach to the requests of these needy families. The deputies were not only compassionate, but were prepared to interpret the rules broadly, even in special cases to go against them. Mothers denied the wetnurse subsidy were often granted nappies instead. Single old women were frequently given at least bread. Very large families, with four, five, up to nine children, were granted beds even if the children were not of the statutory age. But even small families could reasonably hope for a bed, if their living conditions were particularly shocking ("they are all sleeping together on a straw mattress on the damp floor", "sleeping on boards", or "on a chest", "on straw", "more than a bed, it seems like a dog's kennel", "on the bare floor", ...) ²¹. Grants were occasionally made despite inadequate declarations, "because of the information provided by the parish priest". A wetnurse subsidy was granted, although not within the regulations, "given the wretchedness of the family and the lack of employment"; a family, "wretched to the utmost", denied a bed, was given an alternative subsidy. A bed was granted, even though it was noted that the father was an authorized beggar; or where father and son were sleeping on the bare floor, "even though it is known that

this family already got a bed from the Congregation, which perhaps was sold". A wife about to give birth was often sufficient justification for the grant of a bed. Most revealing of a willingness to interpret the rules in order to fit the human case are two examples of beds which should have been refused as the daughter was marrying. In the first case, it was noted that the bed was the property of the daughter, whose marriage would have left her father and sister bedless; in the second instance, having observed that the daughter was about to marry and could not do so as she was the only earner in the family (and hence unable to buy a bed), it was decided, casuistically, that a bed could properly be granted to separate her from her parents and not because she was marrying²². If the regulations were sometimes used as a means of negatively determining choice, if individual rapporteurs could sometimes display deeply hostile suspicion and reject applications perhaps in a bout of irritability, there is abundant evidence that for the most part the deputies utilised the evidence they had assembled so carefully in order to assess the relative degrees and urgency of need of the families they had visited.

What did the deputies look for? What criteria did they employ to guide their choice? The comments they wrote on the applications provide us with a fairly definitive picture which - bearing in mind that the information was based on face-to-face contact - can reasonably be accepted (at least for those aspects which they noted) as an accurate description of family and living conditions in these lower, more unfortunate levels of the poor.

Three parameters can be identified, within which the deputies located their entire discourse - the presence of

kin, the level of earnings and the size of family. All three, separately or in various combinations, were repeatedly employed as a means of explaining why a family was miserabile (and hence meritorious), or why it should not receive help. The washerwoman, living alone, was denied help as her son, even if not living with her, could provide for her subsistence; the aged widowed mother, with low earnings, merited assistance as her only son was about to leave her in order to marry; the old, mentally ill widow, living in the same house as her married daughter, was granted aid as her son-in-law (himself an applicant for a bed) was not able to help her. A conscripted son was a guarantee for a grant, precisely because conscription implied enforced absence of kin (even worse, of male kin) and hence a sometimes drastic diminution of earnings²³. The quintessential prerequisite for an application was inadequate earnings, repeated in virtually all applications, whose counterproof is to be found in the systematic refusal to grant aid because in the deputies' judgement the family earned enough. Size of family functioned in similar dualistic manner: "maximum indigence" was the alarm-bell sounded for big families (nine, even eleven members) "because of their large number and low earnings"; whereas the single individual, even female, was refused aid "because she is healthy and of an age to earn her living"²⁴. Within these three parameters, state of health provided a crucial supportive function, rarely sufficient of its own to justify assistance, but a clinching argument in combination with one of the three permanent conditions. Thus the aging man of limited health was rejected because he had no family to support; the family of three headed by a sick father was assisted because of inadequate earnings; husband and wife were given a grant, as the husband's earnings, normally adequate, were insufficient to pay for all the medicines his wife needed during

her prolonged illness²⁵. Two ideal-type meritorious families, at the extremes of our continuum, were the single widow, alone in the world, aged, of uncertain health and hence unable to earn enough for subsistence; and the large, sometimes extended family, with children too young to earn, an aged parent, and one of the normal earners sick²⁶.

