

DON BOSCO'S EXPERIENCE OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AS IT WAS PRACTISED DURING HIS YEARS AT THE TURIN CONVITTO ECCLESIASTICO (1841-1844)

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INTRODUCTION

«Before I made a final choice, I sought out Fr Caffasso in Turin to ask his advice. For several years now he had been my guide in matters both spiritual and temporal. That holy priest listened to everything, the good money offers, the pressures from relatives and friends, my own goodwill to work. Without a moment's hesitation, this is what he said: "You need to study moral theology and homiletics. For the present forget all these offers and come to the Convitto". I willingly followed his wise advice; on 3 November 1841 I enrolled at the Convitto.»¹

In the month following his priestly ordination, like many other young priests in his diocese and in his times, Don Bosco was faced with a difficult process of discernment. The need to find the necessary means of support in fact forced some of them to accept temporary appointments with the danger of losing the «ecclesiastical spirit.» «Several of those, who on account of their talents, piety and virtue gave the hope of becoming zealous workers» – one may read in one of the first drafts of the *Regulations* of the Convitto –, «once ordained priests, in the fatal gap between ordination and a permanent appointment lose their fervour and zeal and become of no use.»²

Following Cafasso's «wise advice» marks the beginning of perhaps the most fruitful of Don Bosco's spiritual and apostolic experiences.

From the *Memoirs of the Oratory* we know that Don Bosco's first real spiritual guide had been Don Calosso. In spite of the fact that Don Bosco was still an adolescent, thinking back on it he realised that the *accompaniment relationship* had left an indelible mark in the memory of the saint of Turin. «It was then that I came to realise what it was to have a regular spiritual director, a faithful friend of one's soul. I had not had one up till then.»³

Cafasso's accompaniment, in particular in the context of the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin, was to be quite decisive in Don Bosco's spiritual and apostolic process of maturing. «If I have been able to do any good, I owe it to this worthy priest in whose hands I placed every decision I made, all my study, and every activity of my life.»⁴

In order to understand just how fruitful and determining this relationship was we shall try to reconstruct some of the essential features of the origins and of the «formation programme» of the Convitto, in addition to the person of the one who, after having been himself a student at the Convitto from 1833, the year of his ordination as a priest, for more than twenty five years was its heart and soul. The teachings of Cafasso, in fact, were so much a vital part of the Convitto project and imbued with the spirit of Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori, and therefore constituted the basic foundation of that particular *pedagogy aimed at holiness* which was at the heart of «the deep personal relationship which lasted for thirty years.»⁵ «This is the first objective reason to explain why the spirituality of Cafasso was passed on to Saint John Bosco.»⁶

¹ J. BOSCO, *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales between 1815 and 1855*, Translated by Daniel Lyons SDB, New Rochelle 2007, 99-100. From now on we shall refer to this text with MO.

² AOMV [II Reg.] S. II, 255. The published and unpublished writings kept in the Archives of the Oblates of Mary the Virgin in the Generalate in Rome, have been quoted electronically from the database of the *Centre Informatique et Bible* of Maredsous (Belgium), and published and printed in: P.B. LANTERI, *Writings and documents from the archives*, I-IV, Rome-Fossano 2002.

³ MO 44

⁴ MO 101

⁵ E. VALENTINI, *Presentazione in San Giuseppe Cafasso. Memorie pubblicate nel 1860 da San Giovanni Bosco*,

In the first part, of an historical-analytical nature, in addition to the origins of the Convitto we shall deal with its « formation plan», the person of Cafasso, of Don Bosco's personal recollections, many years after his experience as a student at the Convitto; in the second we shall try to bring out some key aspects of Don Bosco's spiritual and apostolic experience which have their roots in the relationship of personal *spiritual accompaniment* which flourished in the three years spent at the Convitto. Finally in an appendix we shall attempt to indicate some *open questions*, starting from the concrete and historical experience of Don Bosco, but in relation to the present day context and to the changed social and cultural conditions.

Turin 1960, 6.

⁶ *L.c.*

1. THE ORIGINS OF THE CONVITTO ECCLESIASTICO IN TURIN

The Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin began in 1817,⁷ under the inspiration of the Venerable Pio Brunone Lanteri and on the initiative of Doctor Luigi Fortunato Guala, in premises attached to the church of Saint Francis in Turin, on the road still today bearing the name of the Poor man of Assisi.

The opening of the Convitto was a very significant event for the Piedmontese Church⁸; in fact, with the Convitto, there opened in Turin a new « spiritual school » of priests with a clear identity, which distinguished them from those trained in the Royal Theological University. To the rigourism in the area of moral theology of the latter was contrasted the desire on the part of the staff of the Convitto to dispel the last remnants of Jansenism (or what rightly or wrongly was called such)⁹ and a defence without reserve of the authority of the Pope. This different way of perceiving things would lead Monsignor Gastaldi, in 1878, to decide to close the Convitto, accused by some of *laxity*. It would be re-opened by the nephew of Cafasso, Canon Giuseppe Allamano, founder of the Consolata Missionaries, in 1882.¹⁰

The Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin owed its prestige to the role it exercised in Piedmont and beyond¹¹ in spreading the moral theology of Saint Alphonsus and to some eminent figures as its Directors, such as Saint Giuseppe Cafasso and his nephew Blessed Giuseppe Allamano, or as its students such as Saint Giovanni Bosco, Saint Leonardo Murialdo and Blessed Clemente Marchisio.

The declared aim of the Convitto was that of gathering together for two or three years young priests, recently ordained, to give them a preparation more closely related to their priestly ministry, in particular in view of preaching and « preparation » for the ministry of hearing confessions. In a telling expression Colombero, a former student at the Convitto and a biographer of Cafasso, describes it as « a group of priests who need the final touches to make them sound in virtue and give them the ecclesiastical spirit so as to be prepared for the exercise of the sacred ministry. »¹²

In the light of the documents connected with its foundation, the idea of setting up a Convitto in premises attached to the church of Saint Francis of Assisi was that of Lanteri. An *aide memoire* drawn up by Venerable Pio Brunone Lanteri¹³ between November and December

⁷ The official decree of approval by Mons. Chiaverotti, however, has the date 23 February 1821.

⁸ For a fuller examination of the history and of the role played by the Convitto and more in particular, by Cafasso in the Piedmontese church see the extensive bibliography provided by G. TUNINETTI, *San Giuseppe Cafasso. Nota storico-biografica*, in G. CAFASSO, *Esercizi Spirituali al clero*, edited by L. Casto, Cantalupa (TO), 2003, 28-33.

⁹ Cf. G. PENCO, *Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, II, Milan, 1977, 266.

¹⁰ For a fuller examination of the reasons leading to this critical situation and to the closing of the Convitto, cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883*, II, Rome, 1988, 165-184.

¹¹ Cf. J. GUERBER, *Le ralliement du clergé français à la morale ligurienne*, Rome, 1973.

¹² G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso, con cenni storici sul Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, Turin 1895, 79-80.

¹³ The complete text of this commemorative address is given by Mario Rossino in an appendix to his article *Il Convitto Ecclesiastico di S. Francesco d'Assisi. La sua fondazione*, in *Archivio Teologico Torinese*, I (1995) 473-475.

1816 preserved in Pinerolo in the General Archives of the Oblates of Mary the Virgin and addressed to the Vicar Capitular Monsignor Gonetti,¹⁴ throws light on the intentions of the founder to establish in Turin a community of Oblates, and to entrust to them in addition to the preaching of retreats/the Spiritual Exercises, confessions and caring for the sick, the management of a Convitto for young ecclesiastics.¹⁵ «The establishment of the aforesaid Congregation» –Lanteri declares in this *aide memoire*– «would provide for new priests whose previous studies were limited to the study of practical moral theology and who had been forced to live in ordinary houses to the detriment of the ecclesiastical spirit [...], the advantage of a modest fee like that of the seminary, which the Congregation would itself establish. »¹⁶ «Without [a Convitto] » – he adds later – «the hopes of the Superiors would not be met, and the costs incurred in a fifth year for young students would be wasted.»¹⁷

This first project of Lanteri, however, did not receive the necessary approval. We do not know whether this was due to the opposition of the ecclesiastical or the civil authorities.¹⁸

In any case, at this point Guala, a friend of Lanteri, comes on the scene and presents to the royal administrator of ecclesiastical property, Andrea Palazzi, a new *aide memoire*, which bears the date 8 August 1817.¹⁹

Having become Rector of the Church of Saint Francis in 1808 at the age of thirty-three, Luigi Maria Fortunato Guala had already for a number of years begun to gather together in the small residence he had available, a dozen or so young priests, with the aim of complementing the formation received in the seminary with daily lectures in «practical» moral theology.²⁰ This was the situation in which Guala found himself when, three years after this recognition which bears witness to the esteem and the approval of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, he presented to Andrea Palazzi a request to be granted some premises for the Convitto.

