

of comforting condemned criminals, accompanying them to the scaffold, and giving them Christian burial. Another charitable brotherhood, the confraternity of the Holy Spirit, maintained a hostel for converts to Catholicism. It was an offshoot of a confraternity originally founded at Rome to convert that city's Jews. The Turinese branch however made few Jewish converts: it converted many more Protestants from the Waldensian valleys, or even from Geneva. Its most famous convert was the Genevan Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who abjured Protestantism in the confraternity's church in 1728 (as he later recalled with distaste in his *Confessions*).

The membership of these confraternities was overwhelmingly male, and as time passed, also increasingly exclusive. In the enthusiasm that accompanied the foundation of a confraternity it often happened that brethren from all classes of society would gather together, but over time the membership tended to take on a distinct class composition: certain confraternities became predominantly aristocratic, others predominantly plebeian. The brothers would meet regularly in their own premises, usually a chapel or oratory in one of the city's churches, where they conducted their devotions, which in some cases included flagellation. To cover the cost of their communal activities, the brothers would assess themselves a monthly fee. It paid for the annual banquet in honor of their patron, for their robes and the sacred apparatus – crosses and statues – they carried in processions, for the burial expenses of dead brothers and aid to their widows and children.

Undoubtedly the most significant of these new confraternities was the Compagnia di San Paolo, or Brotherhood of St Paul, supposedly founded in 1563 by twelve pious laymen to preach against the Protestants then active in Turin. Under the spiritual guidance of its Jesuit advisers the Compagnia grew fast. The brothers practiced an intense devotional life in their own oratory, and undertook a growing range of charitable works: a house for reformed prostitutes, another for maidens whose chastity was threatened, and a pawnshop making small loans to the poor, reviving the old Monte di Pietà, which had foundered in the troubles of the mid-sixteenth century. During one of the recurrent famines that struck Turin, in 1580, the Compagnia set up a poorhouse to care for the destitute, which however soon fell into desuetude. It was the first of several abortive initiatives in which the Compagnia, the city authorities and the state banded together to fight against poverty, culminating in 1717 with the establishment of a comprehensive system of state poor-relief. The Compagnia di San Paolo however was far from typical of Turin's confraternities. The range of its activities, and the exceptionally influ-