A certain symmetry thus existed between family structures likely to provoke cool detachment and those certain to attract sympathetic attention among the deputies. A check-list of the former, destined to be refused assistance, would read as follows: "excellent earnings" or "sufficient earnings"; "young, healthy and [hence] capable of earning"; a young couple without children; an adolescent of sufficient age to earn enough; a single young woman; an old but healthy man or widow; a female head of household aided by her children; a female with small children requesting a bed, or with a son old enough to buy one; a daughter leaving home to marry asking for a bed. Certain job-skills, judged as generating adequate income, were likely to justify rejection of those who declared them: female silk-weaving especially, but also washerwomen and an innkeeper; and servants, as they were expected to be looked after by the household that employed them²⁷.

The counterpart to these types of families regarded by the deputies as self-sufficient was the family condition that merited particular attention. Single aged women, if ill, were almost certain to receive at least bread (if healthy, they might be rejected on the grounds that they could beg); orphans were guaranteed help, as were abandoned wives; the recent death of a husband could ensure assistance, as would the additional burden of an aged infirm parent. Children too young to earn, a deranged member of the family, serious or prolonged illness of a resident relative, and especially of the head of household, all guaranteed assistance; large families were almost equally sure

of receiving a bed, not least because they were likely to include at least one pubescent daughter who had to be separated from her male relatives²⁸.

It would be over-simplistic to conclude that the deputies of the Congregation restricted their help exclusively to the critical moments of the life and family cycle. Social and especially moral considerations played a not inconsiderable role. Families with some link with the Congregation or the parish priest were especially meritorious; recommendation from an influential person (the local police official, a high level bureaucrat) could prove decisive. Soldiers and officers, suddenly unemployed after 25-30 years' service through the vagaries of political change, were given sometimes substantial help. Professional skills - as a copper engraver, a violinist, a teacher - deserved particular regard, as did the dismissed clerks of the former grand-ducal administration. Occasionally and imperceptibly such social considerations could merge into traditional and by now anachronistic concerns for social status, for the shamefaced poor (even though the legal responsibility for the shamefaced belonged to the separate institution of the Buonomini di San Martino). It is difficult to tell whether a dismissed clerk was genuinely destitute or merely unable to sustain his proper station. But there can be no doubt about the families described as of "good birth" or "civil condition", regularly granted assistance; nor about the family "of noble birth", where the wife fell ill through having to do all the housework, so obliging the husband to pawn his possessions in order to pay for a woman to look after wife, three children and home²⁹.

Once more, we must not exaggerate this handful of instances of social considerations reinforcing, and in rare cases even replacing, assessments of the economic condition of the families. Certainly more important were moral considerations. In extreme cases, usually of large families, an

unruly child or one who refused to work would be removed from home and placed in the disciplinary Casa Pia³⁰. Daughters were given clothes in order to go to church³¹. But above all beds were granted to separate the sexes, even when it meant going against the regulations or despite fears of fraud. Daughters entering puberty were the main concern, but sons reaching an age of sexuality (in one case noted as fourteen) also provided an impelling reason to grant a bed. The deputies were quite explicit: the daughters were of "a dangerous age", it was "a scandalous matter" for daughters to sleep together with young parents; on the contrary, a six-year old girl could continue "for some time" to sleep with her parents and maternal grandfather³². Potential sexual promiscuity was the more worrying as kin sleeping together extended beyond parents and children: orphan nieces needed to be separated from their uncle, a father-in-law and his son from the married couple, children and grandfather from the marital bed - while a pubescent niece was told to continue sleeping in the same bed as her uncle, given his old age and infirmity³³.

