
STUDI

RECONSTRUCTING DON ALBERA'S READING LIST

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Between 1892 and 1910, Don Paolo Albera (1845-1921) was called upon to articulate the Salesian spirit for many groups within the Salesian family. This period coincides with Paolo Albera's service on the Salesian Superior Chapter as Spiritual Director General. These were defining years for D. Albera and for the office he held. For if the role of the "Catechist General" or "Spiritual Director General" had been fluid until the time of his election, Paolo Albera helped to set the parameters for this office. He clarified the responsibilities of the Spiritual Director General as a member of the Superior Chapter and within the Salesian Society as a whole.

The previous Spiritual Director General, D. Giovanni Bonetti (1838-1891), had been quite adept in the field of public relations. His pamphlets and books were popular, instructive, and even controversial¹. His most important literary contribution, the *Bollettino Salesiano*, popularized Don Bosco's works and personality to the point of gaining many supporters for the saint's projects both throughout Italy and abroad.

D. Albera's writings and especially his preaching ministry seemed more in tune with formative aspects of his role on the council. The need was evident. The growing reputation of the Salesians' saintly founder John Bosco (thanks, no doubt, to D. Bonetti's own publishing campaign) brought many eager young applicants to join Salesian ranks. The early Salesians had grown up with the founder, but if this rising generation of newcomers was to assimilate Don Bosco's spirit, more systematic training was necessary. Formation and retreats were frequent topics at the general chapters, and responsibility

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¹ Cf Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Roma, LAS 1979, vol. 1, pp. 73-74; Arthur LENTI, *The Bosco-Gastaldi Conflict*. Part II: From the Approval of the Salesian Constitutions in 1874 to the Enforced Reconciliation [Concordia] in 1882", in "Journal of Salesian Studies" 5 (1994) 1, 80-88.

for implementing subsequent guidelines fell to the Spiritual Director General. D. Albera's long-term habit of reading and note-taking, then, would serve to sustain his new ministry. He was entrusted with the task of directing the spiritual formation, initial and ongoing, of his confreres, especially through retreats.

1. One Who Was Well Read

Those who knew Paolo Albera often pointed out that he was a man well-read. D. Giovanni Battista Grosso (1858-1944), who worked closely with D. Albera in Marseilles, cites D. Albera's serious study habits as among the most striking elements of his ministry as provincial. Reading spiritual authors was a practice that D. Albera brought with him from Sampierdarena, D. Grosso opined, but this flourished when he moved to France, where a spiritual renewal was already taking place:

Even in the midst of all his concerns as provincial and director of the "Oratoire St. Léon" (among others, to provide for meals, making the rounds to ask for charity as Don Bosco used to do, and as D. Albera himself did for many years in Marassi and Sampierdarena), he still found time to do a lot of reading, and almost exclusively he turned to ascetical books. He was an avid reader and kept on the alert to acquire every new book of asceticism that the best French authors might publish. Not only did he read them and take notes, but he used to summarize them or make extracts of these works, which would then serve him very well in the monthly conferences he used to prepare for the confreres, or for those occasions when he was frequently invited to speak and willingly did so to the various youth groups in the House².

This testimony is interesting. D. Grosso gives us some important details regarding D. Albera's approach to preparing his conferences. He did not simply rely on tried and true sources for his interventions – something that would have been more than legitimate for a priest ordained 13 years already

² ASC B0330314, Giovanni Battista GROSSO, *D. Paolo Albera. Ricordi personali*, ms aut., p. 1: "In mezzo alle varie preoccupazioni di Ispettore e di Direttore dell'*Oratoire St. Léon* (tra le quali quella di provvedere il pane, andando a chiedere la carità come faceva D. Bosco, e come D. Albera stesso fece per molti anni a Marassi ed a S. Pier d'Arena) trovava tuttavia il tempo di leggere molto, e quasi esclusivamente libri ascetici; ed era avido ed attento a procurarsi ogni nuovo libro di ascetica che i migliori autori francesi pubblicassero; e non solo li leggeva ed annotava, ma ne faceva sunti od estratti, che poi tanto gli giovavano nelle conferenze mensili ai confratelli, ed a quelle che sovente accettava volentieri di fare alle diverse compagnie della Casa".

and struggling with a busy schedule. He read the spiritual masters, and since he was in France, he seemed to feel that he needed to go to local sources if he was to make the spiritual life accessible to his listeners.

Two decades later, D. Calogero Gusmano (1872-1935) would observe this same attitude while accompanying D. Albera on his extended visit to the houses in America. The visitor's days were packed, but he conscientiously prepared his conferences by reading spiritual authors who were most esteemed in the countries he visited. He read these authors in their original language: Portuguese, Spanish or English. By concentrating on sources written in the language of the country that he visited, D. Albera was able to offer a spiritual message in the idiom of that nation. D. Gusmano described the process in these words:

During the visit to the Houses, the days were filled, for he had made it a norm to let the confreres speak with him as long and as much as they wanted to. "There is no point in traveling from Italy and putting up with so many inconveniences if we do not let the confreres speak their minds completely". Nor did he ever neglect the practices of piety made in common. Even when he was on the road he faithfully arranged to make meditation and spiritual reading from books written in the language of the country. Thus D. Albera, in a short time, could give the "Good Night" in the language of the country and converse with numerous cooperators who came to visit him³.

Others who knew him personally concur that D. Albera was an avid reader of spiritual and ascetical works. He took his role as spiritual director very seriously, and therefore made every attempt to keep up-to-date in spiritual matters. Without losing touch with the needs of the young people whom the Salesian served and all the practical and professional preparation needed to minister to them, D. Albera's greatest priority was the interior formation of Salesian personnel. They must ground themselves in Christ; only then could they operate as Christ's apostles⁴. As a preacher, he would integrate what he drew from these spiritual authors with his pastoral experiences as a way to teach the Salesian spirit. Any study of D. Albera's teaching must begin, then, with a look at the "masters" he drew upon as his own sources.

³ ASC B0330315, Calogero GUSMANO, *Appunti alla rinfusa, 1935*, ms aut., p. 23: "Le giornate durante la visita alle Case erano piene avendo egli per norma di lasciare parlare i confratelli quanto volevano. — Non si viene dall'Italia sottoponendosi a tanti disagi per non lasciare [parlare] pienamente i confratelli. — Nondimeno mai lasciava le pratiche di pietà in comune. Anche durante i viaggi era fedele e procurava di fare la meditazione e la lettura spirituale su libri scritti nella lingua del paese. Così D. Albera poteva in breve tempo dare la buona notte nella lingua del paese e conversare coi numerosi cooperatori che venivano a visitarlo".

⁴ Cf ALOÏS [LOUIS CARTIER], *Coups de Crayon. Un Homme de Dieu*, in "L'Adoption" 20 (1921) n. 214, 178.

2. Presentation of the “Fondo” and Documentation

This would be easy if we had a record of the man’s library, but no such library probably ever existed. D. Albera was schooled in poverty by Don Bosco, and so was careful never to accumulate any superfluities. Often D. Albera would borrow books from collections and nearby libraries⁵, and whatever books he bought, he handed over to a library in one of the Salesian houses. We will have to recreate D. Albera’s reading list by examining his own notes and journal.

2.1. *Index of Retreat Topics*

The Central Salesian Archives (ASC) preserve twenty-seven cartons containing D. Albera’s papers. This collection is found in the “Fondo Rettor Maggiore”, and at the present time, they are largely unexplored. Two cartons contain particularly pertinent materials. One, carton B032, contains appointment books and calendars which D. Albera kept from 1893 to 1899, and from 1902 to 1918. Carton B048 contains composition books, note pads, and folders filled with observations, annotations, outlines and final drafts for conferences, sermons and panygerics that D. Albera delivered during his years of ministry. Some notes date back to Paolo Albera’s formation days; others are jottings from conferences given while rector major. The majority of this material, however, seems to have grown out of D. Albera’s years as Spiritual Director General, from 1892 to 1910.

While D. Albera quoted a number of theologians, saints and spiritual writers in his circular letters, he rarely credited his sources. His composition books, on the other hand, are filled with memos from his readings, studies and meditations. Though there is little in the way of bibliographical data, he clearly indicated the names of the authors who inspired his jottings. This allows us to trace a list of authors that D. Albera found useful.

Returning to Turin in 1892, D. Albera brought a rich appreciation for French authors, as we have heard from D. Grosso. French spiritual writers represent nearly a quarter of the sources he would study in the next few years as he prepared his sermons and conferences. He also would study a number of Italian sources, as we see in his diary and in composition books and note pads he used to prepare his talks.

⁵ “Lundi. Je sens la fatigue. Je me lève assez tard malheureusement. La matinée s’est passée à la Bibliothèque pour le triage de livres français”, in ASC B0320102 (29 Nov 1897).

One such composition book (B0480126), is filled with transcriptions and paraphrases of Catholic authors and seems to date back to D. Albera's first months on the Superior Chapter⁶. D. Albera did not outline sermons or develop particular themes. Instead, he collected those "quotable quotes" that he found most useful – an approach described by D. Grosso above. This offers us a clue to the ascetical trail D. Albera followed as he prepared himself for his formative mission as Spiritual Director General⁷.

2.2. *Authors Cited in D. Albera's Spiritual Journal*

Another useful tool for recreating D. Albera's reading list can be found in the reflections he entered in his spiritual journal. He was not concerned about citing complete titles, but he did briefly comment on authors he found helpful for his own spiritual growth. A book that struck him during his study might serve for his private meditation, or vice versa. If a book gave him pause to reassess his own spiritual journey, he journaled his reflections. True, D. Albera did not compose book reviews. His terse comments, however, allow us to identify those authors whom he finds particularly appealing and the effect they make on his life. Thus we find that D. Albera is humbled by Teresa of Avila's mysticism⁸, struck by Fr. Hamon's humility⁹, shamed by the high spirituality of Francis de Sales' letters¹⁰, impressed by Bishop Bossuet's Marian reflections¹¹, consoled by Don Bosco's sketch of the Last Things¹².

⁶ ASC preserve 40 composition books or hand-sewn tablets of D. Albera's notes in carton B048. Though D. Albera normally did not date his notes, it is sometimes possible to approximate the date using internal evidence, such as references to events in the Church or in the Salesian Society. The composition book B0480126 carries references to newspaper and magazine articles published in 1891. The majority of other references in this notebook come from books published in the 1860s and 1870s. Evidence exists to demonstrate that all these books were available in the Oratory library or that D. Albera's colleagues, members of the superior chapter, had copies of these books in their personal collections. This notebook would thus offer us a clue to D. Albera's study and preaching preparation during the first months after his election as Spiritual Director General.

⁷ D. Albera would continue to transcribe "quotable quotes" until the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. He would learn how to modify his notetaking, thanks to his later reading. Six composition books preserved in ASC follow this approach: B0480126, B0480130, B0480131, B0480133, B0480134, B0480135. The bulk of his other notes are outlines or drafts of talks, sermons and conferences. He makes less of an effort to quote his sources in these notes, and therefore they become more difficult to trace. Not surprisingly, we can find more continuous references to sources in D. Albera's spiritual journals than in his work books.

⁸ Cf ASC B0320101 (15 Oct 1894).

⁹ Cf ASC B0320106 (26 Dec 1903; 23 Jan 1905).

¹⁰ Cf ASC B0320106 (16 Jan 1905).

¹¹ Cf ASC B0320106 (21 Oct 1906).

¹² Cf ASC B0320109: 3 Jan 1910.

Occasionally D. Albera journaled about readings he made while preparing a conference or a retreat. These authors, often those he has used previously for his own spiritual journey, seem to have struck him in new ways when he tried to blend their teachings into his own presentations. If D. Albera felt especially nervous about an upcoming preaching assignment, as when preparing the retreat for the Directors in 1905, for the deacons preparing for priestly ordination in 1909, or for the delegates of the eleventh Salesian general chapter (GC11) in 1910, he made numerous comments about the authors he consulted, often in the context of a prayer that could render their teachings fruitful for his audience. He expressed his profound respect for Luigi Pis-cetta's scholarship¹³; he delighted in Alessandro Ciolli's manual for new confessors¹⁴. Though he scolded himself for not dedicating more time to study, D. Albera eagerly and systematically drew from the "treasures" that he found in the writings of his contemporaries – Jean-Baptiste Caussette, Louis Planus, and Cardinal James Gibbons – to share with his fellow Salesians¹⁵.

We have already seen that D. Albera's early responsibilities as Spiritual Director General included editing the General Chapter documents, overseeing the formation of young candidates for Salesian life and priesthood, and preparing Salesians for their annual retreats. These three tasks, as his journal bears out, kept him quite busy. Moreover, the constant demand to direct others brought the man face to face with the issue of his own spiritual growth. This is what prompted him to keep a spiritual journal, which he called "notes confidentielles prises pour le bien de mon âme"¹⁶. This statement opens his practice of keeping the journal. Over the years he will remark (to his journal) that keeping notes is most helpful, and when he neglects to do so, he feels that his spiritual progress is hampered¹⁷.

D. Albera's journal, then, is not a chronicle but a daily spiritual role-call. Whatever author, religious or secular, helps or hampers his spiritual progress – this author will figure into D. Albera's tiny note pad, especially in later years. If, then, we find him jotting a comment about an author or article that impresses him, the fact that he enters this data into his journal means that he

¹³ Cf ASC B0320107 (10 Dec 1907).

¹⁴ Cf ASC B0320108 (14 Jan 1909).

¹⁵ Cf ASC B0320104 (13 Jan 1898); B0320106 (27 Jul 1905; 27 Apr 1906); B0320107 (11 Jul 1908); B0320108 (31 Aug 1909).

¹⁶ ASC B0320101 (cover page 17 Feb 1893).

¹⁷ See also ASC B0320101 (2 Oct 1894); ASC B0320103 (Jun, 31 Dec 1897); ASC B0320104 (31 Dec 1898); ASC B0320106 (29 Aug, 30 Oct, [10] Dec 1903); ASC B0320109 (1 Jan 1910; 4 Sep 1912).

finds this reading to be personally beneficial or detrimental for his spiritual journey. In fact, when we look through D. Albera's composition books or other materials he used to prepare his conferences, we find many of the same writers who feature in his journal. At the same time, however, we find entire pages from a number of authors who never find their way into his "notes confidentielles". It is not unreasonable, then, to view D. Albera's personal reading as an important element in his spiritual awareness, for his felt-need to sanctify himself intensified once he assumed a leadership role on the Superior Chapter. He realizes his responsibility: "I promise to practise myself what I recommend to others"¹⁸.

After his election as rector major on 16 August 1910, D. Albera was no longer able to keep his journal with the same consistency that he had during the previous period. He made spotty entries until 1913, and noted his final journal reflections in December 1915, when Giovanni Cagliero (1838-1926) had been named cardinal. This means that we have limited documentation of D. Albera's reading habits during his years as superior general. We can only presume that he continued what had become a matter of habit: that he read devotional books and ascetical literature for his own growth and as a help in his teaching ministry¹⁹.

2.3. D. Albera's Work-books

Continuing our discussion based on the workbooks, if we can set B0480126 as being transcribed shortly after D. Albera's return to Turin in 1892, we can begin to note a number of trends in D. Albera's studies. The new Spiritual Director General began to gather ideas from apologists, cate-

¹⁸ ASC B0320107 (25 Aug 1907). D. Albera repeatedly expresses his concern to practice what he must preach to others, to be an example to others. These sentiments come out in the following entries made in his spiritual journal: ASC B0320101 (27 Feb, 16 May, 17 Jul, 14 Sep 1893; 12 Dec 1895); B0320102 (19 Mar, 31 Dec 1896); B0320103 (18 Apr, 30 May, 11 Dec 1897); B0320105 (4 Feb, 14 Jun, 2, 3 Aug, 6 Sep 1899); B0320106 (16 Apr 1903, 1 Jun, 26 Dec 1904, 4 Aug 1905, 25 Feb, 31 May 1906); B0320107 (9 Jan 1907); B0320109 (12 Sep 1912).

¹⁹ A careful examination of his circular letters would provide evidence of D. Albera's ongoing ascetical culture. His circular letter of 18 October 1920 reveals dependence on Dom Jean Baptiste Chautard's *L'Ame de Tout Apostolat*, rev. enlarged 9th ed. (Paris, P. Téqui 1920). The circular of 19 March 1921 also draws quite amply from Dom Chautard, as well as from Fr. Frederick Faber's *Spiritual Conferences*. The theme of these circulars is D. Bosco as model of perfection and priesthood. Cf *Lettere circolari di D. Paolo Albera ai Salesiani*. Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1922, pp. 339-340; 402; 408-410; 415-416; 418-421.

chists and retreat preachers who had already made an impact on the northern Italian scene several decades earlier. It is likely that D. Albera knew most of these authors before he had left Italy in 1882. Some of them published their works through the Salesian press in Sampierdarena, where D. Albera had served as director for a decade. It would seem, therefore, that D. Albera was merely reacquainting himself with sources that he already knew.

As he had done in his early preaching days, D. Albera collected stories from readings largely directed to young people. The themes that figure most in the pages of B0480126 are the precariousness of human existence, the immortality of the soul, the power of God as Creator, and the eternal nature of the after life. All these themes are classic fare for an eight-day retreat!

Although the majority of D. Albera's early transcriptions demonstrate an interest in retreat themes and anecdotes appropriate to young people, his later notes reflect his need to prepare for a more mature audience, and with every passing year, D. Albera covered an ever-widening field. He also learned something about referencing his notes. Following advice he picked up when reading Cardinal James Gibbons²⁰, he began to arrange topics alphabetically in an addressbook for easy referencing and retrieving of information, anecdotes, examples useful in his preaching. This orderly approach makes it easier to trace his sources by author, title and sometimes even by page number in notes taken after 1905²¹.

Collecting and transcribing anecdotes from the many authors that he turned to while preparing instructions and conferences, D. Albera actually filled several notebooks. But not all his sources are found in these notes. We can trace other references by combing the text of his retreat sermons and instructions. Throughout his conferences, D. Albera cites sayings and anecdotes from saints and sages, though he rarely makes clear reference to a specific

²⁰ James Gibbons (1834-1921), born of Irish immigrant parents in Baltimore, became a priest in 1861, and ordained bishop in 1868, serving as Vicar Apostolic for the Southern States after the Civil War. His missionary experience in the American South enabled him to better articulate Catholic Faith. He learned effective ways of expressing Catholic teachings in terms that non-Catholics could understand. James Gibbons became the eighth archbishop of Baltimore in 1877, and was named cardinal in 1885.

²¹ While D. Albera was always a good "note-taker", his earlier transcriptions follow a chronological order, in the sense that he copies down ideas as he reads them. After the turn of the century he begins to note his topics by subject in address books that conveniently provided alphabetical tabs: compare ASC B0480128-B0480131 with B0480134-B0480135. These later address books, begun around 1905, are filled with short quotations and references similar to index card transcriptions. This method follows to the letter advice he read in Cardinal Gibbons' writings, which we know he was reading in 1905. Cf ASC B0320106 (24 April 1905); James GIBBONS, *The Ambassador of Christ*. Baltimore, John Murphy Company 1896, pp. 285-286.

text. Often he seems to have taken many of his citations from secondary sources. At other times he allows us to clearly identify a passage down to “chapter and verse”. Direct citations or indirect allusions in his conferences, and cross references from his spiritual journal, round out the picture of D. Albera’s preferred authors and reading.

3. Panorama of “Authors” and “Titles” in D. Albera’s Reading

A careful examination of D. Albera’s notebooks, journals, and retreat manuscripts leads us to identify eight general categories into which the bulk of his reading fell during the period in which he served as Spiritual Director General. These categories are:

1) Doctrinal expositions, including “catechisms” and collections of conferences, as well as meditative works of philosophers, essayists, and literary men;

2) Practical and applied theology: pastoral manuals, moral theology, educational writing for parents, teachers, or young people, apologetics, autobiographies of notable converts;

3) Devotional literature, including classical Christian sources, Marian literature, works on the mysteries and prerogatives of Jesus Christ, and manuals on Christian discipleship;

4) Retreat literature, including meditations for the “Spiritual Exercises”, and collections of sermons preached during parish missions;

5) Treatises, conferences and meditations on Religious Life;

6) Treatises and conferences on the priesthood;

7) Biblical resources in the form of commentaries and new translations;

8) Salesian sources related to the patron and the founder of the Salesian Society.

Perhaps the clearest way to identify D. Albera’s sources is to explore each of these categories and distinguish the individual authors he consulted in each area.

4. Doctrinal Studies, Catechisms, Conferences

The earliest records we have of D. Albera’s reading, as we have seen, are the notes he prepared for preaching to children and teenagers. His peers commented that he was a wonderful storyteller; that he knew how to hold a

young audience²². What the archives reveal is that Paolo Albera took copious notes: in the early years of his ministry he was constantly on the lookout for good stories and anecdotes to bolster his preaching. He transcribed passages from literature directed toward young people, anecdotes from “catechisms” and popular apologetical works.

4.1. *Catechisms*

Among the catechetical writings that appealed to D. Albera²³, we find *Il giovane studente istruito*, a defense of the Catholic faith written for teenagers. This work which first appeared in 1871, was the work of Geremia Bonomelli, a priest from Brescia who was elected bishop of Cremona a few months after publishing this catechism²⁴.

Bonomelli divides the major themes of Christian teaching into episodes called “trattenimenti” – a term which can be translated as “sessions”, but which carries the sense of “time spent together in conversation”. Each session takes the form of a dialogue between teacher (il *maestro*) and the young person identified as the student or disciple (il *discepolo*). The conversational tone, with numerous quips and colloquialisms, makes the doctrinal presentation pleasant and interesting.

Using a later edition, D. Albera drew some arguments from Bishop Bonomelli’s dialogues as back-up for his notes about the “end of man”, the

²² “A Marsiglia l’udii più volte D. Albera a predicare ai giovani: ricordo come fui edificato per la praticità delle cose che diceva, per lo zelo che dimostrava per far del bene ai giovani. Il suo gran punto nelle prediche e nei discorsetti della sera era di parlare con frequenza della fuga del peccato, e ne parlava con vera energia. Praticamente lo faceva vedere come il più gran male, specialmente lo metteva in contraddizione con l’infinita bontà di Dio, dimostrando la mostruosa ingratitudine, avendoci Iddio non solo creati ma redenti con infinito suo dolore, colmati di benefizi tutto [il] giorno” (ASC B0330109, Giulio BARBERIS, *Per le memorie di D. Paolo Albera* [1923], ms aut., p. 5). Giulio Barberis (1847-1927).

²³ As shown above, D. Albera made transcriptions from classical and contemporary sources into his own notes. He would then draw from these notes as he prepared his sermons. A number of these composition books and note pads that he used for this purpose are now preserved in the ASC’s Albera Collection. Most of D. Albera’s catechetical entries were made in note pads now identified as: B0480126, B0480130, B0480131, and B0480133. Later, he made more thematic notes, as can be seen in B0480134 and B0480135, both of which seem to have been compiled during the first decade of the twentieth century.

²⁴ Geremia Bonomelli (1831-1914), theology professor and priest in the diocese of Brescia, was ordained bishop of Cremona on 26 November 1871. An articulate and popular writer, Bishop Bonomelli’s pastoral letters were widely read, as were his multi-volume catechisms and dialogues on Christian doctrine, Catholic tradition and the sacred liturgy. He even produced a number of travelogues, offering descriptive guides for pilgrims guides and helpful tips to vacationers: cf Geremia BONOMELLI, *Misteri cristiani*. Brescia, Queriniana 1894-1896, 4 vols.

last judgment, and God's justice. He also found that the bishop of Cremona offered a clear and youthful approach to prove God's existence, explain the creation of the world and the need to live in response to God's natural and supernatural gifts²⁵.

Another resource for D. Albera's sermons was a comprehensive catechism by French educator and publisher Jean-Joseph Gaume²⁶. Fr. Gaume was a fervent follower of St. Alphonsus de' Liguori, and with his brother Jean-Alexis²⁷, he became instrumental in propagating Alphonsus' moral teachings and approach across France.

Jean-Joseph Gaume published manuals for confessors, catechisms, and books on Catholic education. In addition to St. Alphonsus, he popularized the teachings of Saints Charles Borromeo, Francis Xavier, and Francis de Sales. His writings are strongly apologetic in tone. Clearly ultramontanist, he is an adamant proponent of papal authority and a resolute adversary of the "Revolution" under all its forms. His greatest concern was to produce works that would be useful to those engaged in catechesis. By the end of the nineteenth century Abbé Gaume's writing style was already somewhat dated, but his publications were still considered very innovative and so they remained influential until the turn of the century.

Abbé Gaume's most famous work was his *Catéchisme de persévérance*²⁸. This catechism developed around the "Sacred History", that is, it included Bible history and the history of the Church, and ended the survey with an explanation of the liturgy, the liturgical seasons and the major feast days of the Church calendar: fifty-three lessons spread over eight volumes. These lessons were meant to cover the curriculum for an entire year. They were designed for youngsters who had already completed the sacramental catechesis for First

²⁵ Cf Geremia BONOMELLI, *Il giovane studente istruito e difeso nella dottrina cristiana*. 2nd ed., Brescia, Queriniana 1886, pp. 6-7, 8-11, 17-18, 66-67, 194-195 (D. Albera transcribed and paraphrased passages from these pages into his own notes; cf ASC B0480126, pp. 45-46).