In this new document he makes no reference to the Congregation of the Oblates. It is a striking document, in some ways passionate. Guala says that a young cleric, without the appropriate assistance runs the risk of «losing the ecclesiastical spirit. » «Very many of these tender plants» – Guala writes – «who during their five-year course of study gave high hopes of success, become barren through the lack of the final touches [...]. What a loss for souls, and how lamentable at a time of such a shortage of ministers, which cannot be explained, and yet it is all so evident. »²¹

The reply of Palazzi, bearing the same date, is a positive one. The third floor of the Convent

¹⁴ Mons. Emanuele Gonetti had been Vicar Capitular of the diocese of Turin between the death of Mons. Giacinto della Torre (1814) and the appointment of Mons. Colombano Chiaverotti.

¹⁵ Cfr. G. USSEGLIO, *Il Teologo Guala e il convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, Turin 1948, 11.

¹⁶ AOMV S. I, vol. VII, fasc. 3, doc. 289.

¹⁷ *L.c.*

¹⁸ For a fuller examination of this question see the contribution of Mario Rossino already mentioned, in particular pages 458-461.

¹⁹ A.P. FRUTAZ, *Beatificationis et canonizationis servi Dei Pii Brunonis Lanteri, fundatoris Congregationis Oblatorum M.V. positio super introductione causae et super virtutibus ex officio compilata*, Rome, 1945, 213.

²⁰ Cfr. G. USSEGLIO, *Il teologo Guala e il Convitto Ecclesiastico di Torino*, cit., 14.

²¹ A.P. FRUTAZ, *Beatificationis et canonizationis servi Dei Pii Brunonis Lanteri*, cit., 213.

of Saint Francis of Assisi then is made available to be used as proposed «to the benefit of religion.»²²

The idea of the Convitto, proposed by Lanteri and shared by Guala, who is about sixteen years younger than he is, from now on has a single leader and promoter, Guala.²³ While remaining on excellent terms with his friend and disciple,²⁴ Lanteri will devote himself to the concerns of the new Congregation of the Oblates.

It is also possible, as Calliari believes, that there were reasons of prudence that prevented Lanteri from being seen to take the lead in the foundation, of which in all probability he was the real originator and inspirer; Guala on the other hand was a disciple of Lanteri, as he was, as we shall see, of Diessbach.²⁵

The fact remains that the idea behind the Convitto which Guala also shared is the same as that of Lanteri and is certainly derived from the programme of the *Amicizia Sacerdotale*,²⁶ the association of priests founded around 1783 by Nicolaus von Diessbach, an association to which both Lanteri and Guala had belonged. Then, starting from 1815, meetings of the *Amicizia Sacerdotale* were held at the Convitto and had as their leader Doctor Guala.²⁷

1.1 Pio Brunone Lanteri

Pio Brunone Lanteri was born in Cuneo on 12 May 1759. Seventh child of a doctor who was well-known for some medical publications but also for his Christian charity towards the poor, as a youth he had entered the Cistercian Order perhaps worried about the subject of his eternal salvation, so dear to preachers of the time. Not being able to keep up with the

²² Cfr. A.P. FRUTAZ, *Beatificationis et canonizationis servi Dei Pii Brunonis Lanteri*, cit., 215 The official decree of ecclesiastical approval bears the date 23 February 1821 and is signed by Mons. Colombano Chiaverotti; two years earlier the Vicar Gonetti had approved the first draft of the Regulations.

The disputed question of the «paternity» of the Convitto, which for years has fuelled the debate between the supporters of Guala and those of Lanteri, after a reading of these documenti, seems to us to be CLARIFIED. However, on this subject see the article already mentioned by Fr Mario Rossino *Il Convitto Ecclesiastico di S. Francesco d'Assisi*, in particular, pages 470-471.

²⁴ As confirmation of this statement see the letters which Guala and Lanteri continued to write to each other, many of which are preserved in the *positio Lanteri*. Then in Lanteri's last will and testament the Convitto, in the person of Guala, is named as the universal heir, should the Congregation of the Oblates become extinct in the meantime (cf. P. Calliari (ed.), *Papers of the Venerable Pio Brunone Lanteri (1759-1830) founder of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary the Virgin*, V, Turin, 1976, 413.

²⁵ Paolo Calliari shares this opinion when he writes: «This is the certain fixed point of reference to which one needs to return whenever one seeks the real origins of the Convitto Ecclesiastico: the three names Diessbach-Lanteri-Guala» (P. Calliari, *Gli Oblati di Maria. Fondazione a Carignano. Primi quattro anni di vita. 1816-1820*, San Vittorino 1980, 123). And further on: «(Lanteri) an outstanding man who courageously faced up to the most difficult and complicated situations when it was a question of good to be done or evil prevented knew how take a back seat so as not to appear in the limelight.» (163). Calliari's treatment of the Convitto is full of documentation (cf. in particular pages 118-174).

²⁶ The Statutes of the *Amicizia sacerdotale* are given in C. Bona, *Le «Amicizie». Società segrete e rinascita religiosa (1770-1830)*, Turin, 1962, 503-511.

²⁷ Cf. G. USSEGLIO, *Il teologo Guala e il Convitto Ecclesiastico di Torino*, cit., 17.

austerity of the Rule he had to leave a short time afterwards.

Going to live in Turin he attended the faculty of theology at the Royal University where he had Nicolas Joseph Albert von Diessbach as his teacher.

Diessbach was born in 1732 at Berne. Having become a widower he entered the Society of Jesus in Turin in 1759. In this city he continued to work after the Society was suppressed in 1773. A friend of the Czech Redemptorist Clément-Marie Hofbauer, he had known Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori and was an enthusiastic «Liguorian». Between 1778 and 1780 in Turin he founded the *Amicizia Cristiana*, a private association of clerics and laymen who, binding themselves by *vows* and having Christian perfection as their aim, promoted the spreading of good books, the struggle against Jansenism, the power of the crown and jurisdictionalism and a sincere attachment to the Pope in the context of the ultramontane tendency.²⁸

In 1783 Diessbach had also founded the *Amicizia Sacerdotale*, a school of evangelical perfection and a preparation for the apostolate through preaching, practical moral theology and the distribution/ spreading of good books.

At the school of Diessbach, Lanteri also succeeded in involving many lay men in the « cultural re-conquest » of society, using as the preferred apostolic means the cultivation of the reading of good books in all situations, through the study and examination of individual examples and their distribution among the different social classes; in particular his opposition to the diffusion of Jansenist ideas and attitudes within the Catholic world found its most effective method/ greatest means in the spreading of the works of Saint Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori.

Caught up in the tragic events involving the relations between Napoleon and Pius VII, he firmly insisted on papal authority and primacy, and because of this was subjected to surveillance by the French police.²⁹ After 1814 he took up his apostolate again re-organising the *Amicizia cristiana* in two different associations, the *Amicizia cattolica*, for lay men and *Amicizia sacerdotale*.

In this social and religious context there grew to maturity the idea of the foundation of the Oblates of Mary the Virgin. In 1816, attentive to the signs of the times and in continuity with the programme of the *Amicizia Sacerdotale*, Lanteri founded at Carignano a Congregation the aim of which was the distribution of good books, the struggle against the more common errors especially those against the Pope and the Holy See, the formation of good ecclesiastics and effective preachers. The priority apostolic means was the preaching of the spiritual

²⁸ Cf. G. DE ROSA, *Il movimento cattolico in Italia. Dalla Restaurazione all'età giolittiana*, Bari, 1988², 3-4. The fullest treatment of the subject of the *Amicizie* still remains that quoted by Father Candido Bona.