Specific moral considerations thus coloured the deputies' judgements, though even in the case of sexual worries they did not often lose sight of the possibility for the family to buy its own second bed. Nevertheless, their prime concern remained the economic independence of the family throughout its cycle. This explains why they never refused to redeem the household possessions pawned by a family at the monte di pietà, as their sale by the monte marked a significant rent in the thin fabric of the family's autonomy³⁴. The deputies were always sensitive towards negative conjunctures in the family cycle: illness, unemployment, an imminent childbirth, loss of a son through conscription or a husband through death were regularly accepted as justification for granting assistance. But, more importantly, they

also displayed a clear awareness of the structural relationships between levels of earnings and, on the one hand, the individual life cycle (in which age and gender were the determinants); and, on the other hand, the family cycle (in which income was limited not only by age and gender, but by the number of children and the small proportion of earning members)³⁵. Large families and single old women were given a preference precisely because they were the least likely to earn enough for subsistence. But the most miserable job-skills, such as muck-raking or street peddling, were recognised as yielding "uncertain earnings", or as unlikely to provide enough for a family³⁶. Unequivocally the policy of the deputies consisted of intervention to underpin the most vulnerable family structures and the most critical moments of the family cycle, which they identified by direct impressions and experience, without need of the statistical evidence of subsequent historical research.

In a simple model of urban poverty, charity would thus have been channelled to discrete nuclear families, each comprising its own household. In my earlier article I pointed to the practical identification of family and household: 94.6% of the applications described two-generational nuclear families, and a mere 0.6% included non-relatives or more distant kin³⁷. Analysis of the deputies' comments, however, reveals a more complicated image, as a small minority of applications came from, or on behalf of, individuals living (and sleeping) with larger families. Although the identification of household and family remained overwhelmingly the norm, it was the abnormal cases that attracted disproportionate attention from the deputies, precisely because of the burden represented by the additional household members.

Among this limited number, the most frequent case is that of an aged parent: the mother living with her son's family of four, unable to support her, merited help, as did the son-in-law, unable to support his mother-in-law when

she fell ill, even though she did not live in the same house³⁸. The principle underlying these favourable decisions was that acceptance of family responsibilities could overstretch subsistence capacities; we can consider it as a variant on the assistance given to widows living alone, who did not deny that they had kin, but described them as in as wretched a state as themselves. Another variant was when the family was so poor that a newly married son or daughter could not afford to rent a separate room: bedding complications were created, in which not just sisters, brothers, mothers or fathers, but even fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law found themselves sharing the same bed, and appealed to the willing ear of the deputies³⁹.

More complicated were the cases where blood-ties were less close or even non-existent. Orphans were the main group concerned: the niece sleeping with her married aunt, with husband and four children, was an obvious candidate for a bed⁴⁰. But if the orphan was without relatives, the importance of finding a family ready to accept her (for almost only cases of girls are recorded) more than justified a bed⁴¹. There could be perfect consonance between the ideals of the Congregation and the applicant family, as with the widow Mazzaranghi, who had taken in the Braccini orphans, brother and sister, and "it seems, is giving them an excellent education"⁴². But in other instances, the orphan might only be taken in because of the householder's need of assistance: widow Pestellini, old and ill, was obliged to take in a girl from the public orphanage (Bigallo) to share her work (and hence her insignificant earnings). The orphan Anna Chini, "sick and infirm", lived with non-relatives, but in such wretched conditions that she was granted aid, "given her pitiful situation"⁴³. The examples of households containing more than the classical nuclear family are too few and the comments of the deputies too cryptic to deduce any elaborate significance about the implications of

cohabitation at this level of subsistence, where space, beds and food were all in very short supply⁴⁴. But it is evident that the Congregation's prime concern was to find a home for orphans and that it was prepared to listen sympathetically, even to stretch its rules in order to achieve this end.