²⁶ Jean-Joseph Gaume (1802-1879), a priest for the diocese of Besançon, he taught in the diocesan seminary of Nevers, and animated various lay organizations for women and men. In 1852 he moved to Paris to direct his brothers' publishing house and to devote himself to writing works of a catechetical and apologetical nature.

²⁷ Jean-Alexis Gaume (1797-1869) was professor of moral theology at the major seminary of Besançon. He was twice suspended from teaching because of his Liguorian and ultramontanist approach. He finally quit the diocese in 1834, and went to Paris where, in a short time, he became vicar general of the archdiocese. He published a number of spiritual commentaries, including an edition of the Imitation of Christ.

²⁸ Jean-Joseph GAUME, *Catéchisme de persévérance*. Paris, Frères Gaume 1838, 8 vols.; Italian version: *Catechismo di perseveranza. Esposizione storica, dogmatica, morale, liturgica, apologetica, filosofica e sociale della religione, dall'origine del mondo sino ai nostri giorni*. Milano, Carlo Turati 1859-1860, 8 vols.

Communion, which would have normally been celebrated at the age of 10 or 12. Lessons were not presented in the question and answer form typical of the catechism. Instead, they appeared in the form of stories, anecdotes, histories²⁹. The word “catechism”, Abbé Gaume affirmed, signifies “oral teaching”, and should be considered a “guide for the journey”³⁰. The advantage of coming to catechism lessons is that one can learn to deepen the faith with one’s companions, and grow to form “one mind and one heart” with them³¹.

D. Albera studied Abbé Gaume’s *Le Seigneur est Mon Partage*, a minor work but one that carried the thesis of the “perseverance catechism” to a logical conclusion. This work seems to have been written for personal use rather than as a classroom text, and as far as D. Albera was concerned, it provided some clear, catechetical points for his instructions to youth, particularly with respect to reception of and devotion to the Eucharist³².

A great source of stories that mingled with a reasoned rebuttal to the liberal undercurrent that many Catholics viewed as gnawing away at Italian society, came with the conferences of Gaetano Alimonda, late cardinal archbishop of Turin³³. Cardinal Alimonda’s collected conferences represent a tangible manifestation of what was the core of his ministry. His only ambition was to instruct the people and thereby help them to improve their lives. He believed that there were two poles which needed to be understood: grace and nature. He wanted to unveil to his contemporaries the mysteries of supernatural life while unmasking the errors of his times – errors that continually threatened to compromise spiritual values; errors which only instilled intolerance and prejudice that blocked the way to the truth. So he saw his mission as quite simple: to preach the truth³⁴.

²⁹A later one-volume “compendium” of the *Catéchisme de persévérance* would, however, present each lesson as a series of questions and answers.

³⁰ Cf GAUME, *Catechismo*, pp. 119-121.

³¹ Cf GAUME, *Catechismo*, p. 124.

³² *Le Seigneur est mon partage* first appeared in 1836, but the work went through numerous reprints. D. Albera notations are written in French, which may indicate that he used a French edition rather than an Italian translation. Given the year in which D. Albera studied Gaume, it is likely that he used a later edition than what was available to us for our study. Cf ASC B0480126, pp. 101-103 drawing from Jean-Joseph GAUME, *Le Seigneur est mon partage! Ou lettres sur la persévérance après la Première Communion*. Paris, Gaume Frères 1836, pp. 23-38.

³³ Gaetano Alimonda (1818-1891), renown as a Catholic lecturer in his native Genoa and throughout Italy, was created cardinal by Leo XIII in 1879. The same pope appointed him to the see of Turin upon the death of Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi in 1883. Cardinal Alimonda did much to restore dialogue and reconciliation.

³⁴ Cf Corinno BORALI, *Sopranaturale nelle conferenze del card. G. Alimonda*. Roma, Pontificio Ateneo Angelicum 1962, p. 178.

D. Albera depended on Gaetano Alimonda's early conferences. These had been collected in a four-volume series entitled: *Il sovranaturale nell'uomo*, which contained conferences he delivered in Genoa between 1868 and 1871³⁵. A second series, *Problemi del secolo XIX*, reproduced conferences delivered over the next four years³⁶. These conferences went through several editions, and remained the cornerstone of the Alimonda corpus. As far as D. Albera was concerned, Cardinal Alimonda offered clear argumentation and seemed helpful in the confrontation between believers and forces hostile to the Church. He transcribed some of the cardinal's proofs for the spiritual nature of the human being, and took consolation that "the insults that the wicked make regarding our beliefs cannot harm us"³⁷.

A fourth catechetical source was a popular mid-19th-century catechism authored by a parish priest from Mans, Abbé Ambroise Guillois. This very practical *Explanation historique, dogmatique, morale, liturgique e canonique du catéchisme*, saw translations into German and Italian within a decade after it was first published³⁸.

D. Albera seems to have made use of Guillois as a reference text rather than as a book he read from cover to cover. He zeroed in on specific topics, such as "Christian character" and "pantheism"³⁹. It is interesting that he should have done so, for though these topics appear abstract, they actually carried very practical consequences. To be a Christian, one had to take one's responsibilities seriously. Baptism did not make one a member of a safe society, but a disciple of Jesus Christ. As such, the disciple had to give absolute priority to Christ's teachings and apply them to their own lives. Christ is the center, and Christian-

³⁵ Gaetano ALIMONDA, *Il sovranaturale nell'uomo. Conferenze recitate nella metropolitana di Genova, anno 1868 [1869, 1870, 1871]*. Genova, Tipografia della Gioventù 1870-1872, 4 vols.

³⁶ Gaetano ALIMONDA, *Problemi del Secolo XIX. Conferenze recitate nella metropolitana di Genova, anno 1872 [1873, 1874, 1875]*. Genova, Tipografia della Gioventù 1872-1874, 4 vols.

³⁷ "Gli insulti de' malvagi alle nostre credenze non ci arrecano alcun male", ASC B0480126, pp. 11-12; cf Gaetano ALIMONDA, *Il sovranaturale nell'uomo*. Vol. 1: *L'uomo nelle sue relazioni con le facoltà personali. Conferenze recitate nella metropolitana di Genova, anno 1868*. Genova, Tipografia della Gioventù 1870, p. 68. See also: ASC B0480126, pp. 14, 25.

³⁸ Ambroise GUILLOIS, *Spiegazione storica, dommatica, morale, liturgica e canonica del Catechismo, colle risposte alle obiezioni attinte dalle scienze, per oppugnare la Religione*. Tradotte da Baldassarre Mazzoni. 4th corrected ed., Prato, Ranieri Guasti 1882, 4 vols. Abbé Ambroise Guillois (1796-1856) compiled his series of catechetical for children and youth based on his experience of adapting the standard catechism of the Council of Trent to the needs of his young parishioners in Mans. The series offered a comprehensive curriculum that could accommodate local needs.

³⁹ Cf ASC B0480126, p. 25.

ity is not a theory or a philosophical system to explain the vicissitudes of this world. It is more. It is union with God through Christ. On God's part it is grace freely given; on the part of the Christian believer, it is a matter of character⁴⁰.

There were social and political consequences as well. New religious currents such as pantheism, Abbé Guillois argued, were philosophically fragile and totally inconsistent. They did not explain evil in the world and therefore did not allow for law and order. For example, if everyone and everything is part of God, then a murderer is part of God. But if society were to punish a murderer or a thief, this would be a way of punishing God. Pantheism, therefore, is not only blasphemous, it is anti-social. It leads to anarchy⁴¹.

The religious education specialist Enrico Giovannini⁴² provided D. Albera with a coherent approach in raising the question of God's existence with young people. His most important work, *I doveri cristiani esposti alla studiosa gioventù italiana*, appeared in 1872, and was written in a question and answer format⁴³. In an era when governments were abolishing religion classes in the state schools, Msgr. Giovannini targeted young people who did not frequent parish programs and missed on-going religious education. He maintained that the difficulties of adolescence, compounded by widening horizons and "inflamed passions", made the study of religion even more necessary than it had been in childhood. Giovannini addressed young people as the "hope of both the Church and the Homeland", and asked them to overcome peer pressure and "human respect" by dedicating their time to learn their faith – that which was the religion of the most glorious Italians, Dante, Michelangelo, Columbus, and which "presided over your own birth, covered with motherly protection your cradle, and which will consecrate the most solemn moments of your life, bless your last moments, and will guard your tomb"⁴⁴. With patriotic insistence, he urged them

⁴⁰ Cf GUILLOIS, *Spiegazione*, vol. 1, p. 5.

⁴¹ Cf GUILLOIS, *Spiegazione*, vol. 1, pp. 117-119.

⁴² Msgr. Enrico Giovannini wrote apologetic and catechetical works for young people. He was a doctor of theology, and a priest of the diocese of Faenza with strong links to the archdiocese of Bologna. He dedicated many years to the ministry of religious education in schools and in parish environments. In the 1880s he was vicar general for the diocese of Faenza.

⁴³ Enrico GIOVANNINI, *I doveri cristiani esposti alla studiosa gioventù italiana*. Bologna, A. Mareggiani 1872, 456 pp. A second edition appeared in 1874; 3d ed. 1876, 488 pp.; 6th ed. 1886 added new reference tables, reached 536 pp.; 10th ed. 1900, updated and enl. to 564 pp. The 13th ed., published in 1906, received good reviews from *Civiltà Cattolica*, which called Msgr. Giovannini's work "one of the best catechisms for young lay people"; cf "La Civiltà Cattolica" 57 (1906) n. 1356, 735.

⁴⁴ Cf Enrico GIOVANNINI, *I doveri cristiani esposti alla studiosa gioventù italiana*. *Opera commendata da Sua Santità Papa Pio IX, da arcivescovi e vescovi e da altri illustri scrittori e adottata già in molti istituti di educazione e approvata da parecchi cardinali*. 3rd rev. and enl. ed., Bologna, Tipografia Pontificia Mareggiani 1876, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

to cherish this religion, so that it would be their strength and shield. He sympathized with young people who were exposed, as he said, to poison and blasphemy not only in the streets, but in their own schools and classrooms. Unfortunately, he told them, they were born in a sad era!⁴⁵ Even so, they must not fear the scorn of the godless. Instead, they must arm themselves with reason and truth. And why should they not hold on dearly to the faith of their ancestors and the faith of their own childhood? Catholicism is a national treasure: "Is it not the faith of Christ that has given us Italians primacy even in the civil realm?"⁴⁶

From Giovannini's *Doveri cristiani*, D. Albera transcribed passages that dealt with the nature of God and the futility of atheism. He examined "practical atheists", and highlighted ancient teaching that the wonders of Nature are proof enough that God is behind all that is. He used Giovannini's handy examples of the immensity of and total, unique power of God, stressing against the scepticism of the philosophers that God is not simply an "idea;" God is Being itself⁴⁷.

4.2. Literary Works and Effective Communication of the Faith

Some of D. Albera's reading reveals his concern not just with solid content for his preaching, but with clear form. The same traits that attracted him to that master communicator, apologist and catechist Geremia Bonomelli brought him to study the works of literary men like seventeenth-century French man of letters Jean de La Bruyère⁴⁸, mathematician and mystic Blaise Pascal⁴⁹, and the Savoird philosopher Joseph De Maistre⁵⁰. During the same

⁴⁵ Cf Enrico GIOVANNINI, *La forza della verità sull'errore, ovvero saggio di apologia cristiana offerto ai giovani studiosi italiani*. 2nd rev. ed., Sampierdarena, Tip. S. Vincenzo 1886, pp. x-xi.

⁴⁶ GIOVANNINI, *La forza della verità sull'errore*, p. xiv: "Non è la fede di Cristo, che ha dato a noi italiani un primato anche civile?"

⁴⁷ Cf ASC B0480126, pp. 37-38; E. GIOVANNINI, *I doveri cristiani esposti alla studiosa gioventù italiana*. 3rd ed., Bologna, Tipografia Pontificia Mareggiani 1876, pp. 6, 9-10.

⁴⁸ Jean de La Bruyère (1645-1696), a Catholic essayist and tutor of Louis III de Bourbon (grandson of Louis XIV), critiqued the political and social mores of the court of Versailles with charm and wit, thus winning membership to the French "Accademy". His most famous work, entitled *Les Caractères*, was in 1688.

⁴⁹ The mathematical genius Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) advanced differential calculus and made scientific inroads in the study of hydraulics, but also nourished an intense spiritual life. With his sister Jacqueline, he joined the community of Port-Royal in 1654, where he led a life of prayer and asceticism. From that point on, he dedicated his energies to defending the Port-Royal experience, and to spiritual writing.

⁵⁰ Count Joseph-Marie de Maistre, born in Chambéry on 1 April 1753, was one of the most influential businessmen authors, philosophers, and diplomats of Restoration Kingdom of Sardinia. He died in Turin on 28 February 1821.

time frame he concentrated on the theme of duty, drawing his ideas from the writings of Silvio Pellico⁵¹, Cesare Cantù⁵² and Antonio Pellicani⁵³.

While we do not find D. Albera making extensive notes from the writings of La Bruyère or De Maistre, we do find him marking significant passages while preparing a conference to the Valsalice seminarians for the month of May 1905⁵⁴. These two men of letters were likely very well known in that academic environment that was the house of philosophy for young Salesians. La Bruyère's witty but poignant analysis of French manners offered the opportunity to examine the deeper levels of one's motivating principles. Was it proper for Christians to jockey for position in a fleeting, transitory kingdom, as La Bruyère's fellow courtiers at Versailles? Salesians must, with educated people, read between the lines and know that seeking courtly power was vain. Only those with the gift of discernment can spot the diamond in the rough⁵⁵.

Joseph De Maistre had a more centered message. An essayist and keen observer of humanity, this ambassador wrote his most important work on the papacy. This was an attractive theme for Salesians. Still, the most evidence we have of his thought in D. Albera comes through quick, maxim-like quotations made during conferences to student Salesians⁵⁶.

Blaise Pascal is most remembered for a book on the evidence supporting religion. He had worked on this thesis over a period of four years, but never completed the text. It was only after his death that his friends were able to as-

⁵¹ After eight years of solitary confinement under the Austrian imperial government, poet and playwright Silvio Pellico (1789-1854) became a national figure when he published his memoirs, *Le mie prigioni*, in 1832. The book was meant as a religious testimony; its impact was to fuel anti-Austrian sentiment, becoming the most popular book of the Risorgimento. Following his release, Pellico became the secretary of the Marchesa Julie Colbert Falletti di Barolo. He worked closely with S. Joseph Cafasso, D. Bosco and others among Turin's Catholic renewal.

⁵² Cesare Cantù (1804-1895) taught in secondary schools and university, but his patriotic style triggered a suspension from the Austro-Hungarian government. After unification, the ever popular Cantù was elected to the Chamber of Deputies. In 1873, he became director of the State Archives in Milan. His writings mainly consist of historical and literary pieces.

⁵³ Former Jesuit, Fr. Antonio Pellicani (1817-1892) was a priest of the diocese of Savona, and a confidant of D. Bosco. He wrote guidebooks for secondary school students.

⁵⁴ Cf Paolo Albera, "Allo Studentato di Valsalice, 4 Maggio 1905", in ASC B0480137, *Conferenze sulla vita religiosa: Quaderno III*, ms aut., pp. 71-75; ASC B0320106 (3-4 May 1905).

⁵⁵ Cf ASC B0480133, Paolo ALBERA, *Quaderno con argomenti di vita cristiana*, ms aut., p. 15, citing passages from Jean de La Bruyère, *Les caractères* (edition unknown).

⁵⁶ Cf Paolo Albera, "Allo Studentato di Valsalice, 4 Maggio 1905", in ASC B0480137, *Conferenze sulla vita religiosa: Quaderno III*, ms aut., p. 72-73; see also: ASC B0480115, *Raccolta di Istruzioni prediccate dal Sign. D. Albera, Catechista Generale de' Salesiani, in occasione degli Esercizi Spirit[uali] tenuti in Foglizzo agli Ascritti Salesiani il Marzo 1894*, ms, p. 64.

semble the manuscript and publish it under the title: *Pensées*⁵⁷. D. Albera makes reference to Blaise Pascal's "Pensieri" in his notes, copying thoughts on the "excellence of man"⁵⁸.

D. Albera transcribed a number of examples from books written for teenagers by Silvio Pellico and Antonio Pellicani. These concern taking pride in the Catholic faith, facing up to one's civil and religious duties with courage⁵⁹, recognizing the power of good conversation, and taking stock of the damage that can take place when one is taken in by bad companions⁶⁰.

Fr. Pellicani's myriad examples taken from the Bible (Samson, David, Jonathan), the classics (Seneca, Euripides), and the lives of the saints (Stanislaus Kostka, John-Francis Regis, Aloysius Gonzaga, Juliana Falconieri), include many cruel and vicious details of what can befall the unsuspecting young person who trusts bad companions. The style remains simple, colloquial, almost breezy, and these 108 pages, presented in a handbook format, must have made for easy but thought-provoking reading for young Catholics in his day.

The book of short essays entitled *Dei doveri degli uomini*, meaning "On the Duties of Men", by Silvio Pellico, centers around the necessity and value of duty, love for the truth and religion. This was not the playwright's most noted work, but it came after *Le mie prigioni* had brought him national prominence and his Christian commitment had excluded him from economic and literary celebrity. *Dei doveri degli uomini* is addressed to "young men" of about 15 to 17 years of age, and composed in the second person, singular, as if a quiet dialogue between the adolescent and a family friend. In a simple but direct fashion, the text details issues such as the duties of a young man to his country, loyalty to family and friends, the choice of a state in life, respect for women, and the manly virtues of gentleness, gratitude, fatherhood, humility, forgiveness, and courage. Writing from experience, Pellico invites the young to face the trials of daily life in a realistic manner. In the final analysis, it takes courage to be humane, courage to be an adult, courage to face one's responsibility. This courage is the foundation of every virtue in Pellico's lay

⁵⁷ Blaise PASCAL, *Pensées de M. Pascal sur la Religion, et sur quelques autres sujets, qui ont esté trouvées après sa mort parmi ses papiers*. Paris, G. Desprez 1669, xxx-365 p.

⁵⁸ Cf ASC B0480126, p. 25. D. Albera cites from "Ed. Migne, 659", but it is not clear if he copied from a secondary source.

⁵⁹ Cf ASC B0480126, pp. 4-5; Silvio PELLICO, *Dei doveri degli uomini*. Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1877, pp. 10, 13-16.

⁶⁰ Cf ASC B0480126, pp. 23-24; Antonio PELLICANI, *I compagni*. 6th ed., Bologna, Giuseppe Legnani 1859, pp. 13-14, 32.

spirituality. Christian adulthood, he says, is actually a call to holiness, the perfection of the Gospel⁶¹.

Cesare Cantù wrote *Buon senso e buon cuore*, he said, as an “act of reparation” for all the books that he had written for scholars. Cantù hoped that his “good sense” essays would become daily bread for the people⁶². *Buon senso* resembles Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, and carries many of Franklin’s themes: thrift, moderation, modesty, temperance, and the value of hard work. Cantù, who presents his Italian readers with a biographical sketch of this self-made success story from America’s beginnings⁶³, writes a series of essays that raise the issues of freedom and equality, the duties of citizens, the importance of literacy and good reading habits, economy, and the role of the military⁶⁴. Cantù also examines contemporary concerns such as socialism and communism, and problems relating to the world of labor, mechanization, strikes and justice in the work place⁶⁵. However, he does not imitate Anglo-American thinkers. His reflections take a definitely Italian and Catholic turn when he reviews themes such as property rights, stressing the importance of storing up spiritual rather than material treasures⁶⁶. He includes an essay on Divine Revelation, Sunday as the Lord’s Day, the duty to render homage to God, and the role of churchmen in society⁶⁷.

Throughout *Buon senso e buon cuore*, Cesare Cantù shows himself a fervent patriot. He was a romantic who believed in family, freedom and Catholicism, and saw no contradiction among them⁶⁸. Cantù’s reflections on the wonders of creation and the need for prayer strike D. Albera, who paraphrases them in his own notes⁶⁹.

⁶¹ Cf S. PELLICO, *Dei doveri degli uomini*, pp. 92-93.

⁶² Cf Cesare CANTÙ, *Buon senso e buon cuore. Conferenze popolari*. Milano, G. Agnelli 1879, p. vii.

⁶³ Cf “Benjamin Franklin”, in CANTÙ, *Buon senso e buon cuore*, pp. 182-189. Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) was an American printer, writer, newspaper editor, scientist and statesman. He became famous among his contemporaries for his wit and common-sense philosophy, especially as expressed in his popular *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, published in successive editions between 1732 and 1757. Franklin experimented with methods of harnessing electricity, served as postmaster general of the British American colonies, helped draft the *Declaration of Independence* in 1776, acted as first American agent and ambassador to France, and was among the framers of the US Constitution in 1787.

⁶⁴ Cf C. CANTÙ, *Buon senso e buon cuore*, pp. 41, 395, 140, 190, 564.

⁶⁵ Cf C. CANTÙ, *Buon senso e buon cuore*, pp. 260, 271.

⁶⁶ Cf C. CANTÙ, *Buon senso e buon cuore*, p. 167.

⁶⁷ Cf C. CANTÙ, *Buon senso e buon cuore*, pp. 334-337, 341, 347-349.

⁶⁸ Cf C. CANTÙ, *Buon senso e buon cuore*, p. 343: “Concedasi ad un romantico riverire l’invulnerabilità della famiglia, l’autorità della Chiesa, la libertà morale e quella di pregare”.

⁶⁹ Cf C. CANTÙ, *Buon senso e buon cuore*, p. 16, note 1; ASC B0480126, p. 22.

It is not unlikely that D. Albera read beyond these passages, for his journal indicates that during that same year that he took a greater interest in cultural and literary sources. The following November, for example, we find him pondering the beauty of his Italian home land in his reading: "I have read a book of Stoppani, *Il bel paese*. It excites in me the admiration of the Providence which has recollected so many wonders in the country which is my own home"⁷⁰.

The book that D. Albera cites here, *Il bel paese*, was one of the most popular publications of the late 1800s. It was written by a priest of the Milan archdiocese, D. Antonio Stoppani⁷¹. His object was to help the young appreciate the beauty of Italy's geography and landscape, and by teaching them to love the land, he hoped to lead them to cherish their country and its Catholic heritage. He wrote as if he were a storyteller speaking to a group of children and young people gathered around him. The style purposely imitates Alessandro Manzoni⁷², making the *Il bel paese* a dual resource: a valuable example of Italian prose for classical students; a natural history for science buffs. By the end of the 1800s, Stoppani's book was considered a classic for young readers, but D. Albera is able to draw some spiritual benefit. His sense of national pride derived from his gratitude to Providence for the beauties and blessings bestowed upon his native Italy.

He was impressed by authors who could articulate religious truth in such a way as to stimulate the faith of their readers. His journal entries reflect his own desire to communicate, and his admiration for this ability of others. Thus he found the sermons of Fr. Henri Chambellan "profound" in their doctrinal exposition and "elegant" in their presentation⁷³. He enjoyed reading *Intimité*

⁷⁰ ASC B0320106 (27 Nov 1905).

⁷¹ Antonio Stoppani (1824-1891), priest, science professor, author, editor and outdoorsman, was supportive of a reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the Kingdom of Italy. When tension between the Holy See and the Italian government made outright political participation impossible, D. Stoppani advanced the cause for reconciliation through the natural sciences and by promoting the Italian Catholic cultural heritage.

⁷² Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), writer and patriot, is a central figure of 19th-century Italy. His romantic novel *I Promessi Sposi* (1825-26), set in 17th-century Milan, greatly influenced the development of Italian prose and fueled the cause of Italian nationalism. The book went through 118 editions by 1875. Manzoni also wrote tragedies and poetry, including the celebrated ode "5 Maggio" (1821), on the death of Napoleon.

⁷³ Henri CHAMBELLAN, *Œuvres oratoires du père Henri Chambellan de la Compagnie de Jésus*. Tome 1 : *Carême, Panégyriques, Discours de Circostances*. Edited by Gaston Sortais, Paris, Gabriel Beauchesne 1905; cf ASC B0320106 (20 Oct 1906). Henri Chambellan, SJ (1834-1892), held various posts of leadership among the French Jesuits. An able administrator, he was also a capable preacher, noted for his practical approach and his deep understanding of human nature.

avec Jésus, a volume that renewed his enthusiasm for personal spiritual reading⁷⁴.

D. Albera also registered feelings of inadequacy when faced with writing and speaking. In February 1906 he commented, in broken English: “I read an excellent book, entitled: *Jésus et moi*. I find a rich mine of saint thoughts. This reading is very profitable for my soul. I take some notes in my texte-book. How my ignorance is great, if I compare my with these, who write such books!”⁷⁵.

This prompted D. Albera to hone his writing style with the help of a handbook on composition and rhetoric, conscious as he was of his need “to learn a more efficacious form in writing” so as to better transmit his thoughts⁷⁶.

5. Practical and Applied Theology

5.1. *Manuals of Practical and Moral Theology*

If in the early days D. Albera was interested in building a repertoire of preachable stories, years of experience on the Superior Chapter awakened him to more technical aspects of ministry.