²⁹ Cf. G. DE ROSA, *Il movimento cattolico in Italia*, cit., 6-7. See also chap. 27, entitled *Un prete temuto da Napoleone*, by P. CALLIARI, *Servire la Chiesa. Il Venerabile Pio Brunone Lanteri (1759-1830)*, Caltanissetta 1989, 120-124.

exercises according to the method of Saint Ignatius.³⁰ Lanteri had been initiated in this work by Diessbach.³¹

The Congregation, disbanded for four years on account of some lack of understanding with the then Archbishop Mons. Chiaverotti, was re-established in 1826 with the approval of the Pope. Lanteri died at Pinerolo, in Piedmont, in 1830.³²

1.2 The spiritual exercises and the Sanctuary of Sant Ignatius above Lanzo

Another indispensable element to understand the spiritual experience of Don Bosco and the formative characteristics of the Convitto, is its links with the Sanctuary of Saint Ignatius, located above Lanzo Torinese.

The periodic practice of the spiritual exercises is one of the more interesting characteristics of the spirituality of the XIX century. Although already in existence in Europe in the previous two centuries, it became more widespread and almost universal, in this century not only for religious orders but also for the «secular clergy», for devout lay people, for students in schools.³³

In particular the piety of the laity was sustained and animated by the *popular missions*, which can be considered a particular adaptation of the exercises³⁴; closed or open annual retreats, on the other hand, were made compulsory in religious houses and in seminaries starting from the end of the XVII century, by order of Clement XI and Benedict XIV.³⁵

The work of Lanteri, an enthusiastic promoter of the Ignatian method, in some ways had its «official anointing» in the diocese of Turin from 1807 when together with Doctor Luigi Guala, he was engaged to preach to the priests of the diocese.

For this purpose, Guala and Lanteri decided to restore and furnish the premises next to an old sanctuary which after the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, had been taken over by the Turin archdiocesan curial offices and had fallen into a state of almost total disrepair.

³⁰ Father Timothy Gallagher has demonstrated at length the centrality of the Exercises of Saint Ignatius in the spirituality and in the charism of the Founder of the Oblates; these, even more than the Jesuits, who Lanteri saw as being engaged in other educative work, devoted themselves to preaching the exercises/retreats according to the method of Saint Ignatius, for the benefit of priests and lay people of all degrees and classes (cf. T. GALLAGHER, *Gli Esercizi di S. Ignazio nella spiritualità e carisma di fondatore di Pio Brunone Lanteri*, Rome, 1983, 37-47).

³¹ Cfr. C. BONA, *Le «Amicizie»*, cit., 283.

³² Regarding the spirituality of Lanteri and his relationship with Diessbach see also A. BRUSTOLON, *Alle origini della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria Vergine. Punti chiari e punti oscuri*, Turin 1995, in particular pages 82-90.

³³ Cf. J. DE GUIBERT, *La spiritualità della Compagnia di Gesù. Saggio storico*, Rome, 1992, 386-387.

³⁴ Regarding «predicabili» in this period of the history of Italian spirituality see G. TUNINETTI, *Predicabili: nell'otto-novecento*, in *Dizionario di omiletica*, edited by M. Sodi and A.M. Triacca, Leumann-Gorle 2002, 1172-1177.

³⁵ Cf. *Enchiridion clericorum* nn. 139 ss; G. NICOLAI, *Il buon rettore del seminario*, Turin, 1863.

The construction of the sanctuary of Saint Ignatius³⁶ at about 920 metres above sea level, a short distance from the town of Lanzo, and about forty kilometres north-west of Turin, had been completed in 1727 by the Jesuits who since 1677 had become the proprietors of a small chapel where the Saint³⁷ was venerated and of the surrounding land.

For the first few years there were inconveniences and material difficulties but already by 1808 the house was officially opened.

Then in 1814, Doctor Luigi Guala, who a few years earlier had been appointed Rector of the church of Saint Francis of Assisi, became the administrator of the sanctuary, nominated by the archbishop of Turin, Mons. Giacinto della Torre,³⁸ an appointment confirmed in 1836 by Mons. Fransoni.

This particular circumstance linked together the fates of the sanctuary and of the Convitto Ecclesiastico and contributed in a very practical way to the formation project of the Convitto. The retreat apostolate remained a constant reminder and provided a practical outlet for the formation programme of the Convitto and, as we shall see, for the *model* of the priest that the Convitto project was setting out to form.

In addition, the Regulations of the Convitto made the provision that each scholastic year concluded with the Exercises at the Sanctuary of Saint Ignatius³⁹; it will be precisely at the end of his first year at the Convitto that for the first time Don Bosco will make his Exercises at Saint Ignatius.

In this way the Convitto and the Sanctuary of Saint Ignatius acquire a central role in the theological formation and in the spiritual life of the Piedmontese clergy in the eighteenth hundreds. Saint Ignatius, in particular, was almost the beating heart of the whole diocese of Turin during the difficult years of the Italian Risorgimento.

On the death of Guala it was Cafasso, who already a number of years earlier had begun his apostolate giving the exercises at the sanctuary, who also took on their organisation. «That his preaching had great success, Don Lucio Casto informs us «is commonly affirmed by

³⁶ For these and other historical accounts of the sanctuary see: G. TUNINETTI, *Il Santuario di Sant' Ignazio presso Lanzo. Religiosità, vita ecclesiale e devozione (1622 - 1991)*, Pinerolo (TO) 1992; F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888)*, Turin 1996, 160-163; *Storia del Santuario di Sant' Ignazio di Loyola presso Lanzo Torinese*, Turin, 1894; L. NICOLIS DI ROBILANT, *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso*, II, Turin 1912, 265-273.

³⁷ In 1622 Ignatius was declared a saint. Six years later in the village of Mezenile in the Val di Lanzo a novena to the saint put an end to a dangerous invasion of wolves; the following year a woman from a nearby hamlet had a mysterious apparition which was repeated in the place where later the sanctuary of Saint Ignatius would be built. As the result of popular devotion, a small chapel dedicated to Saint Ignatius was constructed there which became the site of many pilgrimages and of various extraordinary events attributed to the intercession of the saint (cf. L. NICOLIS DI ROBILANT, *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso*, II, cit., 264-268).

³⁸ In an appendix to the text of Giacomo Colombero already quoted it is also possible to find the *Norms for the direction of the Spiritual Exercises in the sanctuary of Saint Ignatius*, compiled by Doctor Guala himself (367-379). It is easy to see the many similarities between these Regulations and those compiled by Don Rua, immediately after the third General Chapter of the Salesians (1883) which had devoted considerable time to the subject of retreats. The text of the manuscript is made up of thirteen large pages and contains many corrections by Don Bosco himself (cf. G. BUCCELLATO, *Gli esercizi spirituali nell'esperienza di Don Bosco e alle origini della società di San Francesco di Sales*, in M. KO (ed.), *È tempo di ravvivare il fuoco*, Rome 2000, 128-132).

³⁹ G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit. 361.

many witnesses: many times, there was not sufficient accommodation at Saint Ignatius for all those who asked to make the Spiritual Exercises with him.»⁴⁰

2. THE FORMATION PLAN OF THE CONVITTO: CONTENTS AND METHOD

After having considered the origin and the requirements which were at the basis of life at the Convitto, we shall now try to summarise the main features of its « formation plan». It seems to us that it is possible to identify at least three of its principal *ingredients*:

- the study of *practical moral theology*;
- exercises in sacred eloquence;
- practice in the apostolate.

We shall look at them one by one trying to bring out in an analytical manner the *methodology* adopted and the contents considered.

2.1 The study of practical moral theology

The more immediate objective of the lectures in moral theology was the preparation needed to exercise the ministry of hearing confessions; during their stay at the Convitto, the young priests took only one examination, that required to obtain faculties to hear confessions.