What conclusions can be drawn from this study of charity and subsistence? There can be no doubt that the Congregation of San Giovanni Battista understood its duties of outdoor relief (a domicilio) in a very literal sense: the deputies saw their task as underpinning the independence of the family, both economic and residential, at moments of crisis. To achieve this end they were prepared to intervene at various levels of subsistence crisis (from a family's initial use of the pawnshop to its sudden awareness, through absolute lack of food, of the immediacy of starvation⁴⁵), at different stages of the family cycle (orphans, large families, aged widows...), and at particular conjunctural moments (sickness, insanity, unemployment...), while deliberately excluding others (young couples, healthy adults, individuals with skills judged capable of ensuring adequate earnings...). Precisely because of their overriding concern with the family in its home, they were particularly sensitive towards the problem of orphans, who lacked kin and consequentially also neighbourhood support. But equally, although they preferred to deal with entire families (and hence insisted on full information), they were prepared, wherever judged necessary, to intervene within households in order to assist a specific individual. The conviction of the deputies about the centrality of the social role of the economically independent family unit would be difficult to fault. At most, one may query whether

the forms of charity they proposed were appropriate to the world of structural poverty which was their domain⁴⁶.

Institutional sources offer little direct evidence about how families viewed and responded to the cyclical problems of daily existence at a permanent level of minimum subsistence. In this instance, application to the Congregation was evidently regarded as an aspect of the family strategy of subsistence, but only as a fall-back tactic, more or less the last resort of a family of good morals to meet an immediate crisis. It is unequivocally clear that the equilibrium between needs and earnings was always taut, as liable to snap through the absence of a bread-earner as through the presence of an additional member in the household. Our Congregation, probably like most outdoor relief organizations, offers us evidence about some cyclical needs. Another crucial aspect of poverty at Florence, which the Congregation failed to confront (presumably because it was not contained in its statutes) and hence which is only hinted at, was the high level of rentals, which explained the overcrowding and cramped habitations of these families. The problem remains to be explored, although the deputies' refusal in one instance to help pay a rent, on the specific grounds that "these cases are too frequent", is an unambiguous indication of its importance⁴⁷. Similarly the whole issue of topographical concentrations of poverty (our contemporary inner city ghettos) is ignored, although a cursory, impressionistic survey of the applications already indicates numbers of families giving the same address, as well as possibly family networks living in nearby houses.

For the moment these must remain open questions, pointers to other aspects of structural poverty and to the family strategies adopted to confront them. But it is worth recalling that by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and earlier), if outdoor relief was of central importance in Western Europe, because of the stress placed on economic

independence by society, alternative (and indeed concurrent) strategies of survival were open to the poor, even though they could only have affected significantly smaller numbers. At one extreme, because of the moral taboo on allowing death through visible neglect, families or individuals could opt for a total and socially accepted dependence on institutional support, whether temporary (a period of renferment, the deposit of a legitimate babe at the foundling hospital) or permanent (old age residence in a hospital). At the other extreme, poor individuals and families could develop an abusive dependence on society by adopting social practices formally and usually juridically unacceptable to that society (such as prostitution, theft or begging). It is evident that the choices were rarely so stark and drastic. Indeed, it is most likely that within the life cycle of the poor, use was made of various alternatives or combinations of them, depending on the nature of the relationships between each individual and the society in which he (or she) recognised himself (or herself); hence the importance of less formal ties of kinship or clientelism. But it is also possible to suggest that strategies of subsistence made more use of institutional resources by the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries precisely because the range and specialisation of charitable (and repressive) institutions had widened as a response to a growing awareness of the complexity of society and the incidence of domestic crisis.

NOTES

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1. P. Townsend and D. Wedderburn, The aged in the welfare state (London 1965); P. Townsend, The concept of poverty (London 1970); P. Townsend, Poverty in the United Kingdom; a survey of household resources and standards of living (London 1979); B. Showler and A. Sinfield (eds), The workless state; studies in unemployment (Oxford 1981); A.B. Atkinson, The economics of inequality (Oxford 1983); A.B. Atkinson, A.K. Maynard and C.G. Trinder, Parents and children: incomes in two generations. SSRC-DHSS studies in deprivation and disadvantage. 10 (London 1983).
 2. For a full discussion of the Congregation of San Giovanni Battista and the nature of the sources, see S.J. Woolf, 'Charité, pauvreté et structure des ménages à Florence au début du XIXe siècle', Annales E.S.C., 39:2 (1984), pp. 355-82.
 3. Woolf, art. cit., p. 380.
 4. Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Congregazione di San Giovanni Battista, serie IV, filze 2 to 43. All references and quotations in this article come from this source and will list the filza number, civic number of the habitation and surname of the applicant family. Although usually only one or two references are given, they are representative of substantially larger numbers. (Filza) 3: (civic number) 5106 Rossi; 17:5031 Cornamusi; 22:3730 Nannetti, and cf. 19:3405 Ricci; 10:3835 Fiorini; 12:5083 Chellini; and cf. 4:4148 Bruni, rejected "because it is a matter of assisting a single individual, of unknown age".