Accusations of sexual abuse against the Salesians of Varazze during the summer of 1907 prompted him to deepen his own understanding of ethics and moral theology. He waded through Luigi Piscetta’s *Elementa theologiae moralis*, a Latin text published for the Archdiocesan seminary four years earlier⁷⁷.

In the later years of D. Michele Rua’s rectorate, Paolo Albera seems to have dedicated himself more intensely to the ministry of spiritual direction as a regular confessor at Turin’s Basilica of Maria Ausiliatrice. The confessional allowed him to return to a more active pastoral experience after many years of office work.

⁷⁴ Cf ASC B0320106 (27 Apr 1905).

⁷⁵ ASC B0320106 (23 Feb 1906).

⁷⁶ Cf ASC B0320106 (27 May 1905).

⁷⁷ Luigi PISCETTA, *Elementa Theologiae Moralibus*. Torino, SEI 1903, 3 vols.; cf ASC B0320107 (10 Dec 1907). Luigi Piscetta (1858-1925) was a Salesian and professor of moral theology in the tradition of Guala, Cafasso and Bertagna; he taught at the archdiocesan seminary from 1885 and directed the Salesian formation house of Valsalice from 1892. In 1907, D. Rua appointed him to a position on the superior chapter as councilor for studies.

To gain more depth in this ministry, he began reading a guidebook for confessors by Alessandro Ciolli⁷⁸. This massive tome entitled *Direttorio pratico del confessore novello*, had gone through seven revisions by the time D. Albera picked it up⁷⁹. It was a popular resource, and D. Albera found it quite useful. "The book of Mgr. Ciolli is very delightful for me", he wrote in his journal, asking himself: "Why have I delayed to read it?"⁸⁰.

Ciolli's directory is a compendium of principles, doctrine, and procedures regarding the sacrament of "Penance". The book seems to have been designed as a ready reference for confessors. D. Albera spent a number of days studying Ciolli's articles on the role and obligations of the confessor early in 1909. These were an aid in his own apostolate. They helped him to articulate ministerial approaches in his conferences addressed to Salesian ordinandi.

Along this same line, he read a book by Emilio Berardi which seems to have troubled him somehow⁸¹. D. Berardi wrote texts of moral theology and published a number of instructional manuals for confessors. He wrote mainly in Latin, though he did publish some popular works designed as models for parish missions⁸². D. Albera does not indicate clearly which of Berardi's books he used in the autumn of 1909, but given the context of his own ministry in those months, it seems likely he read something that would help him in his role as a confessor⁸³.

All that D. Albera read on ministerial and moral issues helped his own pastoral outreach, and gave him material for his formative conferences.

⁷⁸ A religious writer in the second half of the nineteenth century, Alessandro Ciolli was a priest of the archdiocese of Florence. A canon of the "Metropolitana Fiorentina", and vicar general of the archdiocese, he wrote a number of practical and pastoral books. One of his earliest books was: *I maghi moderni ossia lo spiritismo smascherato* (Firenze 1861). His most important work, *Direttorio pratico del confessore novello*, was first published in 1883.

⁷⁹ Alessandro CIOLLI, *Direttorio pratico del confessore novello*. 7th enlarged ed., Firenze, G. Bencini 1906.

⁸⁰ ASC B0320108 (14 Jan 1909). See also entries for 13, 26 Jan 1909.

⁸¹ Cf ASC B0320108 (30 Oct 1909). The prolific Emilio Berardi (1854-1916) authored over 20 volumes of moral theology, pastoral theology, and practical manuals for confessional counseling. The majority of his works were written in Latin, though he did write some popular works designed as models for parish missions.

⁸² Cf e.g., Emilio BERARDI - Enrico GRAZIANI, *L'uomo apostolico provveduto. Volumetto che contiene le istruzioni sulla confessione colla giunta del rosario meditato e varie laudi sacre ad uso delle sante missioni*. Faenza, Tipografia Novelli 1888. This thin volume blended practical guidelines and devotional meditation. Berardi became such a favorite in Salesian circles that the Salesian publishers were able to entice him to adapt his meditations for young people a few years later: Emilio BERARDI, *Esercizi spirituali ai giovani*. Volume che compie "L'uomo apostolico provveduto". Faenza, Libreria Salesiana 1911.

⁸³ In that case, a likely text is: Emilio Berardi, *Praxis confessoriorum*, 4th ed. (Faenza: Tipografia Novelli e Castellani, 1903).

He continued to delve into this type of material well into the summer of 1910, as he prepared to preach the retreat that would inaugurate the general chapter that would elect a successor for D. Michele Rua (1837-1910). His theme was priestly ministry, and even technical manuals were inspirational to him⁸⁴.

5.2. *Educational and Instructional Literature*

For Paolo Albera, every Salesian priest was an educator as well as a minister. This opinion was reinforced by a number of titles in his reading list. *L'Éducateur apôtre*, by Jean Guibert⁸⁵, cites education as the key to renewal and to the regeneration of society against the inroads of neo-paganism. Fr. Guibert wrote for Catholic educators. It is their task to form the Catholic young in such a way that they will not be easily won over by the enemy. If the next generation is equipped to take a firm stand beside Christ, the Catholic people will once again be able to regain the ground they have lost, and return to the places from which they have been expelled. To do this, however, it is urgent to form truly Christian educators. They must cultivate a sense of mission. They must feel the need to bring salvation to society and study the most effective means to do this. This is not just a matter of technique. To be a Christian educator, one must live in union with Christ, must strive to grow in virtue, must know how to witness to a living, growing and fruitful faith. The educator will know which technique and strategy to apply. The scope of Fr. Guibert's book is to cast the seed, and to help Christian educators to reflect and to take up the challenge. D. Albera read Guibert in an Italian edition published by the Salesians in Rome⁸⁶, and exclaimed: "What I have to learn!"⁸⁷.

Not everything D. Albera read met with his approval. When in 1910 he picked up a treatise on matrimony by Fr. Alfonz Eschbach⁸⁸, D. Albera found the book too explicit for his taste⁸⁹.

⁸⁴ For instance, a volume by a certain Fr. Lesers made D. Albera examine his conscience concerning his own priestly spirit; see: ASC B0320109 (3 May 1910).

⁸⁵ Jean Guibert (1857-1914), a priest of the Society of St. Sulpice, spent many years teaching natural sciences and philosophy in Issy. He became superior of the Seminary at the Institut Catholique — a post he held until his resignation for poor health in 1912.

⁸⁶ Jean GUIBERT, *L'educatore apostolo*. Versione libera del prof. Domenico Dall'Osso. Trilogia del prof. Francesco Cerruti. Roma, Libreria Salesiana 1909.

⁸⁷ ASC B0320108 (7 Jan 1909). D. Albera read Fr. Guibert's *L'Éducateur apôtre* in Italian translation as it came off the press in 1909. He consulted a second work: *Culture des vocations*, which, as rector major, he would quote in his circular letter on oratories, missions and vocations, published on 31 May 1913. Cf P. ALBERA, *Lettere circolari*, p. 130.

⁸⁸ Alfonz Eschbach (1839-1923), rector of Collegio Santa Chiara, the French seminary in Rome, and procurator general for the Spiritans. Leo XIII made Fr. Eschbach his special dele-

On the other hand, D. Albera enthused over a volume he calls *L'educazione della castità*. Written by Spanish Jesuit Ramón Ruiz Amado de Contreras⁹⁰, this guidebook for parents, priests and educators was both informative and delicate in its approach. D. Albera appreciated this fact. "It is very consoling", he wrote, "to see that all the men very good exert himself for aiding the youth to conserve the chastity"⁹¹.

5.3. Apologetics

Early in D. Albera's term as Spiritual Director General, he consulted the writings of apologists. Many of the catechisms he studied during that early period had an apologetic edge to them⁹². In a world perceived as hostile to Catholicism, D. Albera seems to pursue authors that set the record straight, so to speak. Among these we find Cardinal Alimonda and Bishop Bonomelli, but more explicitly, René-François Rohrbacher⁹³.

D. Albera outlined passages from Abbé Rohrbacher's *Histoire universelle de l'Église catholique*⁹⁴, which was a monumental if not a critical history of

gate to Constantinople in 1895 to facilitate renewed contacts between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. He also served on several Roman Congregations: consultor for the Congregation of the Index, the Propagation of the Faith, the commission for the codification of Canon Law; censor of the theological academies and for the "moral case" of Rome. For many years he was professor of "diplomacy" at the academy for Rome's nobility. Through his leadership, Collegio Santa Chiara was raised to the rank of a Pontifical Seminary.

⁸⁹ Cf ASC B0320109 (15 Jun 1910).

⁹⁰ Ramón Ruiz Amado de Contreras, SJ (1861-1934), was a leading figure in Catholic publishing. He wrote over 60 books in area of catechetics, education, history and spirituality, and contributed numerous articles to reviews and encyclopedias.

⁹¹ ASC B0320108 (13 Dec 1909); cf Ramón RUIZ AMADO, *Ai confessori, educatori e padri di famiglia sopra l'educazione della castità*. Translated by Domenico Valle, Torino, Marietti 1909.

⁹² D. Albera would have encountered "catechisms with an apologetic edge" in a number of the booklets published by D. Bosco and, while still a boy, would have found these works available at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. See, e.g., Giovanni BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione. Trattenimenti di un padre di famiglia co' suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo*. Torino, Tipografia dir. da P. De-Agostini 1853, 2 vols.

⁹³ Historian and apologist, Fr. René-François Rohrbacher (1789-1856) authored an influential 28-volume "universal history" of the Church that put an end to Jansenism and Gallianism in France.

⁹⁴ The work originally appeared in the 1840s as: René-François ROHRBACHER, *Histoire universelle de l'Église catholique*. Paris, Gaume freres 1842-1849, 29 vols. The Italian version, prepared by Giacinto Marietti in Torino in the 1850s, appeared in 16 volumes. It would seem that D. Albera consulted this edition, namely: René-François ROHRBACHER, *Storia universale della Chiesa cattolica dal principio del mondo fino ai di nostri*. Torino, Giacinto Marietti 1859, vol. 1, pp. 63, 64-65.

the Church. This rich mosaic of anecdotes tended to highlight the importance of the Church and the papacy in world history. Its real significance lies in its open criticism of Jansenism and Gallicanism. Rohrbacher effectively put an end to both movements in France, for his *Histoire universelle* was so influential that after its publication many Catholic writers, seminary professors and churchmen put aside any author, essayist or historian that showed Jansenistic or Gallican tendencies. Rohrbacher's epic brought "ultramontanism" – a Church rooted in the papacy – to the center of the ecclesial scene.

A new breed of apologist was needed at the start of the twentieth century. On the one hand, the governments of traditionally Catholic countries were finding new ways to exert control over religion; on the other, Catholic clergy and laity felt they had endured prejudicial policies long enough: they were beginning to organize and exert themselves. D. Albera too had experienced what renewed anticlericalism could inflict on his Salesian brothers and sisters in France, Brazil and Italy. He perceived the need to strengthen himself in this ongoing battle, and perhaps for this motive he read many of the new apologists⁹⁵.

He waded through *La nuova apologia*, by Jesuit Eugenio Polidori⁹⁶. Though he felt he was less than conversant in the issues raised by Fr. Polidori⁹⁷, this reading demonstrates his efforts to keep up with the Church's stand on biblical scholarship and other controversial doctrinal topics of his times. The same principle was at work with respect to Louis Baunard's *Il Vangelo del povero*, which D. Albera picked up while visiting the Salesians in Faenza in April 1907. This book of essays is easy reading, and D. Albera seems to have been able to complete it in one day⁹⁸.

⁹⁵ For an insight into D. Albera's views regarding the organized forces of anticlericalism and the way it victimized missionaries and innocent Christians, see his presentation of the train accident that killed Bishop Luigi Lasagna and six of his companions, and of the cynical approach of the Brazilian transportation ministry and courts during the ensuing investigation in Paolo ALBERA, *Mons. Luigi Lasagna. Memorie Biografiche*. San Benigno Canavese, Scuola Tipografica Libreria Salesiana 1900, pp. 408, 410, 425-428.

⁹⁶ Eugenio POLIDORI, *La Nuova Apologia del Cristianesimo*. 2d rev. ed., Roma, Civiltà Cattolica 1905; cf ASC B0320106 (25 Apr 1906).

⁹⁷ A Jesuit staff writer for the bimonthly review *Civiltà Cattolica*, Eugenio Polidori (1851-1906) published critical and apologetic articles challenging the historical criticism of contemporary scholars Alfred Loisy, Aldoph Harnack and Count Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy. He collected some of his more significant essays in *Nuova Apologia del Cristianesimo*, released in 1905. Fr. Polidori's arguments are logical and rooted in Catholic philosophical traditions, but his approach, by his own admission, is passionate and often hard-line. Cf Polidori, *La Nuova Apologia*, 4.

⁹⁸ Louis BAUNARD, *Il Vangelo del Povero*. Translated by Domenico Dall'Osso, Faenza, Libreria Salesiana 1907. The latest French edition (*L'Évangélie du Pauvre*. 3d rev. & enl. ed.,

D. Albera read other works by Msgr. Baunard⁹⁹, though the exact sources are not always clear¹⁰⁰. We know that he studied the monsignor's biography of Cardinal Charles-Martial Lavigerie, missionary bishop in Africa¹⁰¹. He had met the cardinal personally when he escorted Don Bosco through France in 1883 and 1886¹⁰². It was either from experience, popular reputation, or the result of his reading, but when writing the biography of his own missionary pupil, Luigi Lasagna, he compared Bishop Lasagna's apostolic sensitivity to that of Cardinal Lavigerie¹⁰³.

This genre appealed to D. Albera. During a few days of rest in the Alpine town of Oulx, he spent some leisure time with a popular apology by the combative Savoird bishop of Nancy and Toul, Charles-François Turinaz¹⁰⁴, a book which he identified as *La foi catholique*¹⁰⁵.

D. Albera reads "a book very bad [...] against the popes". He gives no hint of author or title, but exclaims indignantly: "What calumnies against the Popes! What falsehoods against the Catholic Church! What are blind on the truths of our faith!"¹⁰⁶.

D. Albera spent some January evenings reading Cardinal James Gibbons' first book, *Faith of our Fathers*¹⁰⁷. This work was half apologia and

Paris, Poussielgue, 1904), had met with great success in Catholic circles. This Italian translation by Salesian D. Dall'Osso received the imprimatur on 18 March 1907, and went to press shortly afterwards. D. Albera, then, would have read this book while it was literally "hot off the press" Cf ASC B0320107 (28 Apr 1907).

⁹⁹ Msgr. Louis Pierre André Baunard (1828-1919), professor of patristics and Church history, and rector of the Catholic Faculty of Lille, incorporated contemporary political, philosophical and social issues into his teachings. He wrote on a panorama of Christian, spiritual and moral topics.

¹⁰⁰ See: ASC B0480130.

¹⁰¹ Louis BAUNARD, *Le cardinal Lavigerie*. Paris, Poussielgue 1896, 2 vols. Charles-Martial Lavigerie (1825 1892) founded the Missionaries of Africa, popularly known as the "White Fathers",

¹⁰² Cf MB 16, 252-255; 18, 258-260; L. BAUNARD, *Le cardinal Lavigerie*, vol. 2, p. 239. In 1885, Cardinal Lavigerie traveled to Turin to ask D. Bosco for Salesian missionaries in Africa; cf MB 17, 472-473.

¹⁰³ Cf ASC B0320103 (22 Jan 1897); P. ALBERA, *Mons. Luigi Lasagna*, p. 258.

¹⁰⁴ Charles-François Turinaz (1838-1918), bishop of Nancy and Toul since 1882, remained vocal in the face of religious repression by the French government, and became pro-active in the renewal of parish life for both clergy and laity.

¹⁰⁵ In ASC B0320107 (31 May, 4 Jun 1907), D. Albera identifies the book as *La Foi Catholique*, but the work closest to this seems to be: Charles-François TURINAZ, *Une Démonstration Claire et Décisive de la Divinité de la Foi*. Nancy, Drioton 1902.

¹⁰⁶ ASC B0320108 (8 Jan 1909).

¹⁰⁷ James GIBBONS, *The faith of our fathers, being a plain exposition and vindication of the Church founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ*. 69th rev. and enl. ed., Baltimore, John Murphy Company 1907.

half catechism. Directed toward American Protestants, it attempted to explain Catholic teaching and practice in a down-to-earth fashion, appealing to reason and dispelling the air of suspicion that characterized Protestant-Catholic relations on the new continent. The book was a best seller in North America and England, and D. Albera himself found it “very instructive”¹⁰⁸.

Personal renewal and conversion is a theme that attracted his attention in the opening year of the new century. He read at least three books in 1907 that told the stories of prominent converts to Catholicism. While visiting Alassio in early February 1907, D. Albera picked up a book by “Mr. De La Rive”, and read “a few pages”¹⁰⁹. Ten weeks later he completed reading the conversion story of French poet Adolphe Retté¹¹⁰, followed a week later by an anthology of essays by François Coppée telling of his own journey back to the Catholic faith¹¹¹.

6. Devotional Literature

6.1. *Insights from the Fathers of the Church*

A discrete number of “classical authors” find their way into D. Albera’s sermons, conferences and spiritual writings. We see quotations and allusions from Patristic sources and classical liturgical and Scriptural commentators. Did D. Albera read the Fathers of the Church directly? It is hard to say. Nearly every one of his contemporary sources – sermons, retreats, commentaries – quoted the Fathers. He particularly favored Saint Augustine and Saint Jerome, citing their sayings and relating anecdotes from their writings.

¹⁰⁸ ASC B0320109 (15 Jan 1910).

¹⁰⁹ Théodore DE LA RIVE, *Vingt-cinq ans de vie catholique. Expériences et observations*. Paris, Plon 1907; cf ASC B0320107 (3 Feb 1908). Théodore De la Rive, born in 1855, was a member of one of the most prominent Calvinist families in Geneva. The De la Rive family was enormously influential in economic circles across Switzerland, and had major political ties in France and Italy. Théodore’s conversion to Catholicism in 1880 created something of a sensation.

¹¹⁰ Adolphe RETTÉ, *Dal diavolo a Dio. Storia di una conversione*. Treviso, Luigi Buffetti 1908; cf ASC B0320107 (24 Apr, 1908). French poet and social activist Adolphe Retté (1863-1930) professed a militant materialism and atheism. He converted to Catholicism in 1906. All of his works afterwards were religious in nature.

¹¹¹ François COPPÉE, *Saper soffrire!* Treviso, Luigi Buffetti 1907; cf ASC B0320107 (1 May 1908). Parisian poet and dramatist Francis-Edouard-Joachim “François” Coppée (1842-1908) was an important figure in French letters and a member of the French Academy. He returned to the practice of his faith after a severe illness in 1897, bringing a renewed spiritual dimension into his literary, social and political activities.

D. Albera cites Augustine's second letter to Volusian to set the stage for his discussion of Jesus as model and exemplar for all human beings. D. Albera develops this thought during a retreat for directors and again for the chapter delegates gathered in 1910 to elect a successor for D. Rua¹¹². Most of the other numerous references to Augustine are easily recognized and almost slogan-like: about "hearts" that "are restless", and "love" that allows one to "do what you will". Each epigram highlights virtue or describes the nature of that responsibility necessary to live a Christian lifestyle¹¹³.

Saint Jerome, student and translator of the Sacred Scriptures, is another frequent guest in D. Albera's sermons, although he tends to pull more from the scholar-hermit's autobiographical reflections than from his biblical commentaries. The anecdotes he cites were well known, and seem to figure in the talks of many a retreat master¹¹⁴.

It is true that with revived interest in the Fathers of the Church during the nineteenth century, even the Salesian press at Valdocco produced a number of text-book editions of the Latin Fathers for use in the schools¹¹⁵. It would seem, however, that Paolo Albera simply culled their sayings from secondary sources. He may have even collected their sayings years earlier from the theology manuals used for seminary instruction in his days, for he

¹¹² Cf ASC B0480139, p. 47; B0480138, enclosed *S*, p. 1: quoting from S. Augustine, Epistola 137, *Domino illustri et merito insigni, et praestantissimo filio Volusiano, Augustinus, in Domino salutem*, §3.12, found in *Opere di Sant'Agostino*. Edizione latino-italiana. Parte III: *Le lettere*. Vol. 22, Roma, Città Nuova 1971, vol. 2, p. 156.

¹¹³ Quotations from S. Augustine and references to his life can be found throughout D. Albera's retreats, eg. at: B0480111, p. 73, 81; B0400112, pp. 17, 55, 90, 3:38, 49, 90; B0400115, p. 116; B0480139, p. 47; B048137, pp. 16, 35, 63, 65; B0400138, enclosed *S*, pp. 1-2. Are these passages quoted directly or through secondary sources? A clue comes in B0480111, pp. 86, where D. Albera quotes S. Thomas Aquinas quoting Augustine. The fact remains, however, that D. Albera seems to like Augustine's ability to express the faith. On the cover page of a composition book where, around 1905, D. Albera collected apt phrases and anecdotes from his readings, we find this phrase from Augustine: "Amate scientiam, sed anteponite charitatem", that is, "Love knowledge, but put charity first", See: ASC B0480133, Paolo Albera, *Quaderno con argomenti di vita cristiana, 1905*, ms aut., p. 1.

¹¹⁴ Jerome's teaching and experience appears in: B0400111, p. 81; B0480112, pp. 27-28; B0400113, pp. 45, 75-76, 81; B0480115, p. 7; B0400139, p. 27; B0400137, pp. 16, 17, 37-38, 43, 124.

¹¹⁵ D. Albera's successor at Sampierdarena, D. Giovanni Tamietti (1848-1920), published at least 9 secondary school texts of Latin readings based on the Fathers, including Augustine, Ambrose, Cyprian and Jerome. These were published at Valdocco between 1875 and 1899, with reprints extending into the 1920s. Interest in the Fathers grew as more critical editions became available, and this was largely thanks to the efforts of Abbé Jacques-Paul Migne (1800-1875) and his publishing house. For a description of Migne's work and that of his successors, see: Johannes QUASTEN, *Patrology*. Vol. 1: *The Beginnings of Patristic Literature*. Utrecht-Antwerp, Spectrum Publishers 1950, pp. 14-18.

reported many striking sayings of the Fathers with index-card accuracy¹¹⁶. Whatever the case may be, D. Albera drew from the insights of Saints Ambrose, John Climacus, John Chrysostom and others as authoritative guides when he needed to drive home his own message¹¹⁷.

Some known sources for passages from the Fathers were sermons published by noted retreat masters and mission preachers. They also quoted anecdotes from the lives of the saints, particularly those of great founders, ascetics and mystics. D. Albera often prepared his talks by studying writings of this sort, as we shall see later.

Many more references to ascetical authors appear in his spiritual journal than in his composition books. This indicates that D. Albera did not just prepare his talks at his desk. He brought this ministry into his prayer and meditation as well. The writings of these authors sustain him on his spiritual journey.

References to spiritual authors increased during the period between 1903 and 1910. D. Albera's religious reading took in a greater variety of sources, at least as far as can be determined in his journals. He was also more apt to quote a passage that moved him, or in some way comment on the nature of the book he was reading.

6.2. *Devotion to Jesus*

The most widespread 19th-century devotion was that of the Sacred Heart. D. Albera shows evidence of having done extensive reading on this subject. He read a number of books and seems to have been a regular reader of contemporary journals and magazines for devotion to the Sacred Heart.

D. Albera meditated on the Sacred Heart by using the writings of Fr. Albert Tesnière¹¹⁸ for his own edification and as a resource when preparing conferences for his younger confreres. Fr. Tesnière was highly influential in France and abroad, especially with regard to Eucharistic devotion. He viewed all de-

¹¹⁶ In addition to the Fathers, D. Albera frequently reports dicta from Medieval doctors and saints such as Hugh of Saint-Cher (cf B0480112, p. 81; B0480138, p. 11), S. Anselm of Canterbury (cf B0480111, p. 77), and Jean Gerson (cf B0480111, pp. 81-82). These too appear with manual-like directness.

¹¹⁷ This tactic of bolstering his own position with a "word" from an authoritative source was fairly typical. D. Bosco himself took a similar approach to "the sources"; cf Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol. 1: *Vita e Opere*. Roma, LAS 1979, 241.

¹¹⁸ Albert Tesnière, SSS (1847-1909), theologian, novice director and later editor of the revue, *Le Très Saint Sacrement*, did much to promote Adoration and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, Frequent Communion, and the movement of the Eucharistic Congresses. He was elected superior general of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers in 1887.

votion, including devotion to the Sacred Heart, from a sacramental perspective. D. Albera found this perspective particularly helpful¹¹⁹. Along the same lines, the writings of French Sulpician Charles Sauvé offered him a systematic approach to the study of the interior life¹²⁰. Fr. Sauvé had a way of grounding popular piety in dogmatic accuracy. Devotion to the Heart of Christ was not something sentimental. It implied striving to cultivate an intimate relationship with Jesus that demanded making him the center, the core of one's life¹²¹.

D. Albera's sources confirmed his own opinion that the devotion to the Sacred Heart was devotion to Christ in the Eucharist. The sacramental and sacrificial aspects of this mystery were key in his reading of both technical manuals and devotional literature¹²².