Relying on the Regulations and on the testimony of those at the Convitto, we can state that the lectures on moral theology were normally two: one in the morning about 11.00 and another in the evening at 19.00 which concluded with a « confession practice.»⁴¹ The morning lecture was reserved for the Convitto residents and given by the *tutor*; the evening lecture was a public one and was given by Guala (until 1844) while Cafasso, who before succeeding Guala was the *tutor* of moral theology, at the end of the evening lecture generally took the part of the penitent in the *role play* situation of a confession.⁴²

The official text adopted, or we really ought to say imposed, for the Turin lectures was the *Commentaria theologiae moralis* of Antonio Giuseppe Alasia,⁴³ with a probabilioristic bent, or his compendium in four volumes, edited by the Turinese Angelo Stuardi, entitled *Theologia Moralis breviori ac faciliori methodo in quattuor tomos distribuita*,⁴⁴ familiarly called *Alasiotto*; but the text of Alasia, used at the Convitto, was presented and explained in *Alphonsian* terms.

⁴⁰ L. CASTO, *Introduzione alle Meditazioni al clero*, in G. CAFASSO, *Esercizi spirituali al clero. Meditazioni*, Turin 2003, 36.

⁴¹ G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit., 359.

⁴² Cf. M. ROSSINO, *Gli inizi del Convitto ecclesiastico di S. Francesco d'Assisi*, chap. IV, B, 1, b. This is a piece of research never published which attempts to reconstruct the history of the first thirty years of this institution. A copy of chapters IV and V of this study, in particular, which deal with the life and the priestly ideal of the Convitto, were kindly made available to the author for his consultation; since this copy does not have page numbers as we need to we shall refer to them by chapter and paragraph.

⁴³ Antonio Giuseppe Alasia (1731-1812) was the Capo delle Conferenze di Teologia Morale a Torino dal 1761. In 1783 he had begun a detailed treatise of Moral Theology in 10 volumes, a work completed more than twenty years later.

⁴⁴ The text was published for the first time in the years 1826-1827 in Turin by the Alliana and Paravia Press.

In fact, already in 1828 Doctor Guala had sent a query to Rome in an attempt to obtain an official reply from the Holy See which would declare that the teaching of Alphonsus de' Liguori, who in fact had been beatified in 1816, was *sound and appropriate*. However, his request did not receive any reply.⁴⁵

The spirit of the work of Alphonsus had not had much following among Piedmontese moralists. «The prevalence of the rigourist moral approach in Piedmont» – according to the opinion of Francis Desramaut, biographer and distinguished scholar of the Convitto student John Bosco – «can be explained in part, we believe, without the need to have recourse to Jansenist origins, but starting from the reform of studies in favour of Thomism and Augustinism, a reform which led to the affirmation of a demanding probabiliorism.»⁴⁶

The work of Alphonsus which would probably be most suitable for a course of preparation for the ministry of confession is the *Homo apostolicus* which Pio Brunone Lanteri had distributed widely in Piedmont,⁴⁷ at great effort and cost.⁴⁸

In any case, the organisation of life at the Convitto tended to form a pastor of souls «benign in teaching and kindly in bearing.»⁴⁹

The main aim arising from the moral theological thinking of Alphonsus,⁵⁰ in fact, is that of never discouraging the penitent, while at the same time never neglecting the role of “interpreting” - that of the judge.⁵¹ «Then as regards the theological system» attests Don Reviglio at the process for Cafasso «whether he said he was more in favour of probabilism or probabiliorism, it is certain that he adopted that which in the circumstances best promoted the glory of God, the conversion of sinners, the perfection of devout souls; so that without being attached to a single opinion, he declared that he would have been ready at any time to change his way of seeing things if that would have been to the benefit of his penitents.»⁵²

From a methodological point of view, in ordinary circumstances the lecture was developed

⁴⁵ Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps*, cit., 148.

⁴⁶ F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps*, cit., 148 [our translation].

⁴⁷ According to Giuseppe Cacciatore «it is impossible to calculate even approximately the number of the works of Saint Alphonsus which (Lanteri) distributed, especially of his *Homo apostolicus*. It can be said that all the various editions of this work and of other ascetical and polemical works of Liguori, which were published in Piedmont between 1790 and 1830 were the result of the efforts and the financial support of Lanteri and of his three friends» (G. CACCIATORE, *S. Alfonso de' Liguori e il giansenismo*, Florence, 1942, 430).

⁴⁸ Cfr. F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps*, cit., 174.

⁴⁹ P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, I, Rome, 2003, 163. Gioberti in *Gesuita moderno* accuses the Convitto of *laxism* as well as of *Jesuitism* (Cf. V. GIOBERTI, *Il gesuita moderno*, IV, Naples 1848, 279-281). In fact, the position of the Convitto, and of Cafasso in particular, is a moderate one and if sometimes it seems to tend more towards probabilism than to probabiliorism that is only in comparison with the dominant rigourist position.

⁵⁰ This approach can be linked to the spirituality of Saint Ignatius. «Don't let anyone go away with feelings of bitterness» Saint Ignatius had written to Simone Rodriguez. In the second rule on the discernment of spirits in the first week of the *Exercises* we read: «It is precisely the work of a good spirit to give courage and energy, consolation and tears, inspirations and serenity, reducing and removing every difficulty so as to go ahead on the path of good».

⁵¹ According to Saint Alphonsus «the duties that a good confessor ought to carry out are four in number: they are those of the father, of the doctor, the teacher and the judge» (quoted in F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps*, cit., 149).

⁵² This testimony is provided in M. ROSSINO, *Gli inizi del Convitto*, cit., chap. V, 5, b.

with references to a study of Rossino, according to a predetermined scheme. «A prayer having been said, the text of Alasia or the compendium edited by Stuardi was read; it appears that the reading of the text was entrusted to one of the students of the Convitto. Then the text was explained yet without going on for too long. One or more cases were put forward. The opinions of those present were requested. The lecturer offered some clarifications and then gave the final solution. At least once a fortnight a case was presented to be solved in writing [...]. The public lecture had a further element which was a practical exercise in hearing confessions. »⁵³

A curiosity: some witnesses affirm that in the public lectures Cafasso was wont to use the Piedmontese dialect to make himself better understood by his listeners.⁵⁴

2.2 Exercises in Sacred Eloquence

This is another key element in the formation programme of the Convitto, and the Regulations declare «some exercise and preparation for the pulpit should be always considered necessary for young Ecclesiastics before they find themselves obliged by their office to preach; and therefore our Archbishops have already issued some provisions in this regard.»⁵⁵

While not being its absolute priority, the school of eloquence is a vital part of the formation programme of the Convitto, especially as regards the experience of the Ignatian exercises. It does not surprise us therefore to find the names of the Jesuits Minini,⁵⁶ Grossi, Sagrini among the teachers of eloquence at the Convitto, in particular in the years prior to the time when Cafasso was Rector.⁵⁷

From the testimonies of some former students of the Convitto, it is possible to deduce that it was not only a matter of lessons of theory, there were also «exercises in the pulpit,» for which a theme was offered and which had then to be written up and assessed by the teachers and sometimes also by their companions.⁵⁸ «He used to assign a sermon topic» Colombero writes «or part of a sermon to be written within a fortnight and to be read out in public at the

⁵³ M. ROSSINO, *Gli inizi del Convitto*, cit., chap. IV, B, 1, d.

⁵⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, chap. IV, B, 1, e.

⁵⁵ G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit., 357. The first of the decrees referred to here is, probably, a letter of Mons. Della Torre dated 26 November 1811, republished, as the Salesian Fr Pietro Stella tells us, the following year with some clarifications (P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, II, cit., 26). In the previous pages Fr Pietro Stella also tells us about the institution, in 1816, of a Chair of Eloquence at the University of Turin. The letter is almost entirely dedicated to preaching, «the importance of which –Tuninetti declares– is emphasised by the setting up in the seminary of a three year course of practical moral theology and of eloquence, compulsory for the clergy after the quinquennium of theology» (G. TUNINETTI, *Predicazione nell'Otto-Novecento in Dizionario di Omiletica*, M. SODI - A. M. TRIACCA (ed.), cit., 2002, 1240).