5. 42:4802 Ferranti; 36:3401 Mochi. One deputy, while recommending the grant of a bed in 1810, noted that a bed had already been granted in 1803: 5:5291 Berretti; while another applicant who had already received two beds in the past ten years was refused: 2:4917 Aiazzi. The total number of repeated applications (forbidden by the regulations) only amounted to a few dozen.
6. 6:3941 Socci; cf. 20:4940 Perini ("maintained by the hospital"); 16:4592 Coli ("the serious and dangerous illness of the head of household"). Illness or hospitalization of the head of household was a common justification for granting help, e.g. 18:5342 Agostini; 18:3517 Sonni; 3:3891 Bastianelli; 35:4982 Moschini.
7. 15:3668 Puliti; 24:3728 Benini ("not of good morals, as not even their children are educated"); 19:4338 Bartolini.
8. J.M. De Gérando, Le visiteur du pauvre: mémoire qui a remporté le prix proposé par l'Académie de Lyon sur la question suivante: "Indiquer les moyens de reconnaître la véritable indigence, et de rendre l'aumône utile à ceux qui la donnent comme à ceux qui la reçoivent", Paris, L. Colas, 1820. An English translation was published in 1833, an Italian one in 1834; by 1844 eleven French editions had been published.
9. 25:3730 Saracini, and many others. There are some rare exceptions, where the visitor's negative recommendation was overturned: 26:3759 Miraceli, 14:3537 Manfriani, 28:3528 Bernini.
10. 19:3367 Stiattesi; 22:4020 Nasi.
11. 2:4709 Papi; 2:5154 Fossi; 4:4136 Borsacchi; 12:4088 Cheli. In one instance (4:4534 Zanoboni) an irritable rapporteur rejected the application on the grounds that the visitor-deputies had recommended a bed, whereas the request was for clothes: "it's impossible to know what what is the real need".

12. 31:4705 Bardini: "the doctor who visited the applicant could find no reason why she cannot feed her daughter"; 32:4623 Cavazzani.
13. 10:3582 Pampaloni; 25:4292 Giamberini; 10:4860 Chiaranti; 10:3808 Vanini; 2:4709 Bassilichi; 10:3889 Corsini; 6:4252 Fioravanti; 3:4835 Lolli; 6:5002 Cavini ("it's not possible that the applicants do not earn enough"); 6:5021 Buncioni. Many more examples could be given.
14. Woolf, art. cit., pp. 367-74.
15. 8:3943 Bianchi.
16. 16:3389 Corti; 20:3453 Tedeschi; 18:4075 Lanzi; 15:4389 Martini; 18:5342 Agostini, and many others.
17. 19:4401 Cappelli.
18. For the total number of rejections, Woolf, art. cit., p. 376. 18:3519 Benvenuti (dowry "refused, as against the regulations"); 12:4130 Nesi (coach-driver training); 19:4157 Bichi; 19:3714 Noccioli (beggars); 22:4215 Santi; 6:5027 Panazzoli (blankets).
19. In files 31 to 36, of 74 applications for a wetnurse subsidy, only 26 were accepted. The visitor-deputies frequently referred to the mother's inability to feed through lack of nutrition ("incapable of feeding through poor nutrition": 36:4971 Conti). 27:4069 Giorgi ("among their other dire needs, we must also note their total lack of clothing"). 40:3393 Frassinesi (bed).
20. Particularly hard-nosed rapporteurs seem to be those in files 17 and 27, and a compassionate one in file 21. 37:3512 Boccaccini (wetnurse). 12:4890 Fanti; 6:3769 Pichi (parishes); see also 10:3387 Sbrocchi.
21. 36:4757 Coloretti; 34:4817 Gabbiani; 35:5038 Santoni (nappies). 3:4042 Ricci; 37:4977 Maglierini (bread). 39:6478 Maori; 18:3442 Guidi; 28:4465 Vestri (numerous children). 28:5075 Spe; 18:3954 Guarnieri; 28:3848 Fer-