There are traces of the English convert Frederick William Faber¹²³ in D. Albera's notes. In his early notebooks, he transcribes passages from an Italian version of Fr. Faber's last book of essays, *Bethlehem*. He is struck by the description of the "first Christmas", which did not occur in the "dark cave" or "moon lit slope" of Bethlehem. No, "his home has no scenery, no walls, no shape, no form, no colour, no spot which can be loved with local love. It is not in space, nor in imaginary space, nor within the world, nor at the world's edge, nor beyond it. It is the Bosom of the Father"¹²⁴.

¹¹⁹ Albert TESNIÈRE, *Le Sacré-Cœur; sujets d'adoration pour les premiers vendredis du mois*. Paris 1902; cf ASC B0320106 (5 Jun 1903, 16 Mar 1905).

¹²⁰ Charles Sauvé (1848-1925) of the Society of St. Sulpice, taught systematic and moral theology at the major seminary of Dijon for 28 years until a gradual paralysis took him out of the classroom in 1903. He dedicated the remainder of his life to writing and publishing.

¹²¹ Charles SAUVÉ, *Le Chrétien intime. Le culte du Cœur de Jésus. Jésus notre vie*. Paris, Vic et Amat 1905; cf ASC B0320108 (3 Jun 1909).

¹²² Cf ASC B0480126 (1892-3?), reference to: Giovanni Battista GIORDANO, *Novena del Santo Natale. Giovedì Eucaristici*, in *Prediche del Canonico Giovanni Battista Giordano*. Vol. 3, Torino, Tip. e Libr. S. Giuseppe - Collegio degli Artigianelli 1873; B0320103 (9 Nov 1897), reference to: *Probation sacerdotale sur le culte de la Sainte Eucharistie*, Paris, J. Mersch 1890. B0320106 (14 Jun 1906), reference to: Pierre CHAIGNON, *Il prete santificato dalla pratica dell'orazione, ossia corso di meditazioni per i sacerdoti*. 2nd rev. ed., 3 vols., Imola, Lega Tipografica 1881 (meditation on the Eucharist); B0480130, enclosed U, p. 3, reference to: Johannes Baptist FRANZELIN, *Tractatus de SS. Eucharistiae Sacramento et Sacrificio*. 4th ed., Roma, Typographia Polyglotta 1887.

¹²³ Frederick William Faber (1814-1863) was ordained for the Church of England in 1839, converted to the Church of Rome in 1845, and entered the Oratorian community founded by John Henry Newman in 1848. Fr. Faber had a knack for popularizing Catholic teaching for his contemporaries. He was an effective speaker; his published conferences went through multiple editions; he translated many classic and devotional works from French, Italian and Latin into English and dabbled in composing hymns in the vernacular.

¹²⁴ Frederick William FABER, *Bethlehem*. London, Burns & Oates 1897, p. 8. Cf ASC B0480126, p. 37; Frederick William FABER, *Bethlehem*. Torino, Giacinto Marietti 1869, p. 5.

Many common people found Fr. Faber's writings uplifting and gently optimistic. His writings grew out of his preaching, and his ability to use common speech with graphic and flowery images, may have accounted for his great popularity at home and on the Continent. D. Albera appears to have been familiar with a number of his works, which he read in translation, including *All for Jesus*, and *Spiritual Conferences*, which he read in translation¹²⁵. He also read commentaries by Fr. Faber on some French devotional authors, and inscribed the Faberian phrase, "All for Jesus", at the start of many of his conference notes¹²⁶. This phrase typified for Fr. Faber, and perhaps for D. Albera, the fundamental attitude of Christian discipleship.

6.3. Discipleship

The *Imitation of Christ* had to have been one of Paolo Albera's favorite texts¹²⁷. He consistently turned to this classic, noting choice passages in his spiritual journal and retreat conferences. Besides the Holy Scriptures, it is the *Imitation of Christ* that he would access most often over the course of his 18 years as Spiritual Director General.

In certain periods D. Albera seems to have worked through the *Imitation* fairly systematically, as when he consulted it in preparation for Christmas and Easter¹²⁸. At other times he seems to pick it up as a text for personal meditation in periods of physical or emotional crisis¹²⁹.

¹²⁵ Frederick William FABER, *La bonté. Extrait des conférences du Père Faber*. Avignon, Aubanel Frères 1907; ID., *Tutto per Gesù, ovvero, gli agevoli modi d'amor divino*. Torino, Pietro Marietti 1897. See notes transcribed in ASC B0480120 and B0480135 (ca. 1907).

¹²⁶ See the cover or title pages of ASC B0480105-8, B0480111-4, B0480117, B0480121, B0480131.

¹²⁷ Archbishop Fulton Sheen states that the *Imitation of Christ* "has been more widely read by Roman Catholics than any other religious book except the Bible". A venerable tradition credits an Augustinian Canon, Thomas Hemerken à Kempis (1379-1471) with writing the *Imitation of Christ*. Many English and American Christians hold to this tradition, while the majority of Italian and French scholars since the end of nineteenth century have contested this claim [cf Fulton Sheen, "Thomas a Kempis", in *The World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, 1961), 17:202; Jordon Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 164-168; Piergiorgio Bonardi, and Tiburzio Lupo *L'Imitazione di Cristo e il Suo Autore* (Torino: SEI, 1964), 1:251-252, 286-287]. Paolo Albera appears to have been aware of the controversy surrounding this classic, but does not speculate on its authorship. Rather than mention any particular name, he spoke of "the author of the *Imitation*", cf B0480111, p. 44; B0480115, p. 118. Following his lead, we will consider the source and not the author.

¹²⁸ Cf ASC B0320101 (14, 23, 25 Dec 1893); B0320108 (7 Feb, 19 Dec 1909).

¹²⁹ More often than not, D. Albera would make use of Bishop Challoner English version when reflecting on personal matters; cf ASC B0320101 (1 Apr, 23, 25 Dec 1893; 2 Jan 1894);

The *Imitation of Christ* both challenged and consoled D. Albera. When the rector major, D. Michele Rua, asked him to write some directive letters to the confreres on renewing their spirit of piety and self-sacrifice in the beginning of 1909, he found inspiration in the pages of the *Imitation*¹³⁰. D. Albera recommended the *Imitation of Christ* to novices and to young confreres on retreat¹³¹ and to Salesians serving in the military, instructing them to carry the volume on their persons at all times¹³². He never comments on the style or quality of the book. His focus is the message: following Jesus Christ who dialogues with the would-be disciple¹³³.

6.4. Marian Titles and Themes

Among the many devotional works that D. Albera consulted, he favored several that centered on the figure of the Virgin Mary. The same dynamics were at play that we have seen characterized D. Albera's entire experience. As he prepared specific conferences on devotion to Mary he consulted clas-

B0320106 (11 Jan, 21, 25-28 Jul, 4, 17 Aug, 7, 13, 15 Nov, 18 Dec 1904; 8 Apr, 29 May 1906); B0320107 (18, 24 Feb, 7 Apr, 7 Jul 1907; 12 Jan 1908) B0320108 (7 Feb, 19 Dec 1909). However, he is sufficiently familiar with the common Latin text; cf ASC B0320101 (14 Dec 1893; 28 Dec 1895).

¹³⁰ Cf ASC B0320107 (10-12 Jan 1908).

¹³¹ Cf ASC B0480115, p. 118; B0480111, p. 44.

¹³² Cf [Paolo ALBERA], *Il Salesiano sotto le armi*. Torino, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, s.d, p. 15: "Nel recarvi alla casa salesiana o al Seminario, sia vostra prima cura di fare in cappella almeno un quarto d'ora di meditazione, servendovi o del libro della comunità o della *Imitazione di Cristo*, che dovrete sempre portare con voi".

¹³³ From *De Imitatione Christi*, these are the "Words of the Master" that appealed to D. Albera, and which he traced into his journal in English or Latin: bk. 1, c. 2: "Ama nesciri et pro nihilo reputari"; bk. 1, c. 9: "It is much more secure to be in the state of subjection than in authority"; bk. 1, c. 20: "In silentio et quiete proficit anima devota et discit abscondita scripturarum"; bk. 1, c. 23: "If thou art not prepared to-day to die, how wilt thou be prepared tomorrow?"; bk. 1, c. 23: "Keep thy heart free, and raised upwards to God, because thou hast not here a lasting city"; bk. 1, c. 25: "Tantum proficies, quantum tibi ipsi vim intuleris"; bk. 2, 2: "On humble submission – Non reputes te aliquid profecisse, nisi te omnibus inferiorem esse sentias"; bk. 3, 21: "Behold, I am here; behold I come to thee, because thou hast called upon me"; bk. 3, 23: "Always seek the lowest place and to be inferior to every one"; bk. 3, 25: "Si ad plenum tui contemptum perveneris, scito quod abundantia pacis perfrueris"; bk. 3, 27: "Covet not that which thou mayest not have"; bk. 3, 28: "Take it not to heart if some people think ill of thee, and say of thee what though are not willing to hear"; bk. 3, 32: "Thou canst not possess perfect liberty, if thou doest not deny thyself", From *De Imitatione Christi*, these are D. Albera's favorite expressions as mouthed by the disciple: bk. 1, c. 21: "O God, this is my whole desire, that my heart may be united to thee"; bk. 3, 35: "Oh! When thou shalt fill me with thy presence and become to me all in all?"; bk. 4, 3: "O God, this is my whole desire, that my heart may be united to thee".

sical authors such as Jacques Bénigne Bossuet¹³⁴. For his own instruction, he dipped into the spiritual writings of Louis Grignon de Montfort¹³⁵.

The works of Bishop Bossuet appear more assertively, with direct references to specific titles. Several editions of his sermons were available, but it is difficult to pinpoint the exact edition that D. Albera may have read. Still, we can trace the specific work that he consulted, and can see its impact on his Marian teaching. Jacques Bénigne Bossuet's sermons on the Mother of God become a resource when reflecting with the seminarians of Valsalice on Mary's purity and her immaculate conception¹³⁶.

Between 1893 and 1895, D. Albera read extensively from *Le secret de Marie*, by Louis Grignon de Montfort¹³⁷. The version of this book that seems to have been most readily available to D. Albera – indeed, it is the copy used by his protégé Fr. Francesco Binelli in the novitiate at St. Pierre de Canon – was not a “pure version”. H. Oudin of Poitiers and Paris published numerous editions of *Le secret de Marie* between 1868 and 1893. It was attractive and brief – perhaps too brief. It seems the editors felt it was somewhat incomplete, for they opted to integrate passages into the text from a larger work called *Traité de la vraie dévotion a la Sainte Vierge*. Not only did the publisher make no apologies for this interpolation: no mention was made that this had in fact occurred.

Within a short time, D. Albera graduated to the longer *Vraie dévotion a la Sainte Vierge*¹³⁸. This work had only been discovered among Grignon de Montfort's papers in 1842. It was more theological in content and presenta-

¹³⁴ Orator, controversialist, apologist, spiritual writer, and reformer, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1707), bishop of Meaux, was one of the most influential Catholic figures of 17th-century France.

¹³⁵ S. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort (1673-1716) is considered a member of the “French School”. He completed his formation at St. Sulpice, and founded schools for the children of the common people. He integrated Sulpician ideals with Dominican traditions, and founded two religious communities: the Missionaries of the Company of Mary and the Daughters of Wisdom. Interest in Grignon de Montfort was ignited in 1842 when unpublished treatises on Marian devotion were discovered among his papers. He was beatified in 1888; Pius XII canonized him in 1947.

¹³⁶ Cf ASC B0320106 (22 Oct 1906, feast of the Purity of Mary). 13 months later, D. Albera would again page through Bossuet's marian meditations as he prepared a series of sermons for the feast of the Immaculate Conception: see ASC B0480137, Paolo ALBERA, *Im[macolata] Concezione: Fecit mihi magna qui potens est* [5 Dec 1907], ms aut., 1907, p. 81.

¹³⁷ Louis-Marie GRIGNON DE MONTFORT, *Le secret de Marie dévoilé à l'âme pieuse*. 16th ed., Paris, H. Oudin 1893 ; cf ASC B0320101 (12, 16, 19 Nov 1893).

¹³⁸ Louis-Marie GRIGNON DE MONTFORT, *Traité de la vraie dévotion a la Sainte Vierge*. 13th ed., Paris, H. Oudin 1891; cf ASC B0320103 (23 Oct, 7 Nov, 1897); B0320104 (2, 31 May 1898).

tion: the author wrote it as a “treatise” as opposed to the “spiritual letter” genre he employed in *Secret*. However, Grignon de Montfort never published the *Vraie dévotion*, and critics are unable to determine which piece he actually wrote first¹³⁹.

Interest in this treatise on devotion to Mary received a major boost when Frederick Faber translated it into English in 1862. Fr. Faber related to his readers that he felt this book had been a major influence on his own piety ever since he had first read it in 1846. Furthermore, he cited the Vatican's 1853 decree that Montfort's writings were free from doctrinal error as tantamount to an official validation of his teachings. Now, wrote Fr. Faber, it was simply a matter of making this teaching known – or better, making Mary known – and the renewal of the Church and Society would be assured¹⁴⁰.

Both works made a deep impression on Paolo Albera. He used *Secret* and *Vraie dévotion* as texts for his personal meditation, and repeatedly returned to both books over a period of at least five years. As personal reflections jotted down in his spiritual journal bear out, D. Albera fairly well assimilated the Marian teachings of Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort. Here was a spirituality that demanded a total consecration of self to the Virgin Mary as a means of entering into deeper union with Jesus the Incarnate Word. This approach made a strong impact on D. Albera's sensibilities, motivated his actions, influenced his relationships, and colored his prayer life. Grignon de Montfort's “true devotion” became a model for D. Albera in consecrating his life to the Mother of God; he spoke of this with novices in Saint Pierre de Canon, and used this spiritual program to reflect on his own status during his spiritual exercises in the 1890s¹⁴¹.

D. Albera found another book, *La Vergine Immacolata, don Bosco e i Salesiani*, an articulate presentation on Marian devotion. This book was

¹³⁹ Cf Stefano DE FIORES, “Il Segreto di Maria. Presentazione”, in Louis-Marie GRIGNON DE MONTFORT, *Opere*. Vol. 1: *Scritti Spirituali*. 2d ed., Roma, Edizioni Monfortane 1990, p. 297.

¹⁴⁰ Cf Frederick W. FABER, “Preface”, in Louis-Marie GRIGNON DE MONTFORT, *A Treatise on the true devotion to the Blessed Virgin* Translated from the original French by Frederick William Faber; preface by cardinal [Herbert] Vaughan. 5th ed., London, Burns & Oates 1888, pp. xviii-xix: “Oh, if Mary were but known, there would be no coldness to Jesus then! O, if Mary were but known, how much more wonderful would be our faith, and how different would our Communions be! O, if Mary were but known, how much happier, how much holier, how much less worldly should we be, and how much more should we be living images of our sole Lord and Saviour, her dearest and most Blessed Son!”.

¹⁴¹ Cf ASC B0320101 (7 Oct, 8 Dec 1895); B0320102 (11-20 Mar 1896). To better understand Paolo Albera's Marian devotion, we will briefly survey S. Louis Grignon de Montfort's teachings in the next chapter.

written by his former teacher and confrere D. Giovanni Battista Francesia¹⁴², and like most of Francesia's compositions, was directed toward the common people and the young. It offered clear indications as to how, in Don Bosco's tradition, the Salesian Family could and must develop its attachment to the Mother of God. What seemed to have impressed D. Albera most, however, was the author's fervor, which was so evident, in D. Albera's opinion, that it shone through the printed page¹⁴³.

References to Mary's role in the redemptive mission of Christ, her influence as a model of virtue and apostolic lifestyle, appear frequently in the meditative books D. Albera employed as aids in his own prayer. Certain themes move from his prayer to his instructions, as we find in March 1911, when he recommended to Salesians preparing for ordination that they look to Mary as the guide and model of their priesthood – a concept he culled from the conferences of the popular Parisian retreat master Canon Romain Louis Planus¹⁴⁴.

7. Retreat Literature

Sunday instructions, parish missions and classical retreat conferences offered Paolo Albera a popular if somewhat austere menu of religious entrées. We find that D. Albera relished those preachers who served up appetizers in the way of anecdotes, examples, or allegories about the “end of man”, the “fear of God”, and the eternal option of salvation or perdition.

In the nineteenth century, the Company of Jesus rediscovered the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. D. Albera himself studied the Ignatian retreat, either directly or through the writings of noted Italian and French retreat masters such as Carlo Gregorio Rosignoli, Secondo Franco, Giuseppe Maria Vignitello, Antonio Ciccolini and François Bouchage. He increasingly felt at home

¹⁴² Giovanni Battista Francesia (1838-1930), was a member of the first group of Salesians in 1859, made his profession on 14 May 1862, and was ordained to the priesthood on 14 June 1862. He was a Latinist and a prolific author, with over 60 titles to his credit, but perhaps was best known as a storyteller. His “oral history” of the Oratory enthused young and old in their Salesian experience.

¹⁴³ Cf ASC B0320106 (10 Jan 1905); Giovanni Battista FRANCESIA, *La Vergine Immacolata, Don Bosco e i Salesiani*. S. Benigno Canavese, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana 1904.

¹⁴⁴ Cf ASC B0320110 (Mar 1911): conference outlines; cf Romain Louis PLANUS, *Le Prêtre*. Paris, C. Poussielgue 1898, vol. 1, pp. 360-362. At one time vicar general for the diocese of Autun, France, Canon Romain Louis Planus (1838-1916) directed a center known as “La Maison des Chartreux de Lyon”, and was active in retreat ministry at the close of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Centuries.

in that tradition and wished to introduce his confreres to Ignatius' systematic spiritual approach¹⁴⁵.

Before delving into Ignatius and the Jesuit masters, it may be more useful to examine retreat masters who were closer to D. Albera's personal experience. His earliest retreat experiences came from personal contact with Don Bosco. In fact, he built an entire repertory of material based on his own founder's teachings.

7.1. The "Last Things"

Paolo Albera often paged through Don Bosco's *Il giovane provveduto*, and specifically to Don Bosco's motivational meditations on "the Last Things". Though this handy volume appears to be a simple prayerbook for adolescents, it was intended by its author and understood by the first Salesians to be a guidebook, a "method for living", as it were, that, if consulted daily, could help a young person from the time of adolescence, to "make something" of his or her life – spiritually speaking¹⁴⁶. These considerations were themselves developed in Saint Alphonsus de' Liguori's *Massime eterne*¹⁴⁷.

In later years, D. Albera seems to have been haunted by thoughts about death. The cause for his anxiety was, no doubt, linked to his awareness that his health was steadily deteriorating. Furthermore, with advancing age, close friends and family members were dying one by one, including three of his colleagues on the Superior Chapter¹⁴⁸. It is no wonder then that D. Albera

¹⁴⁵ Cf ASC B0320101 (14 Aug 1893); B0320102 (12 Mar 1896); B0320104 (13 Jan 1898); B0320105 (31 Jul 1899); B0320106 (2-7 May 1902, 31 Jul 1905); B0320107 (20, 22 Aug, 14, 28 Sep, 15 Dec 1907, 14 Apr, 27 Aug 1908); B0320108 (31 Jul 1909).

¹⁴⁶ Cf Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1, pp. 235-236.

¹⁴⁷ Cf Giovanni BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri negli esercizi di cristiana pietà per la recita dell'uffizio della Beata Vergine e de' principali vespri dell'anno, coll'aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre ecc.* Torino, Paravia 1847, pp. 31-50; Alphonsus DE' LIGUORI, *Massime eterne, ossia meditazioni per ciascuno giorno della settimana*, in *Opere ascetiche di S. Alfonso Maria de Liguori, dottore di S. Chiesa, vescovo di Sant'Agata de' Goti e fondatore della congregazione del SS. Redentore*, Torino, Giacinto Marietti 1880, vol. 2, pp. 473-480.

¹⁴⁸ D. Celestino Durando had died on 27 March 1907, and D. Luigi Rocca died on 21 January 1909. Though a good deal of time had already passed, certain expressions in D. Albera's journal lead us to believe that he still felt their loss. D. Giuseppe Lazzerio had retired from council in 1898, but D. Albera had maintained closed ties, as did other members of the council, all of whom considered D. Lazzerio as member emeritus rather than retired. D. Albera had assisted him in his last hours; he died in Mathi on 7 March 1910. Besides the deaths of these superiors, D. Albera registers shock over the sudden deaths of a number of other Salesians that Spring. A number of Salesians quickly followed these beloved superiors to the grave

meditated on the “Last Things”. This was a regular theme, common to the retreat literature, but in 1910 he reflects on these truths in a Salesian context. He used Don Bosco’s week-long reflections in the *Giovane provveduto* as the text for his meditation at the start of the year¹⁴⁹.

In April and May 1910, he meditated on the life of D. Luigi Rocca, written by Carlo Baratta¹⁵⁰, and a biographical profile of Celestino Durando by D. Giovanni Battista Francesia¹⁵¹. Both these Salesian biographies were brief, popular in format and content. The authors, Baratta and Francesia, developed the “obituary letter” genre common among Salesians. The audience they addressed were Salesians, both religious and lay, and these biographies are more like “in-house” print jobs rather than works for public consumption. We can imagine that D. Albera heard or read all the obituary letters that came to the mother house. These, however, seemed to impress him to the extent that, in that year of mourning, he was prompted to review the lives of his peers, for both Durando and Rocca were members of the Superior Chapter. “The life of Fr. Durando”, D. Albera wrote, “is also very useful for my soul. What distance between his virtues and mine!”¹⁵².

7.2. Popular Parish Missions

A variant within the genre of spiritual exercises was the parish mission. This practice that had a long history of success in post-reformation Italy, and received added impulse during the post-Napoleonic Restoration. Local “missionaries” figure heavily in D. Albera’s reading during the 1890s. Among these we find Fr. Antonio Francesco Biamonti, a mission preacher active in

that year: Luigi Pesce (†Fontanile, 22 Apr 1910); Carlo Maria Baratta (†Salsomaggiore, 23 Apr 1910); Salesian missionaries who were victims of earthquake in Costa Rica that Spring: Manuel Solano, Francesco Stanga, Joaquín Vega León (†Cartago, Costa Rica, 4 May 1910); Francesco Fenoglio (†Málaga, 20 May 1910). Add to this number D. Albera’s oldest brother, Giovanni Francesco Albera (†None, 20 Jul 1910), and the Salesian economist general Giuseppe Bertello who died three months into D. Rúa’s term as rector major (†Torino, 20 Nov 1910), D. Albera could not but feel that death was camped in every quarter of his world.

¹⁴⁹ Cf ASC B0320109 (3 Jan 1910).

¹⁵⁰ Carlo BARATTA, *D. Luigi Rocca. Cenni biografici*. Torino, SAID “Buona Stampa” 1910; cf ASC B0320109 (29 Apr 1910). The Salesian priest Carlo Maria Baratta (1861-1910) was an accomplished musician, sociologist, and his experience in agricultural schools brought him into contact with emerging scientific methods of farming, which he promoted among Salesian schools, and, through the *Bollettino Salesiano*, among the public at large.

¹⁵¹ Giovanni Battista FRANCESIA, *Memorie biografiche del Sac. Celestino Durando d. P.* S. S. S. Benigno Canavese, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana 1908.

¹⁵² ASC B0320109 (3 May 1910).

northern Italy during the early 1800s¹⁵³. His ministry in preaching retreats and missions was furthered by his committing his conferences and sermons to print¹⁵⁴. According to his publishers, Fr. Biamonti did not stand out as a florid orator. His sermons and talks were simple rather than elevated in style, and the examples he used were ordinary, homey, down-to-earth. He stressed the essentials. He avoided anything that would smack of profane rhetoric, and presented his subject matter simply, clearly and systematically¹⁵⁵.

D. Albera's instructions during the 1894 mid-year retreat for novices carry traces of the parish sermons of Canon Giambattista Giordano¹⁵⁶. A contemporary and a friend of Don Bosco, his clear and inspired preaching style made him one of Turin's post sought after preachers, and attracted invitations to preach in Genoa, Milan and Bologna, and throughout northern Italy. Canon Giordano's ministry included conducting Lenten series, directing priests and preaching clergy retreats. He was one of Piedmont's most celebrated mission preachers in the mid-nineteenth century. From the series of Sunday Instructions by the Canon, his reflections on the seven capital sins find a place into D. Albera's own sober reflections that stressed the "need to attend to the needs of one's soul"¹⁵⁷.

Canon Luigi Nasi, another friend and staunch support of Don Bosco and his work¹⁵⁸, was a regular visitor at the Valdocco Oratory. As a young priest he had helped the saint with the Lenten religious education program and had been one of the most beloved catechists at the Oratory. In later years, he preached in tandem with Canon Giordano. The Salesians published his col-

¹⁵³ Priest and academic Antonio Francesco Biamonti was active in the early part 1800s. A Doctor in Sacred Theology and censor for the "Accademia Teologica" at the "Archiginnasio della Sapienza" in Rome, he dedicated himself to preaching missions in parishes and towns throughout Italy.

¹⁵⁴ Antonio Francesco BIAMONTI, *Serie di meditazioni, prediche ed istruzioni ad uso delle sacre missioni e de' santi spirituali esercizj*. 6th ed., Milano, Ernesto Oliva Editore 1873, 4 vols.