⁵⁶ Father Ferdinando Minini preached the instructions in the first retreats in which in 1842 the young John Bosco took part at the end of his first year at the Convitto (cf. *The Biographical Memoirs of St John Bosco, by Fr JB Lemoyne etc. Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York 1967 - II, 96.*) From now on we shall use BM for the English version and where necessary MB for the original Italian text.)

⁵⁷ Cf. M. ROSSINO, *Gli inizi del Convitto*, cit., chap. IV, II, B, 2, b.

⁵⁸ *L.c.* In the Archives of the Generalate of the Salesians there are some exercises written by Don Giovanni Bosco during the years he spent at the Convitto (1841-1844). Many of the topics dealt with have a distinctly Ignatian background (*Introduzione agli Esercizi Spirituali, la morte, il peccato, fine dell'uomo, i due Stendardi, la comunione frequente...*). Cf. ACS A 225.

Conference, on Saturday unless I am mistaken.»⁵⁹

To understand the importance given to the ministry of preaching by Cafasso who gradually also took on responsibility for the lessons in eloquence, we have at our disposal an *instruction* which he prepared for a retreat for the clergy entirely devoted to this topic. Far from focusing primarily on the *form* rather than the *content*⁶⁰ or from considering sacred eloquence as a purely oratorical art, Cafasso insisted that the sermons were not to be abstract but practical and connected to the situations of his listeners.

«Let us leave aside that which never or hardly ever can happen to our people» – he writes in this instruction – «and apply ourselves as much as we can to the virtues, the sins and the ordinary daily defects, to prayer, the sacraments, to peace, to sufferings in the family [...]; and deal with these points in a suitable and practical way so that everyone can see in themselves the picture the preacher is describing, helping them to see in what the evil consists and teaching them the way to overcome it.»⁶¹

While the moralising tone is evident, so too is the concern to avoid a certain style of intellectual speculative preaching remote from the lives of those listening. At the same time in this instruction of Cafasso there is a certain pleasant tone of optimism and exhortation to encourage the listener rather than worry him by presenting virtue and holiness as unattainable.

«I don't know why» Cafasso writes, «but we preachers are accustomed and more inclined to speak more often and more willingly about the difficulties the law of the Lord can present, and to highlight the efforts needed to observe it rather than to seek to smooth out the difficulties that are to be encountered in it [...] Hence, 'it is difficult to observe the commandments, difficult to make a good confession, difficult to receive Holy Communion well, even difficult to hear Mass with devotion, difficult to pray as one should, above all difficult to save one's soul, there being few who are saved.' And what happens on account of so many difficulties, if not exaggerated or magnified at least frequently repeated? Good people become worried and discouraged, the bad ones lose hope and almost think no more about it.»⁶²

2.3 Exercises in the apostolate

Another of the formative elements in the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin is provided by the opportunities offered to the young priests for «directed» apostolic activities in particularly difficult situations, experiences which greatly enhanced their human and spiritual qualities and at the same time gave them guidance in the choice of the apostolate most suited to themselves in view of a definitive commitment.

The aim of Cafasso was twofold. «In addition to educating his disciples for the priestly life» Colombero explains– «our wise teacher made another great effort in the direction of the Convitto and that was the study of the students, their characters, their dispositions, their inclinations so as to be able to assign them a suitable placement after the two years of lectures. And this he did both in private conversations and in the fifteen minutes of recreation

⁵⁹ G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit., 89.

⁶⁰ Cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Predicazione nell'Otto-Novecento*, cit., 1241.

⁶¹ The text is given by Lucio Casto in *Gli Esercizi Spirituali al clero di San Giuseppe Cafasso*, in *Archivio Teologico Torinese* I (1995) 496.

⁶² *Ibidem* 496-497.

he spent with us, either sitting at table or elsewhere in the course of the year.»⁶³ The best way of getting to know these young men, of guiding them, of discerning with them, therefore, was simply sharing their everyday lives.

3. THE FATHER OF OUR FATHER

Joseph Cafasso was born on 11 January 1811 at Castelnuovo d'Asti, the same hamlet which about four years later would be the birth place of Don Bosco.⁶⁴

Physically frail, «slightly-built, bright-eyed, kindly and angelic,»⁶⁵ Cafasso was one of the first students at the new seminary in Chieri in 1827.

In 1833, immediately after being ordained a priest he entered the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin, first as a student then as an assistant lecturer and teacher of moral theology⁶⁶ and finally as Rector after the death of Doctor Guala in 1848. He held this position until his death on 22 June 1860.

In addition to the teaching of moral theology he devoted himself in particular to ministering to prisoners and those condemned to death and to preaching the spiritual exercises to the clergy and laity; this latter fundamental aspect of his priestly apostolate was to have repercussions on the spiritual and apostolic experience of Don Bosco.

Cafasso meticulously kept his notes in a number of exercise books but published nothing; a nephew of his Canon Giuseppe Allamano,⁶⁷ at the beginning of the last century for pastoral

⁶³ G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit., 93-94.

⁶⁴ For a biographical and spiritual study of Cafasso see: *Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Josephi Cafasso sacerdotis saecularis collegii ecclesiastici taurinensis moderatoris...*, 5 vv., Rome 1906-1922; G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del Servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso*, Turin 1895; L.N. DI ROBILANT, *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso*, 2 vv., Turin 1912; L. ZANZI, *Lo spirito interiore del beato Giuseppe Cafasso : proposto ai sacerdoti e ai militanti nell'Azione cattolica*, Bassano del Grappa 1928; C. SALOTTI, *Il santo Giuseppe Cafasso. La perla del clero italiano*, Turin 1947³; A. GRAZIOLI, *La pratica dei confessori nello spirito di san Giuseppe Cafasso*, Colle Don Bosco (AT) 1953; F. ACCORNERO, *La dottrina spirituale di san Giuseppe Cafasso*, Turin 1958; AA.VV., *San Giuseppe Cafasso maestro e modello del clero*, Chieri 1960; AA.VV., *Morale e pastorale alla luce di san Giuseppe Cafasso*, Torino 1961; L. MUGNAI, *S. Giuseppe Cafasso prete torinese*, Siena 1972; S. QUINZIO, *Domande sulla santità : Don Bosco, Cafasso, Cottolengo*, Turin 1986; G. BUCCELLATO (ed.), *San Giuseppe Cafasso. Il direttore spirituale di Don Bosco*, Rome 2008. To be consulted also: the introductions to the critical editions of the *Edizione Nazionale delle opere di San Giuseppe Cafasso*. These are six volumes recently published by the Effata press in Turin, between 2002 and 2009: *Esercizi spirituali al clero. Meditazioni, Missioni al popolo. Meditazioni, Predicazione varia al popolo. Istruzione e discorsi, Epistolario e testamento, Esercizi spirituali al clero. Istruzioni, Scritti di morale*.

⁶⁵ The description comes from Don Bosco himself in MO 47.

⁶⁶ For 24 years Cafasso occupied the chair of *practical moral theology* having as the essential foundation of his approach the teaching of Saint Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori, at a time when the predominant official teaching was still rigorous. «An eminently practical apostle, he did not set out to found a “school” of moral theology, nor endorse one system more than another, even though, in order to keep faith with his resolution to seek with all means the salvation of souls, he was happy to accept probabilism.» (DEPARTMENT OF FORMATION, *Sussidi 2*, Rome 1988, 246).