- roni; 23:4212 Massai; 18:4916 Giorgetti; 23:4075 Mac-
ciani; 10:4786 Albizzi (living conditions).
22. 20:4642 Melani (parish priest); and cf. 20:3609 Ma-
netti. 33:3610 Bellucci (wetnurse subsidy). 15:3735
Fedi (alternative subsidy). 28:5052 Pani (begging).
6:4846 Lucheri (bed sold). 40:3961 Furillazzi;
3:3408 Vallesi; 4:4910 Conti (imminent childbirth).
19:3625 Petrini; 9:3760 Masetti (daughter's bed).
23. 22:4503 Salvagnini (washerwoman); 27:3773 Galletti
("given that her son is about to abandon her in order
to take a wife"); 18:3442 Vitali, Bartolini (widow and
son-in-law). 18:3892 Lori; 3:4312 Piccini; 21:4902
Lippi (conscription); and cf. 21:5182 Sereni, a widow
"extremely wretched", because she had sold all her be-
longings to give some money to her conscripted son who
had now been killed in battle.
24. 15:4389 Martini; 42:3774 Parenti (large families).
6:4847 Galleri (single woman).
25. 43:3791 Pelatti; 26:3772 Rossi; 18:3568 Rastrelli.
26. 33:4600 Chini ("sick and incapable, she is allowed to
continue living where she is out of charity"); 14:3471
Ghelardini, a family of seven, consisting of mother and
two married sons, each with one infant (but all in good
health); 26:4375 Mazzetti, a family of six, with the
head of household unable to work and the eldest son de-
ranged (demente).
27. 3:3905 Farolfi; 22:5372 Fraschetti (earnings); 25:4409
Donzelli (young couple); 3:4074 Pezzati (couple without
children); 6:5021 Buccioni (adolescent); 27:3414 Marchi;
12:4089 Seroni (single young woman); 27:4992 Bellucci
(old woman); 27:4397 Ciappi (woman helped by children);
6:5042 Mori; 3:5027 Tafani (beds); 11:4968 Aiazzi (mar-
riage). 12:4328 Falchi (silk weaving); 27:4969 Monelli

- (washerwoman); 14:3391 (innkeeper); 20:4687 Ganti (servant); and cf. 13:4149 Franchi, considered as a servant even though she was not a domestic but "does cleaning jobs" on a casual basis.
28. 19:3982 Miglia (old woman); 27:4020 Nesi (orphan); 20:3909 Marchiani (abandoned wife); 3:5045 Delli (widowed); 40:3784 Bellebuone (recently widowed, with the additional burden of a married daughter who had fled from her husband); 25:3471 Conti (aged parent); 13:4710 Giannelli; 15:3370 Casati (young children); 20:4951 Pietrai; 11:5007 Bassi (insanity); I have counted 7 cases of dementi in the total 4498. 26:3770 Segalari; 3:4705 Ferroni (illness); 18:5342 Agostini; 16:4592 Coli (illness of head of household); 40:3900 Massai; 3:4801 Ceccherini (large family).
29. 9:5092 Ciabilli; 5:4444 Piamonti (close to Congregation or parish priest); 5:5000 Pini; 13:3348 Montefiori (recommendations); 26:3977 Bacchini; 7:4796 Galli; 12:4720 Corderio (army); 6:3800 Marchini; 10:4330 Cantini; 23:4220 Albertini; 15:5137 Guarducci (professional skills); 40:4009 Aretini; 17:4756 Brandi (dismissed clerk); 24:4641 Vannetti; 19:4101 Baccini (good birth); 43:4806 Renard (noble).
30. 3:3857 Borla ("as these two children are of vivacious temperament"); 42:3759 Sacchi ("with a son who lives in the most total idleness, as he has no one to guide him"); all accepted into the Casa Pia.
31. 10:3473 Landucci; 14:3655 Morosi.
32. 21:3866 Bartolini ("but someone should keep check that the bed is not sold"); 14:3835 Scarlini; 11:5183 Covoni; 39:3925 Bianchi; 28:5066 Carotti ("as the parents are young"); 6:5042 Mori.