¹⁵⁵ Cf "Ai Lettori", in F. BIAMONTI, *Serie di meditazioni*, vol. 1, p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ Giambattista Giordano (1817-1871), priest of the archdiocese of Turin and canon at Corpus Domini church, preached Lenten missions throughout Piedmont, and in major churches in Milan, Genoa and Bologna from 1849 to 1869, when poor health forced him from the pulpit. His sermons were collected and published posthumously.

¹⁵⁷ Cf ASC B0480126, pp. 67-68; see: Giovanni Battista GIORDANO, *Istruzioni parrocchiali sui sette vizi capitali*. Torino, Tip. e Libr. S. Giuseppe - Collegio degli Artigianelli 1875, pp. 22-43.

¹⁵⁸ Luigi Nasi (1821-1896), canon of the cathedral of Turin and vicar for women religious, preached Lenten exercises and for the month of May from the early 1860s through the 1880s in Turin, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Milan, Modena, and other Italian centers. In his early years of priesthood, he worked with D. Bosco in the oratories of Turin.

lected Lenten sermons in 1893, and we can find traces in notes penned by D. Albera over a decade later¹⁵⁹.

Like Giordano, Luigi Nasi was a Canon of Corpus Domini, and like all the members of that “fraternity”, pledged himself to effective preaching. Furthermore, Canons Giordano and Nasi were close friends. They described their relationship like that of David and Jonathan, and during Canon Giordano’s last illness, it was Canon Nasi who cared for him. Yet, in spite of living and working very closely together, each had a very different style of preaching. Giambattista Giordano was a master of gesture and rhetorical tone; Luigi Nasi was simple and spontaneous when he stood in the pulpit. Giordano’s figurative language would strike his listeners, impress itself in their imagination, and gradually work to move their hearts to conversion; Nasi’s manner was measured, cautious, almost timid as he spoke “heart-to-heart”, in a way that took his listeners into his confidence. His aim was to move them, to allow them to reflect and ground the message in realities of their daily lives¹⁶⁰.

7.3. *Jesuit Masters*

The “following of Jesus” and the “cost of discipleship” are themes that D. Albera revisited often. He found they were staples in writings of Jesuit retreat masters, and throughout his preaching career, D. Albera turned to Jesuit sources for substance and content.

We have already seen how D. Albera followed the Ignatian method for journaling as outlined in the writings of Fr. Secondo Franco, SJ. He knew Fr. Franco personally and read his retreat meditations as they came off the press¹⁶¹. He consulted the published works of a number of French Jesuits, beginning with the instructions of the martyred Pierre Olivaint, and continuing through the years with the meditations of Pierre Chaignon and Jacques Nouet particularly helpful in times of personal suffering.

There was no dearth of resources for one who wanted to make or preach the spiritual exercises. At the end of the nineteenth century, D. Albera systematically consulted editions and adaptations of the *Exercitia spiritualia* of Saint Ignatius, such as the Italian course of spiritual conferences by Giuseppe Vigi-

¹⁵⁹ Cf ASC B0480134; Luigi NASI, *Quaresimale*. S. Benigno Canavese, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1893, 2 vols.

¹⁶⁰ Cf [Giovanni Battista FRANCESIA], *Il Can. Luigi Nasi e l’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in NASI, *Quaresimale*, vol. 1, pp. xiv-xv.

¹⁶¹ Secondo FRANCO, *Gli esercizi spirituali di sant’Ignazio*. Torino, Tip. e Libr. S. Giuseppe - Collegio degli Artigianelli 1892.

tello¹⁶², and the Ignatian anthology of the much sought-after retreat master Antonio Ciccolini¹⁶³. Both authors offered practical instructions to spiritual directors as to how to conduct retreats in the tradition of Saint Ignatius along with their sermons. What's more, Fr. Ciccolini's book gathered classical sermons from the great Jesuit masters, including the great "Restoration" general, Fr. Jan Philip Roothaan, who taught that the path to holiness followed the perfect fulfillment of one's duties, and held the Ignatian Exercises to be a resource for prayer life, as well as a guide in the continuing struggle for self-mastery. In short, the spiritual exercises were presented as the framework of spiritual life.

He studied the conferences of Paolo Segneri the elder¹⁶⁴, outlining and drawing inspiration from the eminent Jesuit's "Lenten sermons"¹⁶⁵, and when instructing novices, he employed the imagery he found in Fr. Segneri's daily meditations called "Manna for the soul"¹⁶⁶. Another source of good retreat stories was the collected works of Milan's Carlo Ambrogio Cattaneo¹⁶⁷. D. Albera read Fr. Cattaneo's retreats, but drew especially from sermons

¹⁶² Giuseppe Maria VIGITELLO, *Meditazioni e istruzioni per otto giorni di esercizi spirituali secondo la materia e la forma prescritte da sant'Ignazio da Lojola*. 3 rev. ed., Milano, Boniardi-Pogliani 1876, 2 vols; ASC B0320102 (15 Mar, 25 Dec 1896); B0320103 (6 Jan 1897). Giuseppe Maria Vigitello, SJ (1799-1859), was one of the principal players in the restoration of the Ignatian Exercises after the restoration of the Society of Jesus in the nineteenth century. He preached missions and conducted retreats throughout Italy.

¹⁶³ Antonio CICCOLINI, *Raccolta di meditazioni e documenti secondo la materia e la forma proposte da S. Ignazio di Loyola nei suoi esercizi spirituali*. 2 rev. ed., Firenze, L. Manuelli 1880, 2 vols. ASC B0320103 (6 Jan 1897); B0320104 (13 Jan 1898); B0320107 (20 Aug 1907). Antonio Ciccolini, SJ (1804-1880) was a popular Italian retreat master, who based his retreats on the Ignatian Exercises. The work which D. Albera consulted was collection of Fr. Ciccolini's own meditations, backed up with documents and commentaries on the Ignatian themes and methods.

¹⁶⁴ Paolo Segneri, SJ (1624-1694), was a talented teacher, an able preacher, and an adept spiritual director. In direction, he insisted on discernment and detachment, two virtues possible only to those who are humble. He spent 27 years traveling from city to town in Italy, preaching parish missions and Lenten series. Many of his conferences, meditations, and significant samples of his correspondence has been published.

¹⁶⁵ Paolo SEGNERI, *Il Quaresimale del padre Paolo Segneri della Compagnia di Gesù*. Torino, Giacinto Marietti 1876, pp. 49, 171-173, 228-230; cf ASC B0480126, pp. 26, 27, 28, 33.

¹⁶⁶ Cf ASC B0480115, pp. 41, 44; cf Paolo SEGNERI, *La manna dell'anima*. Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1885, vol. 1, pp. 26-29.

¹⁶⁷ Carlo Ambrogio Cattaneo, SJ (1645-1705) taught rhetoric at the University of Brera, and outside school hours, he would apply himself to preaching missions and retreats in the churches of Milan. Though a master of baroque composition in the classroom, in the pulpit he spoke simply, directly, and from the heart. He preached regularly in the church of S. Fedele in Milan. During his sermons and instructions, the overflow of his listeners packed the plaza and surrounding streets. His sermons were collected and published after his death.

he preached for the monthly “exercise of a happy death”¹⁶⁸.

Other classical Jesuit authors that find their way into D. Albera’s repertory include the Roman-born Giovanni Battista Scaramelli¹⁶⁹, and the devout French educator Jacques Nouet¹⁷⁰. From Fr. Scaramelli’s landmark *Direttorio ascetico*, D. Albera transcribed passages on such themes as “spiritual communion” and devotion to Mary¹⁷¹. He made mention of Fr. Nouet in his spiritual journal and quoted him during the course of his own conferences to directors as well, drawing on passages from *L’homme d’oraison*, on the theme of union with God, conformity to God’s will through obedience and purity¹⁷².

The more contemporary retreat master Pierre Olivaint offered a tremendous spiritual patrimony, not only for his Jesus-centered preaching, but for his convictions regarding faith and faithfulness which exposed him to grave personal danger¹⁷³. Père Olivaint’s retreats stress commitment to duty, which in turns implies the need to follow Jesus in times of difficulty and trial as well as in times of consolation and joy. D. Albera understood that union with Christ necessitated embracing the cross of Christ¹⁷⁴.

¹⁶⁸ Carlo Ambrogio CATTANEO, *Opere del padre Carlo Ambrogio Cattaneo della Compagnia di Gesù*. Vol. 2: *L’esercizio della buona morte*. 2d ed., Milano, Boniardi-Pogliani 1867, pp. 10, 18, 20, 35, 40, 43-44, 49, 51, 55, 59; cf ASC B0480126, pp. 28-32.

¹⁶⁹ Giovanni Battista Scaramelli, SJ (1687-1752), was well versed in rhetoric, literature, philosophy and theology. His principal ministry was to preach parish missions. This he did throughout Italy.

¹⁷⁰ Jacques Nouet, SJ (1605-1680) was a Latin and rhetoric professor by training. He directed schools in Alençon, Moulins, Rouen and Arras. He also became an official preacher at Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris. After retiring from the classroom in 1666, he dedicated his time to preaching, spiritual direction, and retreat work. Most of his spiritual writings grew out of his retreat experience, and recast his sermons and conferences.

¹⁷¹ Cf ASC B0480126, pp. 20-21. An edition available to D. Albera at this time was: Giovanni Battista SCARAMELLI, *Direttorio ascetico, nel quale si insegna il modo di condurre le anime per vie ordinarie della grazia alla perfezione cristiana, indirizzato ai direttori delle anime*. Torino, Speirani e Tortone 1856, 4 vols.

¹⁷² Cf ASC B0320102 (17 Mar 1896); B0320106 (28 Mar 1905); B0480137, p. 62. As for the exact work by Fr. Nouet, it is hard to tell, since *L’homme d’oraison*, had almost become his “trade mark”, Two collections of his sermons bore that title, e.g.: Jacques NOUET, *L’homme d’oraison, ses méditations et entretiens pour tous les jours de l’année*. Ed. r. et corr., Lyon-Paris, Périsse Frères 1850, 20 vols.; Id., *L’homme d’oraison: ses retraites annuelles*. Ed. r. et corr., Paris-Lyon, Victor Lecoffre 1868, 3 vols.

¹⁷³ Pierre Olivaint (1816-1871), a priest of the Society of Jesus, was a well-known educator and retreat preacher. During the “Paris uprisings” of May 1871, he was taken prisoner by the radical leaders of the Paris Commune and executed. Fr. Olivaint was acknowledged as master of prayer and spiritual direction in his day, but it was not until after his death that his teachings were collected and published. His personal diary reveals him as an ascetic, open to suffer for the Lord, and open to those who suffer. Fr. Olivaint’s cause for beatification was introduced in 1937.

¹⁷⁴ Cf ASC B0320101 (17 Feb 1893). D. Albera notes that he reflects on P. Olivaint’s meditation on “union with Jesus” in Pierre OLIVAIN, *Journal de ses retraites annuelles de*

In terms of sheer usage, D. Albera assigned Pierre Chaignon pride of place among his most cherished spiritual authors¹⁷⁵. Père Chaignon was one of the first Jesuits in France to take up the ministry of retreats, and specialized in retreats for the clergy. This had been one of the great missions of the Society of Jesus before the suppression, and Fr. Chaignon reasoned that renewal of the Church would certainly take place when the leaders of the Church are committed to a life of personal conversion and ongoing spiritual growth. Fr. Chaignon began this ministry in 1833 and would preach over 300 retreats to priests. His published works are nothing else but a development of his retreat talks¹⁷⁶.

D. Albera found Fr. Chaignon's seasonal meditations helpful for his own asceticism. The French Jesuit's teaching on "conformity to God's will" sustained D. Albera when confronting his own deteriorating health, encouraging him to pray for the gift of resignation and perseverance¹⁷⁷. He turned to Fr. Chaignon's retreats when in France, when visiting America, when back at home and when he went away for a few days of personal reflection. He meditated with Chaignon on such themes as union with Jesus Christ and priestly ministry¹⁷⁸. These same reflections became so many resources for instructing seminarians and superiors in the sacraments and especially in priestly spirituality¹⁷⁹. More pertinently, Chaignon's imagination-based presentations of scriptural accounts seem to have helped D. Albera put flesh and blood on Gospel teaching. Concretely, they bolstered his respect and devotion for his own patron Saint Paul¹⁸⁰.

1860 à 1870. 4th ed., Paris, V. Retaux 1892, 2 vols. This entry comes at the very beginning of D. Albera's spiritual journal. It may well be that he had been using P. Olivaint's retreat meditations for some time before he began the practice of journaling.

¹⁷⁵ Cf ASC B0320101 (26 Sep 1893); B0320102 (14 Dec 1896); B0320106 (3 May 1902, 25 Jan 1904, 18 Feb, 1 Mar 1905, 14 Jun 1906); B0320108 (25 Jan, 11 Apr 1909). Pierre Chaignon, SJ (1791-1883) was a noted retreat preacher who dedicated himself to the renewal of the clergy. He was ordained to the priesthood on 5 June 1819, and entered the Society of Jesus that same year. In 1839, he opened a retreat residence in Angers, which would continue to be his headquarters until his death. P. Chaignon's most noted works are: *Le prêtre à l'autel* (Angers, Lainé frères 1853), and a collection of his conferences and talks, entitled *Nouveau cours de méditations sacerdotales* (Angers, Lainé frères 1857, 5 vols).

¹⁷⁶ Cf Joseph DE GUIBERT, *The Jesuits, their spiritual doctrine and practice. A historical study*. St. Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources 1964, p. 489.

¹⁷⁷ Cf ASC B0320106 (18, 28 Feb, 1 Mar 1905).

¹⁷⁸ Pierre CHAIGNON, *Nouveau cours de méditationss, ou le prêtre santifié par le pratique de l'oraison*. 11th ed., Angers, H. Briand 1883, 5 vols.; ASC B0320102 (26 Sep 1893, 14 Dec 1896); B0320106 (3 May 1902, 25 Jan 1904, 14 Jun 1906).

¹⁷⁹ Cf B0320108 (25 Jan 1909).

¹⁸⁰ Cf ASC B0320106 (14 Jun 1906); B0320108 (25 Jan, 11 Apr 1909).

7.4. *Northern Exposure*

The restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in Great Britain brought new angles to spiritual thought as the English idiom was used to articulate Catholic experiences. This can be seen in the popular retreats preached by the Bishop of Newport and Menevia, Cuthbert Hedley. Monk and scholar, Dom Hedley drew from years of reflection on classical Catholic sources on the continent, weaving in a common sense, pragmatic approach to prayer as was dear to the British¹⁸¹. Though he was never comfortable speaking in front of a group, this Benedictine scholar was an effective communicator. He was aware of the real world and grounded his presentation of Christianity in the needs and demands of daily life. What inspired his listeners and readers was that he made holiness, if not easy, certainly accessible¹⁸². D. Albera meditated on his conferences at a time when he wanted to explore the meaning of union with the Holy Spirit and the practical workings of charity¹⁸³.

D. Albera was convinced that Salesians suffered from “activism”. He felt that they lacked seriousness and depth in their preparation for ministry. When it came to fulfilling their spiritual duties, Salesians were often makeshift and somewhat off-handed in their approach¹⁸⁴. He firmly believed that the best way to combat vice was by strenuously cultivating virtue, and the yearly retreat was a means of doing just this¹⁸⁵.

Another British author that D. Albera discovered during the opening years of the twentieth century was the slightly younger but equally articulate Bishop James Bellord¹⁸⁶. During his years of priestly ministry in London, Fr. Bellord actively participated in the apostolic outreach of the Catholic

¹⁸¹ John Cuthbert Hedley, OSB (1837-1915), lectured in theology in the monastery of St. Michael's, Hereford, before being ordained auxiliary bishop of Newport in 1873. He became Ordinary of the Diocese of Newport and Menevia on 18 February 1881. Author and editor of the *Dublin Review*, Bishop Hedley brought a scholar's precision to his preaching; his writings influenced many in Britain and America.

¹⁸² Cf J. C. ALMOND, “Preface”, in John Cuthbert HEDLEY, *A spiritual retreat for religious*. 3d ed., London, Burns, Oates & Washbourne 1927, pp. vii-viii; Pierre POURRAT, *Christian spirituality*. Westminster, MD, Newman Press 1955, vol. 4, p. 439.

¹⁸³ Cf John Cuthbert HEDLEY, *The Light of life, set forth with sermons*. London, Burns & Oates 1899, pp. 216-218, 219; ASC B0320106 (10-11 Jun 1905).

¹⁸⁴ Cf ASC B0320107 (11, 20, 27 Aug 1907); ASC B0320109 (6 Sep 1912).

¹⁸⁵ Cf ASC B0480111, pp. 5, 16, 21; B0480115, pp. 18-19; B0480127, p. 26; B0480137, pp. 89, 97, 148.

¹⁸⁶ James Bellord (1846-1905) was a priest for the archdiocese of Westminster who was ordained bishop in 1899 when called to serve as Vicar Apostolic of Gibraltar. He returned to London in July 1901 as Chaplain to “Her Britannic Majesty's [Armed] Forces”, He died in London on 11 June 1905.

Truth Society. He wrote a number of instructive pamphlets, but his principal work was a two-volume series of meditations on the doctrines of the Catholic Church¹⁸⁷.

James Bellord's meditations began as an attempt to translate voluminous *La théologie affective, ou St. Thomas en méditation* by Louis Bail of Abbeville. Bail's meditations first appeared in 1638 and underwent 6 revisions before the author's death in 1669. The work was rediscovered and published in 1845. It went through three further editions by 1857, but by the end of the century the work was out of print and difficult to find. Bail's meditations, according to Bellord, were systematic and practical. They had the virtue of converting the abstract and scientific presentations of Thomas and the Scholastic theologians into prayerful meditations that linked the intellect with the heart. The difficulty, however, lie in their sheer bulk. Each meditation went on for pages, and seemed more like sermons than aids to mental prayer. For this reason, James Bellord decided that rather than translate the work, he would attempt to re-write the "Affective Theology" in a way that would make it useful to English Catholics¹⁸⁸. Evidently they could appeal to others as well, for D. Albera made use of these meditations in his personal preparation for Marian feasts¹⁸⁹.

8. Treatises and Meditations on Consecrated Life

Traditional and contemporary authors helped D. Albera articulate a lifestyle rooted in the evangelical counsels. In the early years, he drew from the Jesuit School and Alphonsus de' Liguori. Later he detailed religious observance as prescribed in monastic and conventual sources.

¹⁸⁷ James BELLORD, *Meditations on Christian Dogma*. London: Catholic Truth Society, 1898, 2 vols.

¹⁸⁸ Cf James BELLORD, *Meditations on christian dogma*. London, Burns, Oates & Washbourne 1930, vol. 1, pp. ix-xii. Bellord maintains Bail's outline of theses and themes, but each meditation is written from scratch. Bail is his principal source. Other sources include treatises by Auguste Nicolas (*La Vierge Marie dans les Evangiles*), Dominic McCausland (notes on creation), Henri-Dominique Lacordaire (his celebrated Notre Dame conferences), Dr. Stroud (an April 1871 review in the *Tablet* on Stroud's *The Physical Cause of the Death of Christ*), Max Nordau (on degeneration), Benjamin Kidd (pioneer studies in social evolution), and Herbert Spencer.

¹⁸⁹ Cf ASC B0320106 (25 Mar 1904); B0320107 (29 Nov 1908).

¹⁹⁰ Cf ASC B0480111, p. 43; B0480112, pp. 30-31, 51, 55; B0480114, p. 42, 54, 70, 77; B0480127, pp. 22-23, 27; B0480139, p. 34; B0480137, pp. 13, 63; B040138, enclosed T, p. 1.

8.1. *Jesuit School*

When explaining religious observance and growth in virtue, D. Albera borrowed many popular stories of Jesuits, including the founder himself, Saint Ignatius Loyola¹⁹⁰, and his successors Diego Laínez¹⁹¹, Francis Borgia¹⁹², Claudio Acquaviva¹⁹³, as well as the great missionary Saint Francis Xavier¹⁹⁴ and John Francis Regis¹⁹⁵. In his talks to novices, mature Salesians and directors, D. Albera frequently mentioned that trio of Jesuit youth, Aloysius Gonzaga, John Berchmans, Stanislaus Kostka, whom he presented as models to imitate and protectors to invoke¹⁹⁶.

Most of what he shared about the Company of Jesus came out of secondary sources, but he did read those classics on religious life that came out of the Jesuit school. Alonso Rodríguez's landmark work, *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues*, was an important source for Paolo Albera in his early conferences on religious life¹⁹⁷.

¹⁹¹ Cf ASC B0480137, p. 4-5.

¹⁹² Cf ASC B0480112, p. 61; B0400113, pp. 17-18; B0480114, p. 14; B0480127, p. 21; and especially B0480115, pp. 27-28.

¹⁹³ Cf B040138, enclosed *T*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁴ Cf ASC B0480111, pp. 43-44; B0480115, pp. 72-73; B0480127, p. 21; B0480137, pp. 148-149.

¹⁹⁵ Cf ASC B0480126, pp. 23-24.

¹⁹⁶ In Jesuit formation literature, these 3 young scholastics had long been offered as examples, if not as norms of holiness. S. Aloysius Gonzaga (1568-1591) personified steadfast renunciation of the world, purity and penance; S. John Berchmans (1599-1621) modeled total fidelity to God's will in obediently fulfilling the duties of daily life; S. Stanislaus Kostka (1550-1568) exemplified boundless generosity in following God's call. Aloysius and Stanislaus had been canonized in 1726, and this had gained them wide veneration outside Jesuit circles. John Berchmans was canonized much later, in 1888, but both John Berchmans and Stanislaus were seen as Marian saints, for both had a very tender devotion to the Virgin Mary (cf DE GUIBERT, *The Jesuits, their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, pp. 250-251). As for D. Albera's use of anecdotes from the lives of these saints to cultivate Salesian spirituality, see his references to S. Aloysius in ASC B0480111, pp. 105, 3:9; B0480115, pp. 18, 35, 55, 93, 95; B0480127, p. 47; B0480139, p. 6; B0480137, pp. 126 (at the beginning of a conference on chastity, D. Albera invokes S. Aloysius Gonzaga as "co-patron of every one of our houses": B0400113, p. 10); for references to S. John Berchmans, see: B0480112, p. 25; B0480115, pp. 18, 36; B0480127, pp. 22-23, 27, 47; B0480139, p. 6; B0480137, p. 126; for references to Stanislaus Kostka, see: B0480111, pp. 13, 105; B0400113, p. 40; B0480127, p. 47.

¹⁹⁷ Alonso Rodríguez, SJ (1537-1616), spent 29 years in formation ministry as novice director and rector of Jesuit scholastics. After his retirement from active ministry at age 68, he collected his notes and published works on spirituality and religious life. These were published in 1609 as *Esercicio de Perfección y Virtudes Cristianas*. A Italian edition was available in the early nineteenth century — Alonso RODRÍGUEZ, *Esercizio di perfezione e virtù cristiane e religiose*. Torino, Giacinto Marietti 1828, 3 vols. — but it is not clear if D. Albera used this version, especially since he transcribed ideas from Rodríguez in French; see: ASC B0480130. Through this study we will pull all references from the first English edition directly translated from the

At the beginning of Advent 1893, D. Albera studied the theme in depth by taking up the four-volume manual on religious life by French Jesuit Jean-Baptiste Saint-Jure¹⁹⁸. The text was *Homme religieux*, and D. Albera noted that he found this work most beautiful¹⁹⁹.

On a visit to Marseilles in February 1895, he looked for a text that would help him to prepare novice Daughters of Mary Help of Christians for profession. He settled on a small collection of meditations by Jesuit Claude Judde²⁰⁰. Fr. Judde was primarily a preacher and retreat master. He related the “eternal maxims” to the daily struggles of his listeners, and was especially vehement in his condemnation of “human respect”. D. Albera liked his *Méditations* for those preparing for religious profession; he found them to be “useful for the soul”²⁰¹.

He promoted the tract *De conditionibus boni superiori*, by the seventeenth-century Lithuanian Jesuit Nikolaj Leczycki. “Lancicius”, as Leczycki was commonly known, had only recently been reintroduced to the Catholic world²⁰². D. Albera cited this work as an important resources for superiors, asserting that it detailed the qualities superiors are required to deepen in their own lives²⁰³.

Another important retreat resource was a 2-volume treatise on religious life, *Traité de l'état religieux*, by Sulpician-trained Jesuit François Xavier Gautrelet²⁰⁴. Fr. Gautrelet's approach was theological, but he also delved into

Spanish: Alonso RODRÍGUEZ, *Practice of perfection and christian virtues*. Newly translated from the original Spanish by Joseph Rickaby, Chicago, Loyola University Press 1929, 3 vols.

¹⁹⁸ Jean-Baptiste Saint-Jure (1588-1657) entered the Jesuits in 1604, was ordained in 1617, and made solemn profession in 1623. He directed schools in Alençon, Amiens, Orléans and Paris at great personal cost, for in each of these sites the Company of Jesus faced hostility from Protestants, government, and even from Catholic prelates. Fr. Saint-Jure also carried on a ministry of preaching, writing and spiritual direction. In 1649, he retired from administrative positions, and dedicated himself to spiritual ministries on a full-time basis.