⁶⁷ Blessed Giuseppe Allamano, who was Rector of the Sanctuary of the Consolata in Turin and of the Convitto Ecclesiastico and the Founder of the Consolata Foreign Missions, was the son of a sister of Cafasso. As he himself was to testify during the cause of beatification, he saw his uncle only once when he was six. In addition

motives published some volumes of meditations and instructions for the people and the clergy.⁶⁸

Starting in 2002 a critical edition of the writings of Cafasso was begun. In the *Edizione Nazionale delle opere di San Giuseppe Cafasso*, with the contributions of some prominent Turin scholars six volumes have already been published of meditations, instructions, conferences, and lessons of the saint from Castelnuovo. These volumes are an indispensable means to understand the kind of priest and Christian Cafasso was attempting to form. «Here more than anywhere» Don Lucio Casto President of the Academic Commission which produced this *Edizione Nazionale* declares « clearly emerge the thoughts of Cafasso about the priest, about who he is and what he does, and at the same time quite clearly a delicate critique of other models or styles of priestly life not just imagined by Cafasso, but alive and to be found in his time.»⁶⁹

3.1 The gift of Counsel⁷⁰

The influence exercised by the teaching and the pastoral zeal of Saint Joseph Cafasso on the Turin clergy was profound. Although his field of action might appear limited to the students at the Convitto, as the Salesian Don Flavio Accornero declared he was a teacher of priests and therefore, «multiplied» his influence on the Piedmontese Church:

«He was a man capable of opposing evil » Accornero writes «and of fighting the Lord's battles carrying out with undescrivable zeal his activities on behalf of souls as a priest and as a teacher of priests. Precisely having worked in a restricted and closed field such as the confessional, the pulpit and the Convitto meant Cafasso had an undisputable impact, since his work was multiplied through others: one could say the whole Piedmontese clergy had in him an inspirer and animator along new paths, all the directors of souls had him as their director. So his teaching, his words, his ideas passed from priest to priest, from parish to parish, from soul to soul ... Therefore it is possible to identify a flourishing mass of former students, of the founders of religious institutions, marked by their ascetical and moral qualities and the seeds of holiness. How much is there of Cafasso in their work and in their holiness? Certainly, many features drawn from the source which was Cafasso are channelled into the lives of these men who represent the most spiritually distinguished personalities of the world of Piedmont and who in their gigantic spiritual stature prove the quality and the strength of the seed from which

to information gathered in the family his testimony was based on the sermons and the observations of Don Bosco whom he had known during the four years he spent at the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales, where he did his secondary school studies (cf. *Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Josephi Cafasso...*, *Positio super introductione causae*, 9-10). Regarding the Servand of God see I. TUBALDO, *Giuseppe Allamano, Il suo tempo, la sua opera*, Turin 1982.

⁶⁸ Cf. G. CAFASSO, *Meditazioni per esercizi spirituali al clero. Pubblicate per cura del Can. Giuseppe Allamano*, Canonica, Turin 1892; G. CAFASSO, *Istruzioni per esercizi spirituali al clero. Pubblicate per cura del can. Giuseppe Allamano*, Turin 1893; G. CAFASSO, *Sacre missioni al popolo*, Turin 1923. These writings form part of the collection in five volumes of the *Opere complete* published in Turin by the International Institute-College of the Consolata for the Foreign Missions between 1923 and 1925.

⁶⁹ L. CASTO, *Gli Esercizi Spirituali al clero di San Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit., 483. In this article Casto points out, consistent with this premise, some negative impressions of the priest as Cafasso labelled them, such as the *lazy priest*, doing nothing and living a comfortable life, or the *amphibious priest*, that is to say one who casually passes from the duties of his ministry to secular or wordly pursuits (cf. 490-491).

⁷⁰ The gift of counsel is considered in Catholic tradition one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit; the other six are: *wisdom, understanding, fortitude, knowledge, piety and the fear of the Lord*. This term gives us an important key to the understanding of the real nature of the relationship in *spiritual accompaniment*, that is accompaniment *in, through and with* the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who assists both those involved in the relationship.

they grew.»⁷¹

The first two biographies of Cafasso, the one by Colombero (1895) and that by Di Robilant (1912) devote many pages to what is called the *gift of counsel*.⁷²

«Counselling those in doubt», the first one writes, «is one of the most beautiful works of mercy, but not everyone can do it: in order to exercise it a special approach is needed. This approach our servant of God possessed to the highest degree, as those who knew him attest unanimously. His disposition was the result of serious studies which he never stopped, from a certain natural facility in applying the theory to particular cases, from a profound experience of men and of reality, from a refined intuition that never failed him, from the ability to penetrate hearts, from a certain inexplicable supernatural intuition, with which a loving Providence had endowed him.»⁷³

The biography by Di Robilant, in particular, mentions among the many disciples who benefited from Cafasso's gifts of discernment, bishops, priests, founders, men of every rank and class; among the founders, in particular, the biographer refers in addition to Father Aglesio, the first successor of Cottolengo, the well-known Marquess Giulietta Falletti di Barolo, Don Giovanni Cocchi, Domenico Sartori, founder of the Daughters of St Clare, Francesco Faà di Bruno, the theologian Gaspare Saccarelli, founder of the Institute of the Holy Family, Francesco Bono, founder of the Sisters of Santo Natale, Clemente Marchisio, founder of the Daughters of Saint Joseph and Lorenzo Prinotti, founder of the Institute of the Poor Deaf and Dumb⁷⁴; and finally our Don Bosco, to whose relationship with Cafasso Di Robilant devotes a whole chapter.⁷⁵

«As well as doctor» –Di Robilant writes – «community principal, confessor and apostle the Venerable was then described as *Vir consiliorum*. “In fact, it is well-known” it was written of him after his death, “that both in the Capital and elsewhere, whoever among the clergy or the laity was looking for good advice regarding the conduct of his life [...] used to go to Don Cafasso as to a safe spring.” “Starting with the Bishops and going through all the levels of society and right down to those that the world considers insignificant [...] they all used to find in him that word which although lacking human force, was marked with the divine seal of truth and adapted to all social levels.”»⁷⁶

Among the many observations and testimonies illuminating the person of Cafasso as a spiritual director and depositary of the gift of *counsel*, we shall limit ourselves to emphasising two features:

- the *gift* of reading «the heart of the one who was speaking to him.» Di Robilant, reporting the testimony of P. Bargetto says: «Everyone used to say [...] that Don Cafasso knew people's innermost thoughts before they had finished speaking to him. Many of these indeed used to say that he could read the hearts and feelings of those who had recourse to him »⁷⁷.

⁷¹ F. ACCORNERO, *La dottrina spirituale di san Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit., 155. 157.

⁷² In the work of Colombero referred to we find a chapter entitled *Don Cafasso e il dono del consiglio* (pages 167-187), and in Di Robilant Book VI entitled *Il consigliere*, subdivided into chapters: *Dono del consiglio, I Vescovi, I Parrochi, I Sacerdoti, I Chierici, I Fondatori, Don Giovanni Bosco, Le famiglie cristiane, Le persone di servizio*, for a total of 76 pages (149-225).

⁷³ G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del Servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit., 166.

⁷⁴ Cf. L.N. DI ROBILANT, *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso*, II, cit., 202-208.

⁷⁵ Cf. *ibidem* 208-230.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem* 149-150. The two quotations given are taken from two newspapers of the time, *L'armonia and Il campanile*..

⁷⁷ *Ibidem* 152.

- Another characteristic of Cafasso's accompaniment was his authority: «The answers given by our Venerable, in addition to being clear, prompt and decisive were also eminently authoritative [...]. With such certainty allied to the other gifts no room was left for hesitation in those who questioned him; and so his replies while they brought serenity of heart were considered an oracle by those who had sought them.»⁷⁸ «From this belief » – the biographer later adds - «that he was assisted by supernatural insight in giving advice, there then came that compliance mentioned above in those who turned to him.»⁷⁹

3.2 Don Cafasso and Don Bosco

Joseph Cafasso (1811) and John Bosco (1815) were both born, only a few years apart, at Castelnuovo d'Asti, which in 1817 became part of the diocese of Turin. Both were students at the philosophical-theological seminary in Chieri; the first in the three year period 1830-1833 (the year of his ordination; Cafasso was 22 years of age...) and the second in the years 1835-1841.

