

DON ALBERTO CAVIGLIA

Source:

SEMERARO Cosimo, *Don Alberto Caviglia*, Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1994.

Author:

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Purpose:

Don Semeraro did not write a biography nor a hagiography. His stated purpose was to study the private library and archive of Don Caviglia in order to facilitate a better understanding and analysis of his context and of his thought (p. xiii).

Content:

1. Contribution Toward a Reconstruction of a Biography (pp. 3-74)

1.1. The beginnings

1.1.1. Alberto Luigi Giuseppe Caviglia was born on January 10, 1868. His parents were Pietro Luigi and Antonia Adelaide Bianco. His sister who was three years older was Ludovica and was also called Vica.

1.1.2. Alberto is reserved regarding his family.

1.1.3. Alberto is silent about his mother but was certainly close to his father. On the title page of the first volume of Jesus Christ written by Henri Didon we find written: “Dono di mio papa’. Sac. Caviglia” (Gift of my father. Fr. Caviglia). This was something rare for Caviglia to do and therefore, underscores the love between father and son.

1.1.4. Without the mother (dead?) the family moved to Brazil in 1899 where the father died without seeing his Alberto. Alberto remained at the Oratory.

1.2. Valdocco: an important encounter with Don Bosco

1.2.1. If Caviglia was reserved about his natural family, it was the opposite about the Oratory. He often spoke vividly about it. He recalls Don Bosco saying: “Caviglia, Caviglia, fara’ meraviglia!” (Caviglia, Caviglia, he shall be a wonder!) He particularly relished recalling the climate in which they lived at the time of Don Bosco. “We felt that he loved us and we loved him in return.” Caviglia became a witness and depository of this experience for future generations.

1.2.3. Having finished the scholastic program at Valdocco, Caviglia decided to “stay with Don Bosco”.

1.3. Formative journey in the Salesian family

1.3.1. He had his novitiate under Don Barberis in San Benigno Canavese.

1.3.2. For philosophical studies, he transferred to Valsalice, called at that time “seminary for external missions”. At the end of his second year, he also passed the examination for his “licenza” (equivalent to the “high school diploma” today).

1.3.3. He did not go for practical training since it was not yet part of the formation program at that time. Instead, he went straight to theology in Lanzo (Oct. 1887).

1.4. Human and cultural formation in view of the priesthood

1.4.1. He was a voracious reader and had a great love for the classics.

1.4.2. He loved to study because he was convinced that by increasing one’s knowledge, one can do more good.

1.4.3. This love for study, for knowledge and for culture has its limits which are determined by the fact that a Salesian is first an educator before being a scholar.

1.4.4. He was and remained a man of culture. He preferred the chair and the writing desk.

1.5. Young teacher and “old” university student

1.5.1. In those years the school of “historical method” took root and influenced Caviglia in no small measure in his choice of research method.

1.5.2. While he loved classical culture, his inclination was historical research.

1.5.3. In 1926 he was relieved of teaching in order to devote himself fulltime to the study of the published and unpublished writings of Don Bosco.

1.6. Historian of Don Bosco and of the Congregation

1.6.1. He was not content to enumerate events and to make a chronicle of facts to be narrated. What he did was to analyze the documents, that is, the testimonies and sources in question.

1.6.2. Don Giuseppe Borino identified the limitations under which Caviglia was working. Caviglia was too near the facts he was studying and he also did not have at his disposal all the necessary documents. For these reasons, Don Caviglia cannot write a true history.

1.7. His cultural world

1.7.1. He was not a man of one book. He was a versatile genius. He was interested in every branch of knowledge and sought to extend his knowledge of them.

1.7.2. He had an interest in art. For example, he taught Christian archaeology and sacred art to the Salesian theology students of the International Institute of Turin (Crocetta) and of the Metropolitan Seminary.

1.8. The Giver of conferences on the Salesian Spirit Il “conferenziere” dello Spirito Salesiano

Don Bosco’s beatification and canonization was a favorable time to highlight the figure of Don Bosco, his sanctity and his method. The Congregation found in Don Caviglia the right man to do this. And so came into being the conferences on the Salesian Spirit, given during the retreats of the confreres.

1.9. Cheerful disposition and a tireless worker

1.9.1. He was a sought-after preacher and speaker because of his cheerful character. His jokes and his quips came easily.

1.9.2. He was and remained an exceptionally tireless worker following the example of Don Bosco. His work table is a witness to this. When he had to take to bed because of sickness, his complaint was that he could not work.

1.10. Death of Don Caviglia

1.10.1. Don Caviglia was struck down by cerebral paralysis on October 25, 1943 and died a few days afterwards.

1.10.2. Don Ricaldone, then Rector Major, ordered the room of Don Caviglia to be sealed in order to prevent the loss of his materials. He had Don Ziggotti to study what to do with those materials. Unfortunately it was decided to disperse the materials. The manuscripts were sent to the archive of the Generalate and the library to the faculty of theology of the Ateneo Salesiano. The books, more than a thousand, were also sent to these two places and in addition to the studentate of Philosophy of Foglizzo and the scuola media of San Giovanni.