¹⁹⁹ Cf ASC B0320101 (10 Dec 1893); Jean-Baptiste SAINT-JURE, *L'homme religieux*. New rev. ed., Paris, Régis Ruffet 1867, 4 vols.

²⁰⁰ Claude Judde, SJ (1661-1735), was an expert teacher, formation counselor, and retreat master. His writings are actually transcriptions of his sermons, preserve the literary style of the orator. Little is known of his early ministry; in later years he was much sought after as a spiritual director of religious and laity alike.

²⁰¹ Cf ASC B0320101 (10 Feb 1895); Claude JUDDE, *Méditations pour les trois jours de retraite qui précèdent l'émission et le renouvellement des vœux*. Paris, Vic et Amat 1878.

²⁰² Nikolaj LECZYCKI, *De conditionibus boni superioris*. Torino, Pietro Marietti 1901. Nikolaj Leczycki, SJ (1574-1653), wrote numerous tracts, spreading Jesuit spirituality in Lithuania and Poland as he had learned it in Rome.

²⁰³ Cf ASC B0480137, p. 130.

²⁰⁴ The founder of the “Apostleship of Prayer”, François-Xavier Gautrelet, SJ (1807-1886) had been trained by the Sulpicians before entering the Company of Jesus. He tried his hand at formation ministry, the missions, lay animation, and spiritual direction.

details of canonical regulations governing religious life. Gautrelet's text was a standard resource at the turn of the twentieth century, though many of its juridical details would become obsolete with the promulgation of Canon Law in 1917. D. Albera used Fr. Gautrelet's arguments to explain to directors and provincials what he understood to be the purpose of religious life: correction of one's own faults and advancement in perfection, which he calls the "foundation" upon which all other religious obligations rest²⁰⁵.

8.2. School of Saint Alphonsus

We have already made mention of Saint Alphonsus de' Liguori (1696-1787). This eighteenth-century moral theologian, founder and bishop was one of the most widely-read Catholic authors of the nineteenth century, especially after his canonization in 1839. His moral and pastoral approach had been the foundation of Don Bosco's own formation under the aegis of Don Giuseppe Cafasso²⁰⁶, and was infused a second time when the "spirit of Mornese" became part of the Salesian experience with Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello cooperating in the founding of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians²⁰⁷.

Two major texts by Saint Alphonsus that figured prominently in Don Albera's reading list are *The Dignity and Duties of the Priest*²⁰⁸, and *The True*

²⁰⁵ François Xavier GAUTRELET, *Traité de l'état religieux, ou notions théologiques sur la nature et les obligations de cet état*. New rev. and enl. ed., Paris, Delhomme & Briguet 1900, 2 vols. This work was originally published in 1846, and met with some success and went through a number of editions. The 1900 reprint is a sturdy hard-bound edition on quality paper, with the page edges dyed red; it has all the class of a seminary rector's ready reference. For D. Albera's usage, see: ASC B0480137, pp. 137-138.

²⁰⁶ Cf Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol. 1, pp. 54, 63, 93, 194; vol. 2, pp. 51-52, 398; Jack FINNEGAN, *Prayer in the life and writings of St. John Bosco*. Ph.D. diss., Maynooth, Saint Patrick's College 1983, pp. 94-95.

²⁰⁷ The Mornesine parish priest Domenico Pestarino, SDB, formed the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, forerunners of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, in the spirituality of Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales and Alphonsus de' Liguori. He himself had learned to make this synthesis from his friend colleague in Genoa, the theologian Giuseppe Frassinetti; Mary Mazzarello delved into these spiritualities, making Teresa and Alphonsus two of her favorite authors. For an understanding of the Alphonsan influences in Mornese, see: Maria Esther POSADA, *Giuseppe Frassinetti e Maria D. Mazzarello. Rapporto storico-spirituale*. Roma, LAS 1986, pp. 55, 107-108; ID., *Storia e santità. Influsso del teologo Giuseppe Frassinetti sulla spiritualità di S. Maria Domenica Mazzarello*. Roma, LAS 1992, pp. 41, 100, 110-111, 118. See also: Ferdinando MACCONO, *Santa Maria D. Mazzarello, confondatrice e prima superiora generale delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*. Torino, Scuola tipografica privata FMA 1960, vol. 1, pp. 49-50, 62, 113; Giselda CAPETTI (ed.), *Cronistoria*. Vol. 1: *La preparazione e la fondazione 1828-1872*. Roma, Scuola tipografica privata FMA 1974, p. 124.

²⁰⁸ Alphonsus DE' LIGUORI, *Selva di materie predicabili ed istruttive per dare gli esercizi a' preti ed anche per uso di lezione privata a proprio profitto*, in *Opere Ascetiche di S. Alfonso*

*Spouse of Jesus Christ*²⁰⁹. The first work is a series of “preachable” themes is a printed version of the spiritual exercises for priests. Here Alphonsus’ style resembles an oral presentation. He makes ample reference to the Scriptures, Fathers of the Church, and popular saints and mystics; he then masterfully weaves together every thought for maximum impact. D. Albera copied passages on “zeal” and “humility”²¹⁰ – themes he continually integrated into his own retreats and circulars²¹¹.

The *True Spouse*, on the other hand, is directed to religious women. D. Albera had long known the themes of this book from Don Bosco’s own writing²¹², but it is likely that he took up this book personally when he prepared to preach to the Salesian Sisters. The Liguorian passages he transcribed into his composition books – advantages of the religious life, greatness of the chaste soul, examples of purity, example of saints, small sins that cause the ruin of souls²¹³ – he found applicable to both men and women religious. Saint Alphonsus offered a wealth of material that D. Albera would use in his early retreats²¹⁴. This remained a source of inspiration in the later years²¹⁵.

In December 1907, he embarked on a systematic reading of the works of the Savoird Redemptorist François Bouchage, beginning with *Introduction à la vie sacerdotale*²¹⁶, and continuing with Bouchage’s collection of daily meditations called *Pratique des vertus*.²¹⁷ Fr. Bouchage follows the tradition

Maria de Liguori. Torino, Giacinto Marietti 1880, vol. 3, pp. 5-297.

²⁰⁹ Alphonsus DE’ LIGUORI, *La vera sposa di Gesù Cristo, cioè, la monaca santa per mezzo delle virtù proprie d’una religiosa*, in *Opere Ascetiche di S. Alfonso Maria de Liguori*. Torino, Giacinto Marietti 1880, vol. 4, pp. 5-374.

²¹⁰ Cf DE’ LIGUORI, *Selva*, vol. 3, pp. 63-64, 69, 137-138.

²¹¹ Cf Paolo ALBERA, *Lettere circolari di don Paolo Albera ai salesiani*. Torino, SEI 1922, pp. 11, 19, 26, 28, 56, 81, 87, 111, 166, 183, 184, 187, 206, 207, 214, 226, 227, 228, 229, 240, 241, 255, 257, 281, 284, 286, 298, 300, 318, 347, 363, 370, 372, 375, 377, 379, 380, 388, 427, 428, 468.

²¹² Cf Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol. 1, p. 241.

²¹³ Cf ASC B0480126, pp. 75-76, 82, 83, 95.

²¹⁴ Cf ASC B0480112, pp. 26, 27, 38, 39, 43, 54, 81, 90, 94, 3:51, 81, 4:33, 39, 43, 70; B0480115, pp. 30, 93, 104, 110.

²¹⁵ Cf ASC B0320106 (28 Dec 1903, The times does not seem me long. I read with a great pleasure the life of S. Alphonse de Liguori. What I have to learn in this book! What sufferings for the glory of God! How he worked for the salvation of souls!

²¹⁶ François BOUCHAGE, *Introduction à la vie sacerdotale*. Paris, Delhomme 1897; cf ASC B0320107 (10 Dec 1907). François Bouchage was born in Chambéry on 9 March 1855. He entered the Redemptorists in 1876, and was ordained in 1879. His early writings were historical presentations of religious life. He later moved on to vocational topics, which in turn evolved into ascetical and mystical literature.

²¹⁷ François BOUCHAGE, *Pratique des vertus. Méthode pour travailler à la perfection au moyen d’un exercice de vertu chaque jour*. 2nd rev. ed., Paris, Haton 1894, 3 vols; ASC B0320107 (18, 21 Dec 1907, 9 Jan 1908).

of Saint Alphonsus. He inculcates a practical and intense piety based on the love of God and of Jesus as Redeemer. Like Alphonsus, he recommends prayer and mortification as the means of attaining this love of God – an approach that appeals to D. Albera, who returns to Fr. Bouchage’s meditations over the next few years²¹⁸.

8.3. *Women as Models of Consecrated Commitment*

Perhaps the work on religious life that Paolo Albera studied most during his years as spiritual director was Bishop Charles Gay’s three-volume work of meditations for religious women on “Christian life and virtues” developed in light of religious life²¹⁹. D. Albera appears to have turned to this resource when preparing retreats, but he used it for his own reflection as well. He found Gay’s presentation thorough, even humbling, for the bishop’s rich expression and minute treatment of religious life issues left him wondering whether after years of profession he himself had even taken the first step forward in consecrated life – that of humility²²⁰. On other occasions, he concentrated on the bishop’s exposition of the evangelical counsels, not only in view of future conferences, but to assist D. Rua who was preparing a circular on poverty that year²²¹.

When studying religious life, D. Albera did not take all his counsel from male writers. Saint Catherine of Alexandria and her namesake Catherine of Siena, were also presented as models of faithfulness²²². He liked to quote examples from the teachings of Saint Mary Magdalene de’ Pazzi, though he

²¹⁸ Cf ASC B0320107 (9 Jan 1908); B0320108 (18 Feb 1909).

²¹⁹ Charles Louis GAY, *De la vie et des vertus chrétiennes, considérées dans l’état religieux*. Enrichie d’un Bref de S.S. Pie IX et augmentée de tables analytiques. 11th ed., Paris, H. Oudin 1888, 3 vols. This work, which had met with great success in France, was published in Italian by the Salesians while D. Bosco was still alive: *Della vita e delle virtù cristiane considerate nello stato religioso*. S. Pier d’Arena, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1887, 3 vols. Charles-Louis Gay (1815-1892), auxiliary bishop and vicar general of Poitiers, reintroduced ascetical and mystical literature into the French scene.

²²⁰ Cf ASC B0320101 (19 Aug 1894); B0320107 (11-12 Apr 1908).

²²¹ Cf ASC B0320107 (13 Jan 1907): on poverty; B0320107 (14, 16 Feb, 6, 10 Mar 1907): on chastity; B0320107 (10-20 Jul 1907): on obedience.

²²² Cf B0400113, pp. 28-29. The virgin martyr S. Catherine of Alexandria, whose cult remained popular from Medieval times until the twentieth century, represented the cool logic and limpid faith won many from idolatry to Christianity. S. Catherine (Caterina Benincasa) of Siena (1347-1380) became a deciding force in moving the pope to abandon Avignon to return the papacy to Rome. Her correspondence and mystical writings were influential in the reform of the Church in her days and in later eras. She was declared a Doctor of the Church by Paul VI in 1970.

probably accessed her writings through secondary sources²²³. When the life of Joan of Arc became popular at the turn of the century, he cited the Maid of Orleans' purity and courage in his conferences with the Sisters²²⁴.

One of his preferred authors was Teresa of Jesus²²⁵. He found her autobiography instructive and inspiring to the point that he read it several times, even though he felt called to task by every page he read: "Chaque page est un reproche à ma faiblesse, à ma tiédeur, à mon ignorance"²²⁶. He quoted from her *Camino de perfección* in his conference on obedience²²⁷. He dipped into her *Book of Foundations* when discussing the vocation to the religious state²²⁸, and, at one point, told the novices that he personally cherished her commentary on the "Song of Songs"²²⁹.

Saint Teresa of Avila was more than a good writer: she was one of D. Albera's favorite saints. He called her "the Seraphic Teresa", and the "faithful servant of Christ"²³⁰. He venerated her as his own patron and protector "on the way of perfection"²³¹, and quoted her words and from her liturgy when preaching to Salesian women and men religious²³².

²²³ Cf ASC B0480111, p. 90; B0480112, p. 28; B0480114, p. 14; B0480115, pp. 7, 24, 61, 93, 112; B0480139, p. 18, B0480137, p. 62. S. Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi (1566-1607) was a Florentine Carmelite and a mystic. Her correspondence and spiritual writing placed the primacy on the passion of Jesus as the sublime expression of pure love. In the nineteenth century she was presented as the model of religious consecration.

²²⁴ Cf ASC B0320107 (4 Jul 1908); B0320108 (31 Jan 1909). Renewed French interest for the story, mission and holiness of Joan of Arc (1412-1431) rose in the late 1800s, thanks to the efforts of Félix Dupanloup, Catholic activist and Bishop of Orleans from 1849 to 1878. Popular enthusiasm reached fever pitch when Leo XIII declared her Venerable on 27 January 1894. Pius X beatified her on 18 April 1909, and Benedict XV canonized her on 16 May 1920.

²²⁵ S. Teresa of Jesus (1515-1582), also known as Teresa of Avila, began a reform of Carmel in 1562, integrating her mission and her contemplative vocation. Francis de Sales quoted her in key passages of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* (part 1, c. 4; part 2, c. 17; part 3, c. 11; part 5, c. 11), and Don Bosco proposed her as a model for his Salesian Sisters (Istituto Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice, *Costituzioni e regolamenti*. Roma, Istituto FMA, 1982, §45). Teresa of Jesus was canonized in 1622, and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1970.

²²⁶ ASC B0320101 (15 Oct 1894). It is very possible that D. Albera read S. Teresa's spiritual biography in French; many editions were available in French and Italian in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

²²⁷ Cf ASC B0480114, pp. 38-39.

²²⁸ Cf ASC B0480111, pp. 98-102.

²²⁹ Cf ASC B0480115, pp. 92-93.

²³⁰ Cf ASC B0480111, pp. 47-48.

²³¹ Cf ASC B0320103 (31 Dec 1897); B0320106 (15 Oct 1904); B0320108 (15 Oct 1909).

²³² Cf Retreat instructions to SDB: ASC B0480112, pp. 30, 39, 62, B0400113, pp. 23, 29, B0480114, pp. 43, 71; B0480115, pp. 31-32; B0480127, pp. 21, 27; B0480139, p. 29; for an account of D. Albera's conferences to FMA at St. Teresa's Institute, Chieri, see: B0320105 (12-15 Oct 1899).

D. Albera's continuing practice to look for new sources for his personal spiritual nourishment brought him into contact with another Carmelite woman of growing stature. He read the *Story of a Soul* by the young Thérèse Martin, known by her religious name, Theresa of the Child Jesus. D. Albera was impressed by the "simplicity, candour and sincerity in this girl!" reflecting, "What lesson for me! I have to learn very much from this reading"²³³.

8.4 Monastic and Conventual Traditions that help define the Superior's Role

At the other end of the spectrum, we have many bibliographical indications in the last retreat of D. Albera's years as Spiritual Director General. This was the eight-day retreat that preceded the eleventh general chapter of the Salesian Society in August 1910. D. Albera preached the instructions, thereby fulfilling D. Rua's wish and command. One of the most important topics for those retreat instructions, as far as D. Albera was concerned, was the role of the superior. To develop this theme – one he had approached in earlier retreats for directors – D. Albera drew extensively from monastic and conventual sources, beginning with the maxims of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153).

Saint Bernard's main ministry was to train monks, and most of his writings carry a formative tone. Over the course of the centuries, many authors who wrote about religious life reproduced the saint's sayings. It is not clear that D. Albera had direct access to the works of Saint Bernard, other than short pamphlets or readings from his breviary. He draws repeatedly from *De consideratione*²³⁴. This treatise on pastoral authority took the form of a letter to his former pupil, Pope Eugene III, and along with his 86 sermons on the "Song of Songs"²³⁵, has figured among Bernard's most often-quoted works.

²³³ ASC B0320109 (22 Jan 1911); cf THÉRÈSE DE L'ENFANTE JÉSUS ET DE LA SAINTE FACE, *Histoire d'une Âme, écrite par elle-même*. Lettres & Poésies, Lisieux, Carmel de Lisieux 1910. The volume in question was the spiritual autobiography of Thérèse Martin (1873-1897), who followed her sisters into the Carmelite monastery in Lisieux at age 15. She died at 24. The book, which became an immediate bestseller, revealed her extraordinary personality and depth. Thérèse became the inspiration for many young adults seeking spiritual union with God at the turn of the twentieth century. She was canonized in 1925.

²³⁴ Cf ASC B0480139, pp. 29-30; B0480137, pp. 109, 130.

²³⁵ BERNARD DE CLAIRVAUX, *Sermones super Cantica canticorum*, in *S. Bernardi Opera*. Vol. 1/2: *Sermones super Cantica canticorum*. Critical edition by Jean Leclerc, Charles H. Talbot, and Henri Rochais, Roma, Editiones Cistercienses 1957. We find two explicit references to this work in D. Albera; cf B0480130, enclosed *U*, p. 4; ASC B0320110 (summer 1913): conference outlines.

Even here, however, it is likely that D. Albera gathered the great abbot's words from secondary sources, especially from manuals on religious life²³⁶.

D. Albera dabbled briefly with Dominican sources. For example, in 1896 he studied the Tertiarian handbook's treatment of purity while preparing a retreat for ordinands in Avigliana²³⁷. He shows familiarity with the celebrated preachers and orators such as Frs. Lacordaire²³⁸ and Ravignan²³⁹, and lived in an era that was rediscovering the philosophical and spiritual teachings of Thomas Aquinas²⁴⁰. Even though D. Albera was able to share some Dominican lore with his listeners²⁴¹, he actually spent less time in the Dominican camp than he did among the sons of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Many little anecdotes and edifying "fioretti" wove their way into D. Albera's instructions. The poor man of Assisi was another of his favorite saints²⁴², and he presented the figure of Saint Francis, particularly Francis the founder, to novices and provincials alike²⁴³. His most authoritative and systematic Franciscan source, however, was Saint Bonaventure (1217-1274), whose writings were just beginning to appear in critical editions. These editions, known as the "Quaracchi folios", appeared in print between 1882 and 1902. This event sparked renewed interest in "Seraphic" Doctor's writings

²³⁶ For passages where D. Albera cites quotations or anecdotes from the life and works of S. Bernard in his retreats, see: ASC B0480111, pp. 57, 70, 86, 91, 95; B0480112, pp. 54, 58, 81; B0480114, pp. 15, 30; B0480115, p. 79; B0480127, p. 14; B0480139, pp. 14, 29-30, 34; B0480137, pp. 5, 24, 46, 49, 57, 63, 65; B0480137, p. 130; B0480138, p. 17; B0480130, enclosed R, p. 3; B0480130, enclosed U, pp. 3-4.

²³⁷ Cf ASC B0320102 (1 Mar 1896).

²³⁸ Henri-Dominique Lacordaire (1802-1861) was responsible for the refoundation of the Dominican Order in France after they had been suppressed by the Revolution. His masterful Advent and Lenten conferences at the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris brought many of France's urban population back to the Catholic faith. Cf ASC B0480115, p. 17; B0480137, p. 117.

²³⁹ Gustave-Xavier Lacroix de Ravignan, SJ (1795-1858), shared the "chair" of Notre-Dame with Fr. Lacordaire, with whom he alternated (one taking Advent, the other Lent) until 1846. His first Easter Retreat, preached in 1841, became a paradigm of general missions and retreats for the next half-century. Cf ASC B0480127, p. 27; B0480137, p. 117.

²⁴⁰ Pope Leo XIII relaunched the study of Thomistic thought with the publication of his 1879 encyclical "on the restoration of Christian philosophy" [see: LEO XIII, *Aeterni Patris*. *Epistola Encyclica de philosophia christiana ad mentem S. Thomae Aquinatae in scholis catholicis instauranda* (9 August 1879), in "Acta Sanctae Sedis" 12 (1879) 97-115. Among D. Albera's authors, those who drew most deeply from S. Thomas (1225-1274) included Jesuits Jean-Baptiste Saint-Jure and François Xavier Gautrelet, Sulpician Charles Sauvé, Canon Léopold Beaudenom, Bishop James Bellord, and Belgian's Cardinal Desiré-Joseph Mercier.

²⁴¹ Cf ASC B0480115, pp. 26-27; B0480112, p. 61; B0480137, pp. 36-37.

²⁴² D. Albera loved Francis of Assisi for his deep devotion to Christ (cf B0320101 [4 Oct 1894]), and set him up as a model whom he personally tried to imitate (cf ASC B0320105 [4 Oct 1899]).

²⁴³ Cf ASC B0480111, p. 58; B0480112, pp. 60-61, 62, 85-86, 90, 122; B0400113, p. 45; B0480114, p. 71; B0480115, pp. 25, 34; B0480137, pp. 24, 38, 46; B0480138, p. 5.

during the same period that Paolo Albera's duties as Spiritual Director put him on the look-out for formation resources.

One of Bonaventure's popular writings among religious superiors was the short booklet: *De sex alis seraphim*²⁴⁴. It is precisely this work that D. Albera quotes when preaching the retreat to provincials and delegates in the days the eleventh general chapter of the Salesian Society. We find ten explicit references to *De sex alis seraphim* in D. Albera's conference notes, and much of the content in the mid-week instructions mirrors Saint Bonaventure's advice to superiors²⁴⁵. Furthermore, as retreat preacher, D. Albera urged Salesian superiors to put Bonaventure's book on their own "must read" list²⁴⁶.

Another book from the Bonaventure corpus was *Speculum disciplinae*. Until the end of the nineteenth century this work was ascribed to the Seraphic Doctor. The editors of the Quaracchi folios, however, determined that this was actually written by the saint's secretary, Bernard de Besse²⁴⁷. The purpose of this treatise was to teach with "precision, firmness and sweetness" the way a novice must behave in order to learn to form good habits, both interiorly and exteriorly. He does not encourage beginners to engage in mystical prayer, but offers them a step-by-step approach to spirituality with plenty of concrete advice.

Though *Speculum disciplinae* was written for specifically Franciscan novices, it quickly proved "useful to all who have embarked on the path of perfection". It appears to have created a popular following in formation circles²⁴⁸ and among "other spiritual persons desirous of learning perfect religious practice"²⁴⁹. When the Quaracchi folios appeared, the editors, Frs. Fedele di Fanna and Ignatius Jeiler, published the *Speculum disciplinae* among the "doubtful writings" in the final section of the collection²⁵⁰. Yet, by popular demand it was included in a "hand size" edition of Bonaventure's Franciscan works published later that same year. That edition was specially

²⁴⁴ S. BONAVENTURE, *De sex alis seraphim*. Quaracchi, Typ. Collegii S. Bonaventurae 1902.

²⁴⁵ Cf ASC B0480137, pp. 128, 130, 131; B0480138, pp. 2, 3, 4, 13, 26, 45; B0480138, enclosed S, p. 2. D. Albera had also cited S. Bonaventure in an earlier retreat for directors; see, e.g.: B0480139, pp. 7, 10, 26-27, 45, 46; B0480137, pp. 4, 17.

²⁴⁶ Cf ASC B0480137, p. 130.

²⁴⁷ Friar Bernard de Besse was born in Aquitaine and served many years as secretary and traveling companion to S. Bonaventure. He spent his later years as guardian of the Franciscan friary in Cahors. It was there that he died sometime between 1300 and 1304.

²⁴⁸ Cf JEAN DE DIEU, *Bernard de Besse*, in *Dictionnaire de spiritualite ascetique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*. Vol. 1, Paris, G. Beauchesne 1937, cols. 1504-1505.

²⁴⁹ Thus the subtitle of an early Italian version; see: S. BONAVENTURE, *Specchio di disciplina del serafico dottore S. Bonaventura per l'amaestramento de nouitij, e d'ogni altra persona spirituale che desidera imparare perfetti costumi religiosi*. Roma, Mascardi ad istanza di F. Giuliani al Griffio 1638 (frontispiece).

designed for formation communities. In the prologue, the editors explain that, though it was clear that the “Mirror of Discipline” was not written by Bonaventure, so many readers were asking for copies in a workable format, and tradition had long associated it with the Seraphic Doctor, it seemed opportune to include it in a book destined for daily rather than scholarly use in houses of formation²⁵¹. It is possible that D. Albera made use of this edition when citing Latin dictums from the *Speculum disciplinae* during his instructions to directors²⁵².

9. Treatises and Conferences on Priesthood

Records show that D. Albera continued to preach retreats, reflection days and prepared conferences to seminarians and ordinands throughout his years as Spiritual Director General. The topic of priesthood thus remained central to his preaching ministry. At the same time, D. Albera found shifts in his own ministry that made it imperative that he continue to reflect on priestly ministry as part of his own vocational journey. D. Albera made his meditation from books designed for clergy; he studied guidelines for confessors as well as manuals for seminarians throughout these years.

9.1. Priestly Renewal

In 1893 and again in 1895, D. Albera dedicated several months to reading the retreat meditations and instructions for priests preached by

²⁵⁰ [BERNARD DE BESSE], *Speculum Disciplinae*, in *Opera omnia Sancti Bonaventurae*. Edita studio et cura a PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad plurimos condices mss. emendata. Anecdota aucta prolegomenis scholiis notisque illustrata, Quaracchi, Typ. Coll. S. Bonaventurae 1898, vol. 8, p. 583-622.