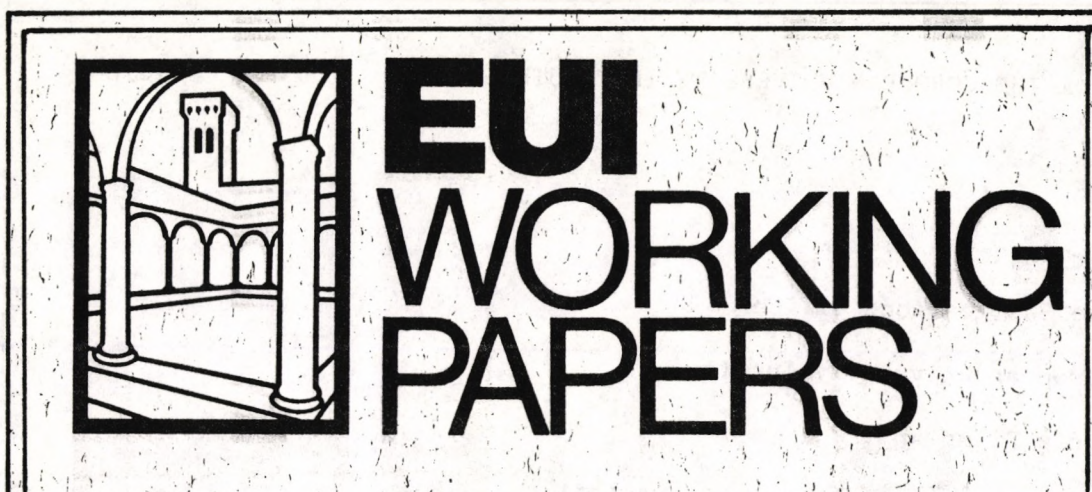
33. 11:3413 Laghi; 6:4866 Paladini; 6:4897 Mori; 22:4859 Lascialfare.
34. 40:3748 Mazzoni; 7:4085 Accioli; 4:4245 Belli ("as the sum is substantial", the deputies decided that only items "of essential needs" should be redeemed).
35. Woolf, art. cit., pp. 367-74.
36. 33:3773 Bronchelli; 43:5016 Bettini; 20:4240 Cioni.
37. Woolf, art. cit., pp. 360-62, 364-65.
38. 16:3389 Corti; 23:3654 Giorgi; 12:3634 Picchi;
12:3833 Bianchi; 4:4449 Gucciardi; 14:3471 Ghelardini;
3:4611 Stefanelli (son's family of four); 43:3957 Martinelli (mother-in-law in another house).
39. 28:5007 Galli; 6:4866 Paladini; 6:4897 Mori; 6:5033 Frangini.
40. 12:4909 Gamberucci; 11:3413 Laghi.
41. 23:4956 Pichianti (where the family insisted on a separate bed as the condition for keeping the orphan; the Congregation agreed, so long as it was her property); 21:4737 Giorgi, 27:4704 Giolli.
42. 5:5094 Mazzaranghi.
43. 14:3542 Pestellini; 33:4600 Chini.
44. For example, see the obscure explanation in 6:4861 Ferroni, where a bed was requested to separate the sister from a "cohabitant".
45. For the redemption of pawned possessions, see above, note 34. 22:4062 Teresa Grifoni ("very small weekly earnings from spinning which oblige her to fast on occasion").
46. Woolf, art. cit., pp. 379-80.
47. 27:4101 Meini.

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