Their first meeting is recorded in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* by Don Bosco himself, more than forty five years after the event. According to the recollections of the author of the *Memoirs*, it was the second Sunday of the month of October 1827; the inhabitants of Murialdo, a fraction/hamlet of Castelnuovo d'Asti, were celebrating the feast of the Motherhood of Mary. Don Bosco writes:

«There was a great air of activity about the place; some were preparing the church, others engaged in family chores; some were playing games, others looking on. One person I noticed was taking no part in the festivities. He was a slightly-built, bright-eyed cleric, kindly and pure in appearance. He was leaning against the church door. Though I was only twelve years old, I was struck by his appearance and felt I would like to meet him. I went over and spoke to him. "Father," I said, "would you care to see what's going on at our feast? I'd like to act as your guide." He kindly beckoned me closer. He asked me how old I was, what studies I had done, if I had made my first communion, how often I went to confession, where I went to catechism, and so on. I was spellbound by his manner of speaking and answered all his questions without hesitation. To show my gratitude for his friendliness, I once more offered to show him round the various entertainments and novelties. "My dear friend," he replied, "the entertainments of a priest are church ceremonies. The more devoutly they are celebrated, the more pleasurable do they turn out for us. The new attractions are the practices of religion. These are ever new and therefore should be diligently attended. I'm only waiting for the church to open so I can go in." I plucked up my courage to add to the discussion. "But Father," I suggested, "though what you say is true, there's a time for everything, a time to pray and a time to play." He smiled. But I have never forgotten his parting words, which were his plan of action for his whole life: "A cleric gives himself to the Lord. Nothing in the world must be more important to him than the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.»⁸⁰

It is almost unnecessary to emphasise that the recollections of Don Bosco are offered to a Congregation scarcely begun to serve «as a record to help people overcome problems that may come in the future », and «as a pledge of fatherly affection»⁸¹. The austere view which emerges from Cafasso's final comment is a clear hint from Don Bosco for his Salesians.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem* 153.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem* 156.

⁸⁰ MO 47-48. In fact the meeting would have taken place in 1829, according to a study by the Salesians Klein and Valentini (cf. J. KLEIN – E. VALENTINI, *Una rettificazione cronologica delle «Memorie di San Giovanni Bosco»*, in *Salesianum* 17 (1955) 3-4, 581-610).

⁸¹ MO 30.

The influence exercised by the personality of Cafasso on Don Bosco, four and a half years younger than him, was decisive. In this regard Don Bosco himself leaves us in no doubt: «If I have been able to do any good, I owe it to this worthy priest.»⁸²

The relationship between the two saints was described as follows by the Salesian John Cagliero, who was then Archbishop of Sebaste and Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia, at the process for the beatification of Cafasso:

«Our Ven. D. Bosco had for the Ven. Cafasso an altogether special veneration, that was intimate and united to a holy affection which linked him and made him a humble disciple in the face of the goodness and holiness of his great teacher, and during 20 years he had him as his spiritual director, his supreme confidant and advisor. We who used to have for D. Bosco the highest esteem of his goodness and his virtues combined with the greatest affection and the deepest veneration for his holiness, came to an even greater appreciation of the goodness, virtues and holiness of his Master Don Cafasso. And I myself in the few situations in which I had occasion to meet with the Ven. Cafasso, having heard his warm exhortations, I was persuaded of the truth of what Don Bosco had told us,»⁸³

In this regard Fr Eugenio Valentini wrote in the presentation to the new edition of the *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso*,⁸⁴ on the occasion of the centenary of his death in 1960:

«Humanly speaking, without St. Joseph Cafasso, we would not have had St. John Bosco, and probably we would not have had the Salesian Congregation either. He it was who advised him, guided him in his choice of his state of life, trained him at the Convitto Ecclesiastico, and then directed him, defended him and supported him in the difficult moments of his life. The spirituality of the Master was passed on in large measure to the Disciple, and we today reading these pages again a century later can easily recognise the interconnection and one might say the fusion of these two spiritualities. This in fact is the main characteristic of this documentation. Don Cafasso was for Don Bosco the Teacher, the Spiritual Director, the Confessor, the Benefactor *par excellence*. Now this deep personal influential relationship lasting for thirty years could not fail to leave its mark – and what a mark! – on the life of the disciple. This is the first reason objectively speaking why the spirituality of Cafasso was passed on to St John Bosco.»⁸⁵

It would be useful to look briefly at some episodes and occasions when these two saints were together in order to arrive at a clearer appreciation of how decisive in the life of Don Bosco this «deep personal influential relationship » of which Fr Valentini⁸⁶ speaks would be. We shall try to recall at least some of the fundamental stages.

After the first meeting most probably in 1829, the guidance and the support of Fr Cafasso were decisive, as Don Bosco remembered them, in some *discernment* situations and in particular:

- in the decision not to give up studies so as to be able to embrace the ecclesiastical state (cf. MO 48; BM I, 215);
- in the decision not to enter the novitiate of the Friars Minor of Our Lady of the Angels

⁸² MO 101.

⁸³ Taurinen. *Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Josephi Cafasso... Positio super introductione causae*, 482.

⁸⁴ The full reference is G. BOSCO, *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri*, Turin 1860.

⁸⁵ E. VALENTINI, *Presentazione in San Giuseppe Cafasso. Memorie pubblicate nel 1860 da San Giovanni Bosco*, Turin 1960, 6.

⁸⁶ For a summary of the main events see pages 208-230 of the second volume already mentioned *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso* by Di Robilant and the biography by Colombo *Vita del Servo di Dio...* on pages 188-198.

(cf. BM I, 229);

- in the decision to enter the seminary in Chieri (cf. BM I, 230);
- in dispelling the doubts prior to taking the clerical habit and to requesting to be admitted to orders (cf. BM I, 271-2; MO 95);
- in the decision to enter the Convitto Ecclesiastico immediately after priestly ordination (cf. MO 100; BM II, 30-31) and the *first Mass* celebrated by Don Bosco in the church of Saint Francis of Assisi attached to the Convitto Ecclesiastico where Cafasso was «dean of the conferences» (cf. MO 95);
- in guiding his first steps of pastoral experience (cf. MO 101. 106. 108);
- in dissuading him from the decision to leave for the missions and to «enter the religious life» with the Oblates of the Virgin Mary at the end of a retreat;⁸⁷
- in contributing to guiding the general direction of his apostolic life including the apostolate of *good books*;⁸⁸
- in the guidance given regarding some of the particular projects of the developing Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales.⁸⁹

Don Bosco's affection, esteem and gratitude to his teacher and benefactor are shown in the deep suffering occasioned by his death⁹⁰ and by his desire to preserve and to perpetuate his memory.

The Servant of God Giuseppe Allamano declares:

«On the basis of the suggestions made to me by the Servant of God D.Giovanni Bosco, a year before his death, aimed at preserving the memory of the Venerable I sent a circular letter to all the people I believed to have had contacts with him in order to collect information about his life. I then gave the records of these memories Canon Colombero, the curate at St.Barbara in Turin.»⁹¹

Colombero's biography, as has already been said, was the first real, documented biography of Cafasso. Before him, for a long time Don Bosco had cherished the idea of writing one, so the nephew confirmed, also saying that it had not come to fruition, according to the saint, because of the mysterious disappearance of some documents he had collected in a cupboard at the Oratory.⁹²

3.3 The 1860 Biography of the priest Giuseppe Cafasso

On 23 June 1860 Don Cafasso died. At that time Don Bosco was almost forty five years old.

Two weeks later in the church of the Oratory, with a voice that was often interrupted by his emotion,⁹³ he celebrated a Mass of suffrage. About two months later, the thirtieth of August, another Mass was celebrated in the church of Saint Francis of Assisi, attached to the Convitto Ecclesiastico; on that occasion too Don Bosco gave the eulogy.

⁸⁷ Cf. MB II, 159; L.N. DI ROBILANT, *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe*, cit., 215-216.

⁸⁸ Cf. L.N. DI ROBILANT, *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso*, II, cit., 222.

⁸⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, 216-221. From the beginning Don Cafasso supported Don Bosco's work not only spiritually but also as a generous benefactor. At his death Cafasso was still the owner of a part of the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales which he bequeathed to Don Bosco, together with a sum of money as well as cancelling all debts (cf. G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del Servo di Dio D.Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit., 198).

⁹⁰ Cf. E. VALENTINI, *Presentazione in San Giuseppe Cafasso. Memorie pubblicate...*, cit., 30-32.

⁹¹ *Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Josephi Cafasso... Positio super introductione causae*, 10.

⁹² He was told this secret by Don Bosco himself near to death (cf. E. VALENTINI, *Presentazione in San Giuseppe Cafasso. Memorie pubblicate...*, cit., 33-34).