²⁵¹ Fedele DI FANNA, and Ignatius JEILER, *Prefatio*, in *Selecta pro instruendis fratribus ord. min. scripta S. Bonaventurae una cum libello Speculum disciplinae*. edita a PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, Quaracchi, Typ. Collegii S. Bonaventurae 1898, pp. v-vi. *Speculum Disciplinae* is found on pp. 285-418.

²⁵² Cf ASC B0480139, pp. 45-46; BERNARD DE BESSE, *Speculum Disciplinae*, in *Selecta pro instruendis fratribus ord. min. scripta S. Bonaventurae*, p. 312. The OFM published an Italian version alongside the Latin text. This helped renew the tract's popularity, including among Salesians. One of D. Albera's closest associates, D. Giulio Barberis quoted abundantly from *Speculum Disciplinae* in his handbook for novices. Cf *Specchio della disciplina. Istruzione e regola de' novizi, di S. Bonaventura*. Quaracchi, Tip. del Collegio di S. Bonaventura 1898; Giulio BARBERIS, *Il vade mecum dei giovani salesiani. Ammaestramenti consigli ed esempi esposti agli ascritti ed agli studenti della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. 2nd ed., S. Benigno Canavese, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana 1906, vol. 2, pp. 411-422, 431-436.

Turin's own Giuseppe Cafasso²⁵³. These conferences, dictated in the 1850s, were first published in 1892 and 1893. In the sense that his preaching had just been published, this was fresh material when D. Albera picked up his retreats²⁵⁴. Reading these sources would have given D. Albera a sense of connection with his Salesian origins, for he was aware of Don Bosco's own attachment to D. Cafasso, his director and mentor²⁵⁵. The saintly moralist would also have put D. Albera in contact with the most significant currents of apostolic spirituality in Catholic Turin, for besides Don Bosco, other great members of Turinese clergy received their formation at the hands of D. Cafasso – figures such as Canons Luigi Nasi, Giovanni Battista Giordano, Bishop Giovanni Bertagna (1828-1905), and the “theologian” Leonardo Murialdo (1828-1900). D. Cafasso's legacy was continued by his nephew and editor, Canon Giuseppe Allamano (1851-1926), whom D. Albera knew and admired. Thus, D. Cafasso's texts held special, personal significance for D. Albera, as a priest of Turin and a son of Don Bosco, and D. Cafasso's world view would certainly impact or confirm D. Albera's own understanding.

D. Cafasso's retreat meditations followed the Ignatian categories of the Last Things and the call to conversion, in the tradition of the classic retreat masters. These themes took on added weight when addressed to priests, however. D. Albera modeled some of his own talks on D. Cafasso's instructions, as when in 1909 he spoke to Salesians ordinands about “delicacy of con-

²⁵³ S. Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860), a native of Castelnuovo d'Asti, was Turin's great spiritual guide and formator of the clergy. In spite of a very fragile constitution, D. Cafasso was noted as a hard worker and a cheerful, approachable person from his youth. He was among the first to attend the regional seminary in Chieri. He was ordained in 1833, after which he entered Turin's Convitto Ecclesiastico, located at the church of S. Francesco d'Assisi. At the end of his two year pastoral course, the rector and founder of the Convitto Ecclesiastico, Theologian Luigi Guala, invited him to join the staff. He began as an assistant lecturer, and soon took over the classes in moral theology. He eventually succeeded D. Guala as rector. A dedicated instructor, fervent preacher, able confessor and guide, D. Cafasso became mentor and friend of Turin's young clergy and an advocate on behalf of Piedmont's poor and imprisoned. Pius XI, who beatified D. Cafasso in 1925, called him the “pearl of the Italian clergy”, Pope Pius XII canonized him on 22 June 1947.

²⁵⁴ Giuseppe CAFASSO, *Meditazioni per esercizi spirituali al clero*. Torino, Canonica 1892, 2 vols.; ID., *Istruzioni per esercizi spirituali al clero*. Torino, Canonica 1893; cf ASC B0320101 (15, 17 Jul 1893, 18 Oct, 8 Dec 1895).

²⁵⁵ D. Bosco always acknowledged that D. Cafasso guided him spiritually and professionally from before he entered the seminary, right through the first two decades of his priesthood; cf Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. Introduzione, note ed edizione critica di Antonio Da Silva Ferreira, Roma, LAS 1991, pp. 105, 108, 109, 119, 127-128; Giovanni BOSCO, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri*. Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia 1860, pp. 3, 6-7.

science", and asked his retreatants to read D. Cafasso's book for themselves²⁵⁶. In reading Giuseppe Cafasso's biography, D. Albera was struck by "his piety, his spirit of prayer", and exclaimed, "What example!"²⁵⁷.

Biographies of noted 19th-century priests developed the same lines of apostolic spirituality as the more serious meditations that were becoming increasingly available, but took a popular and practical approach. Judging from comments in his journal, D. Albera found certain priestly biographies refreshing. He strove to imitate the pastoral zeal of Bruno Lanteri²⁵⁸. He admired the florid style in which Cardinal Alfonso Capececlatro wrote the life of Franciscan Lodovico da Casoria, a contemporary and acquaintance of Don Bosco, but he was even more impressed by the holy friar's virtues²⁵⁹. He relished the biography of the Curé of Ars²⁶⁰ as recounted by Turin's Archbishop

²⁵⁶ Cf ASC B0480137, p. 132; G. CAFASSO, *Istruzioni*, pp. 107-127.

²⁵⁷ ASC B0320109 (5 Sep 1912). D. Albera does not identify the biography he was reading, but the earliest biography of S. Cafasso had long been part of the Salesian collection in Valdocco and had been one of D. Lemoyne's sources when compiling MB [cf MB 2:191]. This may well have been D. Albera's choice for his reading in 1912: cf Giacomo COLOMBERO, *Vita del Servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso, con cenni storici sul Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*. Torino, Canonica 1895.

²⁵⁸ Cf ASC B0320106 (12 Apr 1905). Servant of God Pio Brunone Lanteri (1759-1830) had been active in formation of laity and clergy through the movement known as the "Amicizie Cattoliche" during the years of the French imperial occupation of northern Italy. He founded the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, and was instrumental in establishing the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin where Saints Joseph Cafasso, John Bosco, Leonard Murialdo and many other zealous Turinese priests received their pastoral training.

²⁵⁹ Alfonso CAPECECLATRO, *La vita del p. Lodovico da Casoria*, in *Opere di Alfonso Capececlatro, Arcivescovo di Capua e Cardinale di S.ta Chiesa*. Vol. 16, Roma, Desclée-Lefebvre 1893, 772 pp.; cf ASC B0320105 (29 Oct 1899). Alfonso Capececlatro (1824-1912) was a priest of the Oratory in Naples, whose leadership made the Oratory a center of spirituality and scholarship. Fr. Capececlatro was a popular preacher and a prolific writer. He published numerous literary, exegetical, historical, apologetical and biographical works. Pope Leo XIII appointed him archbishop of Capua in 1880, and elevated him to the college of cardinals in 1886. The subject of this biography, Naples' beloved Fra Lodovico, was born in Casoria (province of Naples) Arcangelo Palmentieri (1811-1885) entered the Franciscans in 1832, and it was then that he received the name Lodovico. He worked with the destitute and, attracting help from many fervent people, mobilized Third Order Franciscans into apostolic action groups. He founded two religious communities: the Franciscan Brothers of Charity and the Franciscan Sisters of St. Elizabeth. He corresponded with D. Bosco before and after the two met in 1880. Lodovico of Casoria was beatified by John Paul II on 18 April 1993.

²⁶⁰ Cf ASC B0320106 (17 Mar 1905). D. Albera bibliographic indications here are meager. He cites Alfred MONNIN, *Esprit du curé d'Ars M. Vianney dans ses catéchismes, ses homélies et sa conversation*. 8th ed., Paris, Ch. Douniol et C.e 1875. Jean-Marie Vianney (1786-1859) became curate of Ars in 1818. A man of utter simplicity, Fr. Jean Vianney was especially effective as a confessor and spiritual guide. His personal holiness and pastoral zeal won many people back to Catholic practice. He was canonized by Pius XI in 1925.

Lorenzo Gastaldi²⁶¹, and transcribed some striking images from the writings of the English Cardinal Henry Edward Manning²⁶², particularly from the prelate's best known work, *Eternal Priesthood*, which he read in translation²⁶³.

From Canon Henri Dubois of Coutances, D. Albera outlines key concepts regarding priestly zeal²⁶⁴. And who better than a venerable Sulpician in the guise of Louis Branchereau to tap for meditations on priestly spirituality and discipleship? D. Albera makes no comment on Fr. Branchereau's books, but it seems that he returned to these volumes quite often during the mid-1890s²⁶⁵.

Another Sulpician that captured D. Albera's attention was André Hamon, often called "the curate of St. Sulpice"²⁶⁶. Abbé Hamon offered meditation material that concentrated on spiritual life from the perspective of priesthood and religious life, and D. Albera was so impressed by the Sulpi-

²⁶¹ Cf ASC B0480126, pp. 5-11. See: Lorenzo GASTALDI, *Cenni storici sulla vita del sacerdote Giovanni Maria Vianney, parroco d'Ars*. Torino, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. de Sales 1863, 192 pp. Lorenzo Gastaldi (1815-1883) had been a close friend of D. Bosco before becoming Archbishop of Turin in 1871. Disagreement over ecclesiological principles and matters of jurisdiction brought about a painful estrangement. See: Arthur LENTI, *Don Bosco, His Pope and His Bishop: The Trials of a Founder*. Roma, LAS 2006, pp. 115-117, 118-122, 125-147, 149-237; ID., *Don Bosco History and Spirit*; volume 6: *Expansion of the Salesian Work in the New World and Ecclesiological Confrontation at Home*. Edited by Aldo Giraud. Roma, LAS 2009, pp. 276-374.

²⁶² Henry Edward Cardinal Manning (1808-1892) was educated at Harrow and Baliol College, Oxford, and ordained in the Anglican Church. He entered the Roman Church in 1851, and was ordained to the priesthood shortly afterwards. In 1865, Pius IX appointed him archbishop of Westminster.

²⁶³ Cf ASC B0480126, pp. 1-2. See: Henry Edward MANNING, *L'eterno sacerdozio*. Roma, F. Pustet 1884.

²⁶⁴ Henri-Marie DUBOIS, *Pratica dello zelo ecclesiastico, ossia mezzi per rendere il ministero sacerdotale onorevole e fruttuos*. Torino, G. Marietti 1864; cf ASC B0480126, p. 23. Henri-Marie Dubois (1801-1859) served as a missionary, then as a parish priest, and eventually became superior of the major seminary in Coutances.

²⁶⁵ Louis BRANCHEREAU, *Méditations à l'usage des élèves des grands séminaires et des prêtres*. Paris, Vic & Amat 1891, 3 vols.; cf ASC B0320101 (4 Jan 1895). Fr. Louis Branchereau (1819-1913), Sulpician, taught philosophy at seminary in Clérmont before directing seminaries in Nantes and Orléans. He brought his scholarship and experience to his ministry of formation of French clergy. He was often called to preach retreats and recollection days for priests and seminarians; the meditations he prepared for these occasions were collected for publication.

²⁶⁶ André-Jean-Marie Hamon, SS (1795-1874) became parish priest at St. Sulpice in Paris in 1851, after 31 years as professor of systematic and moral theology. His pastoral zeal and love for the poor became a byword throughout Paris, and he drew from his theological background to offer adult classes for laity and clergy alike. "The curate of St. Sulpice" refused several nominations to the episcopacy. Instead, he expanded his parish outreach by preaching retreats and through numerous publications in spirituality for clergy, religious and laity. Abbé Hamon died in Paris at the age of 79.

cian's meditations that he recommended them as a text for common meditation to all the Salesian directors in a circular letter written for January 1899²⁶⁷. Meanwhile, he himself took to reading Canon Planus, a diocesan priest from Paris whose retreats for priests were just being published during the 1890s. These provided D. Albera with a mine of ideas for his own ministry to priests and young confreres in formation throughout the coming decade²⁶⁸.

9.2. Priestly Mission

D. Albera pursued the topic of apostolic spirituality through a prolonged study of Cardinal James Gibbons' book on the priesthood entitled *Ambassador of Christ*. This was a best seller in America and across the English-speaking Catholic world. D. Albera first refers to this text in 1905, and returns to it in subsequent years when preparing retreats for priests and major seminarians²⁶⁹. Among the many topics he explored, he stressed the following as essential considerations for priests: the marks of a divine vocation, truth and sincerity of character, self-respect and human respect, hindrances to charity, the spirit of poverty, sacerdotal chastity, humility, learning and a studious life, persevering labor, the key to knowledge, sources of discouragement in the pursuit of knowledge, study of Holy Scripture and Patristics, the preparation of sermons and extemporaneous preaching²⁷⁰.

While preparing conferences on the priesthood for ordinands and directors alike, D. Albera often turned to published series of retreats for priests and seminarians. He found the conferences of the Canadian preacher René Gendron useful for educators²⁷¹, and drew from Canon Léopold Beaudenom's

²⁶⁷ Cf ASC B0320105 (14 Jan 1899); B0320106 (26 Dec 1903, 23 Jan 1905); see also: ASC B0330310, *Dalle circolari mensili*, outline notes by Domenico Garneri, ms aut., p. 2.

²⁶⁸ Louis Planus published a trilogy of meditations on the priesthood that included 2 complete retreats and 1 volume of conferences called: Louis PLANUS, *Le prêtre*. Paris, C. Poussielgue 1898-1899, which became one of D. Albera's staples when preparing conferences for ordinands; cf ASC B0320105 (4, 8, 21 Jan, 15 Dec 1899); B0320106 (24 Apr, 12 May 1905); B0320107 (20 Jun 1908); B0320108 (27 Feb, 2, 12, 18, 25 Mar, 31 Aug 1909). See also topical notes in ASC B0480134 and B0480135.

²⁶⁹ ASC B0320108 (1909).

²⁷⁰ Cf James GIBBONS, *The ambassador of Christ*. Baltimore, John Murphy Company 1896; ASC B0320106, 12 May 1905; B0480137, pp. 93-94.

²⁷¹ René GENDRON, *Retraites de séminaires*, in *Œuvres oratoires de M. l'abbé Gendron*. Edited by Joseph Turmel, Paris, G. Beauchesne 1906; ASC B0320106 (5, 22 Dec 1906). Abbé René Gendron, a Canadian preacher and ascetical writer, was active at the end of the nineteenth century.

manual for confessors as a way of grounding his instructions to ordinands' in the practical demands of ministry²⁷². For D. Albera, however, the minister himself must grow in holiness, and he found Beaudenom's *Dalla tiepidezza al fervore* helpful for his meditation as well as instructive for others²⁷³.

Another retreat master that D. Albera studied for ideas on the priesthood was Jean-Baptiste Caussette²⁷⁴. Fr. Caussette composed a two volume directory for priests, *Manrèze du prêtre*²⁷⁵, which presented the figure of the priest as a key player in the revitalization of the world. Renewal, wrote Fr. Caussette, begins with the Church but must extend to civil society. It is social, political, and spiritual. For the believer and especially for the zealous priest, social virtues are the flower, the apex of charity²⁷⁶.

While preparing for the ordinands' retreats of 1897 and 1909, D. Albera picked up a book by Jean-Baptiste Berthier²⁷⁷ "on the priesthood"²⁷⁸. This volume, like several of Fr. Berthier's other books, is a collection of stories designed for use by those who would preach missions, catechetical instructions, sermons on the sacraments, Church doctrine, and similar topics²⁷⁹. In *Le sacerdoce*, Fr. Berthier covers the main themes of priesthood through a series of anecdotes, stories and examples. By and large, his examples came from the lives of the saints, from the writings of the masters of the French

²⁷² [Léopold BEAUDENOM], *Pratica progressiva della confessione e della direzione spirituale secondo il metodo di S. Ignazio di Loyola e lo spirito di S. Francesco di Sales*. 2d ed., Parigi, P. Lethelleux 1899, 2 vols.; cf ASC B0320108 (3 Jun 1909). Educator and "director of souls", Canon Léopold Beaudenom (1840-1916) was not an original theologian, but one who attempted to make the rich spiritual tradition of the Church accessible to the faithful, both lay and religious.

²⁷³ Cf ASC B0320108 (8, 13, 28 Feb, 6 Apr, 14 Jul 1909); [BEAUDENOM], *Pratica progressiva della confessione e della direzione spirituale*. Vol. 1: *Dalla tiepidezza al fervore*. 2d ed., Parigi, P. Lethelleux, 1899.

²⁷⁴ Ultramontane in his ecclesiology, Père Jean-Baptiste Caussette (1819-1880) was one of the most eloquent preachers of mid-19-century France. He was a priest of the Society of the Holy Cross, and later served as vicar general of the archdiocese of Toulouse.

²⁷⁵ Jean-Baptiste CAUSSETTE, *Manrèze du prêtre*. 5th ed., Paris, Libraire Victor Palmé 1890, 2 vols. We find numerous references in D. Albera's notes: cf ASC B0480134, address-book entries "B, C, P, M, S",

²⁷⁶ Cf J-B. CAUSSETTE, *Manrèze du Prêtre*, vol. 2, pp. 460-461; ASC B0480134, address-book entries "S",

²⁷⁷ Jean-Baptiste Berthier (1840-1908) was a popular preacher and writer. He founded the Missionaries of the Holy Family, a congregation whose purpose is to promote missionary vocations.

²⁷⁸ Jean-Baptiste BERTHIER, *La sacerdoce, son excellence, ses obligations, ses droits, ses privilèges*. Paris, Delhomme et Briguët 1898.

²⁷⁹ See, e.g., Jean-Baptiste BERTHIER, *Paroles et traits historiques les plus remarquables*. New, enl. ed., Paris, Haton 1898; ID., *Le prêtre dans le ministère de la prédication, ou directeur du prédicateur en chaire et au saint tribunal et recueil de sermons*. Paris, Haton 1900.

School²⁸⁰, and from French history. He wrote for popular consumption and made no attempt to identify his sources. Still, he aimed to offer a “seriously useful” instrument to preachers and seminarians alike²⁸¹.

Throughout his tenure, D. Albera remained concerned about the formation of candidates for the priesthood. He looked for material that would help him to highlight the spiritual and human values appropriate to those in ministry. The writings of French seminary rector Auguste Texier fit into this category. Fr. Texier²⁸² published collected essays that imitated evening conferences that he once was in the habit of giving to the minor seminarians of Mortmorillon. This is the literary device he uses, for he really directs his colloquial but systematic essays to major seminarians. D. Albera found his first book, *La piété chez les jeunes*, quite useful for Salesian clerics in philosophy²⁸³. He was so enthusiastic, as a matter of fact, that he invested in Fr. Texier's second book, *La charité chez les jeunes*. He described this volume as “very good”, and exclaimed, “What I learn in this reading!”²⁸⁴.

His interest in providing a solid groundwork for young Salesians in formation prompted him to study Cardinal Desiré Mercier's conferences to the seminarians of the archdiocese of Malines, collected in a volume entitled simply *À mes séminaristes*²⁸⁵.

An important pontifical document issued August 1908 influenced D. Albera's reflection. To mark his Golden Anniversary of priestly ordination, Pope

²⁸⁰ The “French School” refers to a group of spiritual masters active in France during the seventeenth century. The personality that gave rise to this movement was Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629); his main concern was the sanctification of priest through a Christocentric and incarnational asceticism. For a description of the movement and a sample of the most influential writings by its leading figures, see: William M. THOMPSON, *An introduction to the French School*, in *Bérulle and the French School. Selected writings*. Mahwah, Paulist Press 1989, 3-101.

²⁸¹ Cf J-B. BERTHIER, *La sacerdoce*, p. 847.

²⁸² Auguste Texier was a priest of the diocese of Poitiers. He taught in the minor and major seminaries of his diocese in the beginning of the twentieth century.

²⁸³ Auguste TEXIER, *La piété chez les jeunes. Conférences*. Paris, P. Téqui 1904; cf ASC B0320107 (7 Aug 1907).

²⁸⁴ Auguste TEXIER, *La charité chez les jeunes*. Paris, P. Téqui 1907; cf ASC B0320109 (13 Feb, 8 Mar 1910).

²⁸⁵ Desiré-Joseph MERCIER, *A mes séminaristes*. Bruxelles, Albert Dewit 1908; cf ASC B0320107 (25 Apr 1908). Desiré Mercier (1851-1926) was a priest of the diocese of Malines and professor of philosophy at the University of Louvain. An articulate scholar, he was one of the first to implement Pope Leo XIII's call to revive Thomistic philosophy. Pius X named him archbishop of Malines and primate of Belgium in 1906, and gave him the red hat on 15 April 1907. During World War I he remained an outspoken critic of the German occupation and championed Belgium independence. After the war, Cardinal Mercier worked for Christian Unity.

Pius X addressed a letter, *Haerent animo*, to diocesan and religious priests throughout the world²⁸⁶. D. Rua sent copies of this apostolic exhortation to every Salesian priest²⁸⁷. With a sense of duty and commitment, D. Albera prayerfully read the document and drew material from it for the ordinands' retreat that he preached the following summer²⁸⁸.

9.3. *Practical Resources: Mixing Work and Research*

Practical responsibilities dictated Paolo Albera's choice in pastoral reading. For instance, in May 1910, he was asked to preview a book of retreat instructions for clergy by the Salesian priest Albino Carmagnola²⁸⁹. He began to read the galley proofs on 18 May 1910, and allowed the "nihil obstat" on 20 May 1910²⁹⁰. During this same period of time, D. Carmagnola had come to Valdocco to preach the novena for the feast of Mary Help of Christians in the church of Maria Ausiliatrice at Valdocco. D. Albera was impressed by D. Carmagnola's preaching and by his book. As his journal entries indicate, D. Albera transformed his reviewer's task into a spiritual exercise. He described this book, not in academic terms, but as something he found helpful for his own spiritual life. "I continue to read the book of D. Carmagnola with enthusiasm. It is very useful for me", he wrote, and concluded: "I hope that it will be read by numerous priests who desire to do some good to the souls"²⁹¹.

10. Biblical Resources

As the years went by, D. Albera made greater use of the Bible for his own spiritual and apostolic reflection. He noted significant scriptural passages in his spiritual journal and drew Scripture into his conferences and instructions. References in his journal occur at a moderate ratio during the 1890s, but nearly double during the next decade²⁹².

²⁸⁶ PIUS X, *Haerent Animo*, in "Acta Sanctae Sedis" 41 (1908) 9, 555-577.

²⁸⁷ RUA, *Lettere Circolari*, p. 406.

²⁸⁸ Cf ASC B0320108 (24 Jan, 28 Jul 1909).

²⁸⁹ Albino Carmagnola, SDB (1860-1927) was a gifted preacher; he traveled throughout Italy conducting retreats and missions. Most of his published works reproduce his sermons and conferences.

²⁹⁰ Cf Albino CARMAGNOLA, *Istruzioni per gli esercizi spirituali al clero secondo la mente di Pio X*. Torino, SAID "Buona Stampa" 1910, p. 327.

²⁹¹ ASC B0320109 (19 May 1910); cf entries for 16, 18 May 1910.

²⁹² D. Albera cited the Scriptures 24 times in journal entries between 1893 and 1899, 40 times between 1904 and 1910.

We know from his spiritual journal that D. Albera had made a personal resolution to read the Scriptures daily. He wrote this resolution after reading Cardinal Gibbons: "I read with relish the *Ambassador of Christ*. I learn always better that I have not the zeal which becomes to the priest. I promise to read every day some pages of the Holy Scriptures"²⁹³.

D. Albera demonstrated a rich knowledge of Scripture before this period, it is true²⁹⁴, but his 1905 reflections point to the Scripture as a school for zeal, a training ground for priestly spirituality, a guide to developing an ascetic lifestyle²⁹⁵. No doubt he found Cardinal Gibbons' arguments persuasive:

The Bible is the only book of study that is absolutely indispensable to a priest, and hence it is appropriately called by St. Ambrose, "*Liber sacerdotalis*". He might be familiar with the whole range of ancient and modern literature, and yet his sermons would be lamentably cold and defective, if he happened to be ill-instructed in the Sacred Volume. On the other hand, if he is well versed in the Holy Scriptures, though a comparative stranger to human science, he will preach with edification and profit. The clergyman that draws his inspiration from the Sacred Text, is easily recognized by the sweet unction that flows from his lips²⁹⁶.

Reading the Sacred Scriptures was a concrete way of imitating Christ, Cardinal Gibbons went on to affirm: "The Bible is the only book that our Saviour is known ever to have read or quoted in the whole course of his public ministry. He makes no allusion whatever to the classic literature of Athens or Rome that flourished in His day"²⁹⁷. Thus, Gibbons made Jesus' own example the most persuasive element in his argument that priests be conversant with Scripture if they are to be effective ministers.

Reference to the example of "our Saviour" would be particularly striking to D. Albera, a disciple of *De imitatione Christi*, and schooled by Don Bosco, who presented Jesus not only as Redeemer and Savior, but also as Divine Teacher and Exemplar. Don Bosco had formed young people to recognize how Jesus not only spoke about, but *modeled* salvation in his own behavior. This active Christ was the model for Don Bosco's Salesians, and it seems that Paolo Albera made this approach his own²⁹⁸.