2. Patrimony: Documents and Library (pp. 75-86)

2.1. Introduction

The thought of an author has the same value as the sources which he has used. Knowing the sources constitute the first step and privileged instrument in order to be able to enter the fascinating world of reconstructing what he has written.

2.2. Important sources

2.2.1. Don Caviglia states: “Among so many authors, the one which I have found to be nearest and parallel to Don Bosco is his contemporary P. Faber, who, like St. Francis de Sales and Don Bosco, is well informed of the spirit of St. Philip Neri.”

2.2.2. Other references of Caviglia were: St. Francis de Sales, Adolph Alfred Tanquerey, St. Alfonsus M. de Liguori, Calumba Marmion, and Jules Segond. He often used as comparison the life of St. Therese de Lisieux and St. Aloysius Gonzaga.

2.3. The type of Salesian culture in the view of A. Caviglia

2.3.1. The educative mission, the needs of the community and structure and specific circumstances may mean the sacrifice of personal cultural interests in which the Salesian might excel.

2.3.2. To know what is necessary in order to do good to the young and to the people is the measure of the Salesian culture.

2.3.3. Mediocrity, sobriety, and almost cultural poverty which is proposed to the Salesian as one of his traits is nothing else but ignorance or sloppiness, or superficiality and coarseness.

2.4. Brief conclusion

2.4.1. Don Caviglia should be seen as a scholar of spirituality, of pedagogy and of the writings of Don Bosco.

2.4.2. He is a man of no mean intellectual capacity, of many diverse cultural interests and animated by an uncommon drive to know.

3. The Books of Albert Caviglia. The Reconstruction of his Personal Library. (pp. 87-96)

3.1. Identifying Caviglia's book was made simple by the fact that he wrote in pencil on the margins of the book his annotations, corrections, additions and comments. He rarely wrote with a pen and more so his name on his books. An example of a rare instance when he did write with a pen was on the book "Gesù Cristo". On the title page he wrote: "Gift of my papa. Sac. Caviglia". Usually he marked his books with "DAIC" (D[on]Al[berto]C[aviglia]) in pencil.

3.2. When a hapless author attributed a well-known text of Saint-Cyrian to a certain "S. Civan", Caviglia wrote this annotation: "Ma l'asino che ha fatto questo 'Compendio' non seppe il nome e lo credette... chi?" (But the donkey who made this 'Compendium' does not know the name and he believed it....who?)

3.3. The books of Don Caviglia were distributed according to the criterion of immediate use and usefulness. For example, everything that was strictly of Salesian interest was sent to the Central Archive of the Mother House in Valdocco. Some books did not find their way to their proper destination. "S. Teresa di Lisieux ossia una rinascita spirituale" was an example. But fortunately this was finally found in the seminar library of the Institute of Spirituality of the Salesian University.

3.4. After compiling the catalog of the books of Caviglia, one becomes well aware of the context in which he lived and studied. One is also surprised at the number and quality of the books that were housed in his room, which was remembered as "bare, simple and poor".

3.5. Don Caviglia was not a rarity with regards to knowledge and love of books. There were other Salesians of similar calibre: Don Paolo Ubaldi, Don Giovanni Borino and Don Antonio Tonelli.

3.6. One day Don Caviglia confided to a younger confrere, Don Palieri: "At my death someone might find himself in front of a sizeable mass of books that I have left behind. But no one will ever know how many books Don Caviglia has read and how he was able to read them...by reading the whole night."

4. Appendices (pp. 99-318)

The appendix contains 65 appendices. The longest is appendix no. 65 entitled: "Catalogo sistematico e annotato dei libri posseduti da A. Caviglia.

Evaluation:

1. The author stated that he does not intend to write a biography. And in fact, the book is not a biography of Don Caviglia. Nevertheless, he did write about his life. Chapter 1 is the longest chapter of his book. It begins with his birth and ends with his death.

2. By examining the books, manuscripts and documents Don Caviglia left behind, the author was able to:

2.1. Paint a portrait of Don Caviglia, the man, the Salesian, the scholar, the teacher, the speaker.

2.2. Provide us with a background of certain important events in the history of our congregation. For example, his correspondence with Don Ceria gave us an idea of what went into the writing of "Don Bosco con Dio".

2.3. Point out the factors (books, for example) which influenced his thought. The author pointed out a writer, P. Faber, and a book, "S. Teresa di Lisieux ossia una rinascita spirituale". The latter was dear to Fr. Caviglia and was a valuable documentary evidence for it contained a lot of annotations from his own hand.

3. The appendix of this book would be most valuable to researchers and it is perhaps here that that author has rendered the greatest service. For the author has already gone through the trouble of making an inventory and catalog of Don Caviglia's books, manuscripts, and other documents.