²⁹³ ASC B0320106 (12 May 1905).

²⁹⁴ Already in the 1890s, D. Albera would take the Bible in hand for his meditation or for personal spiritual reading; cf ASC B0320102 (25 Sep, 25, 29 1896); B0320103 (5 Dec 1897).

²⁹⁵ Cf ASC B0320107 (20 Jun 1907).

²⁹⁶ James GIBBONS, *The ambassador of Christ*. Baltimore, John Murphy Company 1896, pp. 226-227.

²⁹⁷ J. GIBBONS, *The ambassador of Christ*, p. 230.

²⁹⁸ For an historical presentation of D. Bosco's understanding of Jesus as "Model", see: Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol. 2: *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*. Roma, LAS 1981, pp. 110-113.

There was yet another reason for D. Albera to value a personal study of the Scriptures. Prayer allows the creature to lift mind and heart to God, but the Sacred Scriptures show us a God who opens his heart and mind to his creatures. This concept was expressed by Fr. Jean-Baptiste Caussette in a passage that D. Albera transcribed into his own notes:

Before everything else, a spirit that has devoured the book of Sacred Scripture will never go without good pasture. Yesterday I encouraged you to pray, and prayer is our speaking to God. In the Scripture, it is God who speaks to us. Now, nothing is more worthy of veneration, says a certain Father of the Church, than an intellect that through the assiduous reading of the two Testaments is transformed into a library of Christ: “The heart of whoever reads assiduously becomes a library of Christ”. When I see a priest who nourishes himself on God through the Gospels, and feeds on God in the Eucharist, divinized in his spirit, divinized in his soul, I venerate in him the ideal of intellectual greatness in the context of moral greatness²⁹⁹.

The effects of early Catholic biblical scholarship had made an impact on Paolo Albera’s retreat ministry. While he prepared his 1910 retreat, he seriously consulted the writings of his contemporary, Louis Claude Fillion, a French Scripture scholar and consultant of the Pontifical Biblical Commission³⁰⁰. D. Albera used Fr. Fillion’s commentary on the Gospel of Matthew to penetrate the deeper meaning of certain Scripture passages. One example is that he turned to Fillion as a resource when explaining how Christians must “learn of Jesus, meek and humble of heart”³⁰¹.

The young Paolo Albera would comb the Bible and baroque histories akin the *Annales ecclesiastici* of Cardinal Baronio for interesting anecdotes –

²⁹⁹ J-B. CAUSSETTE, *Manrèze du prêtre*, vol. 1, pp. 188-189: “Après tout, un esprit qui a le livre des Écritures à dévorer n’est pas sans pâture. Je vous recommandais, hier, la prière, nous parlons à Dieu; dans l’Écriture, c’est Dieu qui nous parle. Or, rien de plus vénérable, dit un Père, qu’une intelligence convertie par la lecture assidue des deux Testaments en une bibliothèque du Christ: *Qui lectione assiduâ, pectus suam fecit bibliothecam Christi* (S. Greg. *Past.*); et quand je vois un prêtre nourri de Dieu par l’Évangile, nourri de Dieu par l’Eucharistie, divinisé dans son esprit, divinisé dans son âme, je vénère en lui l’idéal de la grandeur intellectuelle dans la grandeur morale”.

³⁰⁰ French exegete and author Louis-Claude Fillion (1843-1927) joined the Sulpicians after his ordination in 1867. From 1871 to 1903, he taught Sacred Scripture in Rheims, Lyons and at the Institut Catholique of Paris. In 1903, Fr. Fillion was invited to Rome to serve as a consultant on the newly-formed Pontifical Biblical Commission. He remained at this post for three years, then retired to the Sulpician seminary in Issy, where he devoted himself to writing.

³⁰¹ Louis Claude FILLION, *La Sainte Bible. Évangile selon S. Matthieu*. Paris, P. Lethielleux 1925, pp. 233-234, note on Mt 11, 29; cf B0480130, enclosed U, pp. 2-3; ALBERA, *Lettere circolari*, p. 286.

stories with a moral³⁰². By the turn of the twentieth century, he mulled over the Sacred Scriptures as inspired and inspiring Word of God. And while he returned to favorite passages in his preaching, his personal reflections show a greater variety. Of 64 scriptural references in his journal, only six passages are ever repeated in all the years he kept his journal. D. Albera recognized the hand of God who “exaltavit humiles” when reflecting on the lives of Don Bosco and D. Rua³⁰³. Overwhelmed by the demands of his ministry, but resolving not to let himself be shaken by criticism, he repeated with his namesake Saint Paul that God alone was his judge: “Qui autem iudicat me, Dominus est”³⁰⁴. When he needed to drum up courage to confront his sufferings and fears, D. Albera recalled the words of the Sermon on the Mount to take each day one at a time without worrying about the future, for “sufficit diei malitia sua”. He cited this passage twice in the same week when confronted by an increasingly painful stomach disorder³⁰⁵. As his health deteriorated, he sighed with the psalmist, “In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in aeternum”³⁰⁶, and on the vigil of a painful stomach operation in 1905, he prayed, “Quando veniam et apparebo ante faciem Dei?” D. Albera modified the verse to make it a prayer when thinking of his deceased brother and sister: “My God, quando veniam? quando apparebo ante faciem tuam?”³⁰⁷. When D. Albera feared he was stalling in his spiritual life, he exclaimed with the apostles, “Domine, salva nos: perimus!” – a prayer he repeated for the victims of the 1908 Messina earthquake, particularly his Salesian brothers³⁰⁸.

³⁰² Cesare Baronio (1538-1607) received spiritual direction from S. Philip Neri as a teen; after ordination he entered S. Philip's Oratory. In addition to a very active life as preacher and administrator, he found time to teach and gather materials for a universal Church history. He served as Philip Neri's vicar and successor until Clement VIII named him cardinal in 1596. At the time of his death, the cardinal completed 12 “in-folio” tomes of his *Annales Ecclesiastici*; but had only reached the eleventh century. The Capuchin Antonio Pagi annotated and completed the chronicle up to the seventeenth century (Cesare BARONIO, *Annales Ecclesiastici, una cum critica historico-chronologica P. Antonii Pagii*. Lucae, Leonardi Venturini 1738-1746, 19 tomes). D. Albera refers to Baronio's comments on the ministry of Saints Paul and Barnabas, which were featured in tome 1. However, given the antiquated text found in what can be described as bulky tomes, it seems reasonable to guess that D. Albera quoted Baronio from secondary sources.

³⁰³ Lc 1, 52, in ASC B0320104 (18 Sep 1898); B0320109 (8 Apr 1910).

³⁰⁴ 1Cor 4, 4, in ASC B0320105 (7 Feb 1899); B0320107 (9 Jul 1907).

³⁰⁵ Mt 6, 34, in ASC B0320106 (24, 28 Mar 1905).

³⁰⁶ Sal 31, 2, in ASC B0320106 (27 May, 25 Aug 1905).

³⁰⁷ Sal 42, 2, in ASC B0320106 (25 Aug 1905); B0320108 (19 Jul 1909).

³⁰⁸ Mt 8, 25, in ASC B0320106 (31 Jul 1904); B0320108 (3 Jan 1909).

11. Salesianity

11.1. Francis de Sales

D. Albera's early retreat conferences contain many anecdotes from the life of Francis de Sales. Most were culled from the celebrated spiritual biography, *L'esprit du bienheureux François de Sales*, by Jean-Pierre Camus³⁰⁹. It is not clear whether D. Albera made use of an Italian edition or worked from notes he had begun to develop during his stay in France. No matter: he determined he would offer his confreres solid, Salesian content, portraying Francis de Sales not simply as patron, but as the model for all Salesian apostles and religious³¹⁰.

In his own preaching, D. Albera also quoted from the conferences, correspondence and testimony of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal³¹¹. She was the faithful interpreter of Francis de Sales' spirit, and continued to apply his insights into the changing circumstances of daily life. D. Albera presents Mother de Chantal as one who mastered the Salesian spirit and mentored others in the same³¹².

D. Albera studied a number of his contemporaries who popularized the

³⁰⁹ The Paris-born Burgundian Jean-Pierre Camus (1584-1652) was appointed Bishop of Belley by King Henry IV of France, and was ordained bishop by Francis de Sales on 30 Aug 1609. His diocese bordered that of Geneva, and he became close friends with the saint, whom he considered his spiritual master. In 1629 he resigned his see, and eventually moved back to Paris where he became chaplain at the Hospital of the Incurables. He wrote over 200 books, of which *L'Esprit du Bienheureux François de Sales* is the best known.

³¹⁰ Cf ASC B0480112, pp. 101, 102, 106; B0400113, pp. 57, 59.

³¹¹ Jeanne-Françoise (Jane) Frémyot, born 23 January 1572, Christophe II, Baron Rabutin de Chantal married on 28 December 1592. Theirs was a happy and fruitful marriage, but Christophpe's death in 1601 left Jane with four young children. She met Francis de Sales in 1604 and became his spiritual directee; it was through their spiritual dialogue that Francis de Sales was able to articulate what has come to be known as the Salesian spirit. Together they founded the Order of the Visitation in 1610. Mother de Chantal survived Francis de Sales by 19 years, during which time she continued his legacy, articulating and developing many aspects of Salesian spirituality. She died on 13 December 1641, and was canonized on 21 August 1767 by Clement XIII. For some insight into Jane de Chantal's contribution to the Salesian spirit, see: Elizabeth STOPP, *Madame de Chantal, Portrait of a Saint*. 2nd ed. Stella Niagara, Desales Resource Center, 2006, pp. 205-230; Joseph BOENZI, *Saint Francis de Sales, Life and Spirit*. Stella Niagara, Desales Resource Center, 2013, pp. 131-138.

³¹² It is not clear which editions D. Albera consulted. Much of what he cites can be found in Mother de Chantal's epistolary and transcriptions of the depositions she made for Francis de Sales' beatification. This material is available in the modern American translation: S. Jeanne-Françoise DE CHANTAL, *Saint Francis de Sales. A Testimony by St. Chantal*. Hyattsville, Institute of Salesian Studies 1967; cf ASC B0480112, pp. 80, 88, 98; B0480114, p. 39; B0480137, p. 11; B0480138, p. 8.

spiritual tradition of Saint Francis de Sales, among whom were Cardinal Alimonda³¹³, Abbé Hamon³¹⁴, Bishop Hedley³¹⁵ and Cardinal Gibbons³¹⁶. He meditated on tracts prepared by a Paris-based association called the “Société des Prêtres de Saint François de Sales”, taking particular interest in their collection of reflections on the Eucharist, and on the figure of the Bishop of Geneva as a model worth imitating³¹⁷. A similar resource was a small paperback called *Il cuore di S. Francesco di Sales*, which contained 30 meditations and other exercises designed for those who wanted to spend a month with Saint Francis de Sales. D. Albera took up this booklet when already rector major, though his busy schedule made it difficult for him to complete these devotions as he would have liked³¹⁸.

But Saint Francis de Sales was not simply the subject of meditation; he was the spiritual master, the originator of the Salesian spirit, Doctor of the Church who had much to teach about interior and apostolic life. D. Albera therefore approached the saint's own writings directly. The saint's correspondence became a tool for his own meditation. The English edition of the letters of Francis de Sales became D. Albera's mainstay during the January of 1905: he prepared for the patron's feast on 29 January, but was also passing through a difficult period of personal uneasiness. He found that the upheaval in his own heart contrasted with the gentle calmness of Saint Francis de Sales, as his journal indicates:

³¹³ Cardinal Alimonda frequently drew examples from Francis de Sales into his preaching, and on the occasion of the saint being declared “Doctor of the Church”, he published a panegyric: Gaetano ALIMONDA, *S. Francesco di Sales. Panegirico*. Genova, Tipografia della Gioventù 1877.

³¹⁴ The curé of St.-Sulpice wrote a life of the saint: André Jean Marie HAMON, *Vie de Saint François de Sales*. Paris, Victor Lecoffre 1854, 2 vols. Francis de Sales is also one of the featured saints in Abbé Hamon's meditations; cf André Jean Marie HAMON, *Meditations for all the days of the year, for the use of priests, religious and the faithful*. 3rd ed., New York, Benziger Brothers 1894, vol. 1, pp. 443-448.

³¹⁵ The Benedictine Bishop Hedley of Newport had a hand in publishing a popular library of S. Francis de Sales' works for the English speaking world. At his direction and with his assistance, Canon Henry Benedict Mackey, OSB, translated a number of the saint's works from the Anney Editions: Cf *Selections from Burns & Oates Catalogue of Publications*. No. 1, London, Burns & Oates 1898, pp. 13-14.

³¹⁶ Cardinal Gibbons presented S. Francis de Sales as a model of apostolic depth; cf e.g. GIBBONS, *The ambassador of Christ*, pp. 10, 45, 103, 124-125, 133, 283, 289, 292-293, 304-305, 340-341.

³¹⁷ *Probation sacerdotale sur le culte de la Sainte Eucharistie*. Paris, J. Mersch 1890; cf ASC B0320103 (9 Nov 1897). *Probation sur l'Imitation de Saint François de Sales*. Paris, J. Mersch 1890; cf B0320108 (31 Jan 1909). The “Société des Prêtres de Saint François de Sales”, was founded by Henri Chaumont (1838-1896) in 1876.

³¹⁸ Cf ASC B0320109 (23 Jan 1911).

15th [January 1905]. This day is very unprofitable for me. The exercises of piety are not fervant. I feel that the pride is master of my heart. The reading of the letters of S. Francis of Sales does not suffice to master my spirit. What a weakness!

Let everything be done for love, nothing for fear. Love obedience more than you fear disobedience. – S. Francis de Sales.

After the storm God will send a calm.

16th [January 1905]. My spirit is not very quiet. I am disturbed especially after the Mass. nevertheless in the meeting of Chapter I dont show my discontent. I read every day a few pages of letters of S. Francis de Sales. What a difference between his spirit and mine!³¹⁹.

If he drew from Francis de Sales' letters for spiritual instruction and devotional preparation, both before and after the patron's feast³²⁰, D. Paolo also consulted the saint's letters in pastoral matters. He spent time with Francis' letter to André Frémyot, brother of Baroness de Chantal and newly installed archbishop of Bourges, on the role of the preacher. The letter is akin to a treatise. The preacher must not just instruct, he must *move* the faithful to love virtue and flee from vice. Good preaching, therefore, is the most crucial and core ministry of a pastor, Francis de Sales explained at length to André Frémyot. This was an opinion that was already dear to the heart of D. Albera as retreat master and formation counselor³²¹.

As he had done with Francis de Sales' letters in 1905, D. Albera chose the English version of the *Treatise on the Love of God* for spiritual reading in October 1909. He spent some time each day reading and reflecting on this second Salesian classic³²². However, at that late date it seems improbable that we are looking at D. Albera's first exposure to the *Treatise on the Love of God*. Earlier conference notes show great familiarity with the saint's writings.

³¹⁹ Cf ASC B0320106 (15-16 Jan 1905); FRANÇOIS DE SALES, *A selection from the Spiritual Letters of S. Francis de Sales, bishop and prince of Geneva*. New ed., London, Rivingtons 1889, p. 52.

³²⁰ Cf ASC B0320106 (10, 29 Jan, 23 Mar 1905). D. Albera's journal shows traces from St. Francis de Sales' *Spiritual Conférences*, especially in the form of maxims that he applies to himself. See: B0320106 (7 Apr 1906).

³²¹ The letter to Msgr. André Frémyot does not appear in Mrs. Lear's anthology, which is the collection that D. Albera quoted above. It is likely that D. Albera found the Frémyot letter in a pamphlet directed to priests as, for example: FRANCESCO DI SALES, *Metodo per ben predicare. Lettera a mons. Andrea Frémoit*. Milano, Tip. S. Giuseppe 1898, 40 pp.; cf ASC B0320106 (10 Jan 1905).

³²² FRANÇOIS DE SALES, *The Treatise on the Love of God*. Translated by Henry Benedict Mackey, London, Burns & Oates 1884; cf ASC B0320108 (5 Oct 1909).

It is likely that D. Albera read Francis de Sales' principal works while still provincial in France, if not earlier.

It is difficult to identify specific source material in D. Albera's early retreat notes. We do, however, find repeated references to the writings and sayings of Saint Francis de Sales in conference notes prepared around 1893-1894 for Salesian confreres and novices. In the course of these retreat notes, D. Albera cited the *Directoire spirituel* as the source for a saying from Saint Francis de Sales. D. Albera mistakes this reference. The passage he quotes does not come from the "Spiritual Directory", which the saint patron had prepared as a commentary for the Visitation rules. Instead, the passage he employs comes from the "Spiritual Conferences" which are a collection of Francis de Sales' monthly conferences with the first group of the Visitation nuns³²³.

D. Albera died well before the Annecy edition was complete. It is not clear where he found his favorite passages. Any number of pocket-sized editions of the saint's maxims had become plentiful in the years since Pius IX declared him a doctor of the Church. Did D. Albera lift his favorite quotations from one of these popular collections? Did he pull lines from secondary sources? It is difficult to say. The point is this: his ample use of the thoughts and sentiments of the Salesian patron demonstrate his interest in providing a Salesian framework for the life and mission of the communities and confreres he guided during his years as Spiritual Director General. Later, as Rector Major, D. Albera would encourage his confreres to practice the virtues typical of Francis de Sales. It is not enough to bear his name, he stressed in his circular letters, Salesians should imitate his "disinterested love" and attachment to fulfilling his duty in the presence of God. The way to begin is to know his teachings. In fact, those who do "Salesian work" should make "a more intimate and deep study of his life and writings" the first step toward assimilating his spirit³²⁴.

11.2. John Bosco

D. Albera had first-hand contact with Don Bosco's thought. It was he, after all, that collected the founder's circular letters and prepared them for

³²³ Cf FRANÇOIS DE SALES, *Les vrais Entretien Spirituels*, in *Œuvres de Saint François de Sales*. Édition Complète, Tome 6, Annecy, J. Niérat 1895, p. 10; cf ASC B0480112, p. 19. The critical edition of Francis de Sales' works, known as the "Annecy editions", published the first volume of Francis de Sales letters in 1904, a decade after this retreat; the critical edition of "Spiritual Directory" was printed in 1930.

³²⁴ Cf P. ALBERA, *Lettere Circolari*, pp. 152, 238, 261-261, 292, 504-505.

publication in 1896. He considered the founder's letters as "a true Salesian codex", a sure guide to interpreting Salesian rules and traditions, and felt that they should be read with the utmost respect and prayerful devotion³²⁵. We have seen that, in addition to these circular letters, D. Albera made explicit references to the *Giovane provveduto*³²⁶, and can only surmise that Paolo Albera had read Don Bosco's short writings as they appeared in the monthly *Letture Cattoliche*.

When D. Giovanni Battista Lemoyne (1839-1916) began to publish Don Bosco's biographical memoirs in 1896, Paolo Albera, designated "censor of books" for the Salesian Society, proof read each volume carefully as they were prepared for print. He found Lemoyne's accounts "very interesting", reflecting how Don Bosco's life was "very edifying: He was really a holy servant of God"³²⁷. Besides giving his professional "placet" in the form of a "nihil obstat", D. Albera relived his years with the unforgettable Don Bosco, and confided to his journal: "All is edifying in this man!!!"³²⁸.

Reading and meditating on the life of his venerable founder seemed to be a means for examining his own apostolic commitment³²⁹. D. Albera nourished his Salesian identity by meditating on Giovanni Bonetti's history of Don Bosco and the Oratory. This work collected into one volume a series of short episodes which Bonetti had published in the *Bollettino Salesiano* between January 1879 and August 1886³³⁰. The original version – *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio S. Francesco di Sales* – appeared in 1892, shortly after Bonetti's death. It is reasonable to assume that D. Albera would have read Bonetti's account, both from the *Bollettino Salesiano* and when it appeared in book form. The only reference he made to this work in his personal notes, however, comes from his reading the English translation in 1908: *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate*³³¹.

³²⁵ Cf Paolo ALBERA, *Ai direttori delle case salesiane*, in *Lettere circolari di D. Bosco e di D. Rua ed altri loro scritti ai Salesiani*. Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1896, pp. 4-5.

³²⁶ Cf ASC B0320109 (3 Jan 1910).

³²⁷ ASC B0320107 (14 Jul 1907); see also 7 Jun 1907.

³²⁸ ASC B0320108 (30 Jul 1909); cf 11 Jul 1909. D. Albera previewed each volume of the MB as written by G. B. Lemoyne, with the exception of vol. 8. The "nihil obstat" for these volumes are dated as follow: MB 1: 1 May 1898; MB 2: 1 March 1901; MB 3: 19 April 1903; MB 4: 9 October 1904; MB 5: 1 November 1905; MB 6: 7 October 1907; MB 7: 8 September 1909; MB 8: 12 March 1912 (granted by D. Guilio Barberis); MB 9: 19 March 1917.

³²⁹ Cf ASC B0320108 (16 Jan 1909).

³³⁰ Cf Antonio da SILVA FERREIRA, *Introduzione*, in BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 20.

³³¹ Giovanni BONETTI, *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio S. Francesco di Sales*. Torino, Tip. Salesiana 1892; ID., *History of don Bosco's early apostolate*. London, Salesian Press 1908; cf ASC B0320107 (14, 18, 26 Nov 1908).

One of D. Bonetti's principal sources had been Don Bosco's as yet unpublished *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. Reading Bonetti brought him into indirect contact with the origins as Don Bosco himself relayed them³³².

12. Conclusion

During the first months after his arrival in Turin as Spiritual Director General, D. Albera spent much time reading retreat sermons by classic and contemporary Italian and French preachers. This type of literature was not new to him. Since boyhood he had been exposed to retreat themes, beginning with Don Bosco's meditations reproduced in the *Giovane provveduto*. Years later D. Albera still loved to pick up this book and apply Don Bosco's meditations to his own situation, commenting that Don Bosco was a master in teaching the Last Things³³³. Don Bosco's originality does not concern us here, but the imagery he employed does. As we have said, D. Albera grew up with these images. He had absorbed them in his own thinking. His future readings would either reinforce them, or bring in new dimensions.

With the turn of the twentieth century, D. Albera's responsibilities and his reading habits began to change. True, there was a corpus of favorite authors to whom he returned for his own devotion or when preparing special retreats. However, he seems to have begun to diversify. Several reasons may have contributed to this development. First, the trip to the American missions had made a dramatic impact on D. Albera's life. His letters to D. Rua note the need for a stronger formation of Salesian confreres and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians³³⁴. He was especially concerned about the preparation of leaders, and upon his return he sought practical resources that could help strengthen this area.

Furthermore, D. Albera seems to have taken positive steps to remain up-to-date in religious issues, spiritual life, formation and the pastoral praxis of the Church. If in his earlier days he dedicated much of his time to the classics,

³³² Cf A. DA SILVA FERREIRA, *Introduzione*, pp. 20-21.

³³³ ASC B0320109 (3 Jan 1910): "I have passed a bad night [...] I fall in the staire with a great danger. I suffer a little during all the day. I done my meditation on the end of man; the word of D. Bosco is always efficacious".

³³⁴ ASC B051 preserves 10 letters from D. Albera to D. Rua during the American visitation. These letters are actually reports on the Salesian missions in various parts of the continent, and most deal with formation needs.

once he returned from America we find him reading many new releases as soon as they hit the book shops.

A third point is that D. Albera's pastoral journeys and the canonical visits he made pushed him to perfect his knowledge of other languages. D. Gusmano commented that throughout his visit in Latin America, D. Albera read spiritual works in Spanish. There is little evidence of this in D. Albera's later notes, but we do find him giving increased attention to English writings. This gave him direct access to Catholic thought as it developed in non-Latin, minority environments such as England, Wales, and the United States. Writings from these areas offered diverse images of ministry and mission, and D. Albera seemed to integrate these new offerings into his own presentations.

Thus, changes in D. Albera's reading patterns grew out of shifts in his ministry. In the 1890s, D. Albera concentrated on sermons and retreat literature. After 1900, apologetics, conversion stories, religious life and pastoral manuals became substantial fare as D. Albera increasingly turned to writers facing contemporary issues. During the early stages of his ministry D. Albera steeped himself in the classics; in his mature years he drew many ideas from contemporary sources.

D. Albera absorbed much from the many authors he read, old and new. In his own instructions, continually stressed the importance of making a serious retreat. He soberly recognized that he, as a retreat preacher, was not as adept as others in spiritual matters. He confessed that he felt he would not be able to fulfill his role at all except for the merciful fact that God habitually used the weak to strengthen his people³³⁵. On more than one occasion, D. Albera used the word "inept" to describe his abilities as a preacher, instructor and writer³³⁶. Still, he did not simply rely on grace to overcome his perceived inadequacies. He studied, took copious notes, outlined the thoughts of the great preachers and spiritual writers, and then endeavored to integrate their insights into his own presentations as a way to help his own listeners in their search for God and for spiritual growth.

³³⁵ Cf ASC B0480111, pp. 4-8, 41-44; B0480115, p. 2; B0480127, pp. 1-2; B0480139, pp. 4, 26; B0480137, pp. 89, 92, 122.

³³⁶ Cf B0400113, pp. 9-10; B0400114, p. 88; P. ALBERA, *Mons. Luigi Lasagna*, p. 448.