⁹³ Cf. D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. n. 1, 1860, 10.

At the end of the year the two sermons were put together in a pamphlet of the Catholic Readings. Don Bosco added an introduction, the public notices announcing the death of his teacher, some devotions favoured by Cafasso, and promised, on a later occasion to work on a proper biography.

The frequency and the depth of the relations between these two saints obliges us to approach these pages with particular care.

«Who are you, I ask myself» –Don Bosco says at one point – «who presumes to narrate the feats of this hero? Don't you know that his most beautiful actions are known only to God?»⁹⁴

In spite of this premise, it is precisely on this «private» life that Don Bosco shows he wants to focus the attention of the reader. «By this private life I mean in particular the practice of hidden virtues in his everyday life, those things which for the most part are scarcely seen by the eyes of the world but which are perhaps the most meritorious in God's sight.»⁹⁵

What is most striking in these two addresses is Don Bosco's ability to identify in the spiritual experience of Cafasso, that special combination of apostolic charity and asceticism, of untiring work and of prayer.

Regarding Cafasso's youth our author notes: «With what diligence he went to church, took part in the sacred ceremonies, received the sacraments! What marvels followed. He went to listen to the word of God and then repeated it to his companions and friends. He worked but his labours were interspersed with short prayers, acts of patience, the constant offering of his heart to God.»⁹⁶

To heroic charity Don Cafasso joined a profound spirit of prayer:

«D.Caffasso devoted himself tirelessly to the study of Bible History, Church History, to Patrology, to theology - moral, dogmatic, ascetical, mystical, to preaching, preparing cases for the course for parish priests, conducting the examinations for faculties for confession, and yet whenever I came into this church I found him on his knees praying before the Lady altar, then prostrate in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, or else in the confessional with a long line of the faithful anxious to tell him of their anxieties of conscience and to receive from him advice about good living. You might go to the sanctuary of the Consolata, and you would see D. Cafasso at his devotions; visit the church where there was the Forty Hours and there too see him prostrate pouring out his loving thoughts to his beloved Jesus.»⁹⁷

On the same subject in the first funeral address one can read: «And so in the bitter winter cold, even when suffering from aches and pains in his stomach, his head, his teeth, so that he could scarcely stand, before four in the morning he was on his knees praying, meditating, or carrying out one of his particular occupations.»⁹⁸

What is the «secret» of this «marvellous amount of different activities» which nevertheless did not distract the Saint in his life of prayer? Don Bosco identifies not one but five:⁹⁹ his constant calm, his long experience in many affairs, together with his great confidence in God, the exact and constant use of time, his temperance, the short time given to rest. In this regard, Don Bosco wrote:

«Don Caffasso saved time by limiting his time of sleep. The only relief he gave during the day

⁹⁴ G. BOSCO, *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri*, Turin ny affairs, 1860, 18.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, 25.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 68.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, 89-90.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, 33 .

⁹⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, 91-97.

to his weak body was three quarters of an hour after his lunch, during which in his room he first of all prayed, meditated or performed some special act of piety. In the evening he was always the last to go to bed and in the morning the first to get up. His rest during the night never exceeded five hours and often it was four and sometimes only three. He used to say that a man of the Church should only wake up once during the night. With these words he let us know that once he was awake, whatever time it might be, he rose from his bed to pray meditate, or carry out some of his other business.»¹⁰⁰

These secrets which he «could not keep hidden so that they came to the notice of those who admired his holy deeds and reflected on his rare virtues,»¹⁰¹ and which provoked the grateful admiration of his disciple, enable us once again to appreciate more deeply Don Bosco's own response.¹⁰²

In this regard Don Valentini wrote in his *Biography* and concerning the *spiritual affinity* between the two saints: «There is another reason ... why we find in these pages some marvellous coincidences. It is because everyone in describing another person in good measure describes himself. We recognise in fact in others those features that strike us, in which we are particularly interested, which in some way partly reveal solutions to problems that concern us.»¹⁰³

This interesting hypothesis seems to be confirmed in some testimonies from our own tradition.

On 29 September 1926 Fr Philip Rinaldi, at the time the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation, sent to Cardinal Antonio Vico, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites a letter in which, on oath, among other things he declared:

«In his final years...every day he used to retire to his room between two and three o'clock in the, and during that hour the Superiors did not allow him to be disturbed. But since I was responsible for a formation house for aspirants to the priesthood between 1883 and the death of the Servant of God, and he had told me that I should go to see him whenever I needed to, perhaps rather indiscretely, so as to be able to approach him more easily, I broke the rule, and not only at the Oratory but also at Lanzo and at S.Benigno, where he often used to go, and at Mathi, and in the house of St. John the Evangelist in Turin several times I went to see him to talk to him at that hour. And at that time, everywhere and always, I caught him each time by surprise and found him recollected with hands joined meditating.»¹⁰⁴

The similarity is noteworthy, but, all things considered not surprising; it is only natural that the disciple should have assimilated the habits of the master into whose hands for so many years he had placed, *every decision I made, all my study, and every activity of my life.*¹⁰⁵

Also with regard to Cafasso's «nighttime habits» it is possible to find similarities in Don Bosco's life. Until he was forty-five years of age, in fact, according to a confidence he himself shared with Don Lemoyne on 5 April 1884, Don Bosco did not sleep more than five

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, 95 .

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, 92.

¹⁰² There is a curious anomaly in a quotation which Fr Juan Vecchi makes from these pages, in the letter *When you pray say «Our Father»* ... of 2001. Don Bosco writes «With these five secrets D. Caffasso found the way to undertake many varied things in a short time and in this way to bring charity to the highest degree of perfection... ». In Fr Vecchi's quotation however one reads: «With these four secrets –Don Bosco concludes – Don Caffasso found the way to undertake many varied things in a short time and in this way to bring charity to the highest degree of perfection.». The secret which «disappears» in the letter of the RM is that of his habit of praying during the night ...

¹⁰³ E. VALENTINI, *Presentazione in San Giuseppe Cafasso. Memorie pubblicate* , cit., 6-7.

¹⁰⁴ The letter, dated 29/9/1926, is attached in an appendix to the documents of the cause.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. MO 101.

hours a night, and he stayed up all night once a week;¹⁰⁶ only subsequently as ill-health began to take its toll, did he give up this demanding way of life.

Knowledge of the writings of the founder in this as in many other cases is seen to be a means, *indirect* but precious, of coming to know his spiritual experience.

4. DON BOSCO'S JUDGEMENT REGARDING THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CONVITTO

What personal effect did these three years at the Convitto have on Don Bosco? In his mature years what was his judgement? We can read it in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*:

«The Convitto Ecclesiastico completed, you might say, the study of theology. In the seminary we studied only dogma and that speculative; and in moral theology only controversial issues. Here one learnt to be a priest. Meditation, spiritual reading, two conferences a day, lessons in preaching, a secluded life, every convenience for study, reading good authors - these were the areas of learning to which we had to apply ourselves.»¹⁰⁷

In one of the first drafts of the Regulations for the Convitto the same thing can be seen: «It can be seen that even after the study of the dogmatic and speculative sciences for five years in the Seminaries, when they are ordained priests these young men know little or nothing about hearing confessions, preaching, how to behave appropriately in the world especially given the modern difficulties in exercising the ministry, for which there is need of much greater knowledge and prudence.»¹⁰⁸

The three «protagonists» in the formative experience at the Convitto, Guala, Golzio and Cafasso, are remembered by the founder of the Salesians as follows:

«At the time, two prominent men were in charge of this most useful institution: Doctor Louis Guala and Fr. Joseph Caffasso. Doctor Guala was the work's founder. An unselfish man, rich in knowledge, prudent and fearless, he was everyone's friend in the days of the regime of Napoleon I. He founded that extraordinary seedbed where young priests fresh from the seminary courses could learn the practical aspects of their sacred ministry. This proved very valuable to the Church, especially as a means of eradicating the vestiges of Jansenism that still persisted in our midst. Among other topics the most controversial was the question of Probabilism and Probabiliorism.... Doctor Guala took a strong stance between the two parties; starting from the principle that the charity of O.L.J.C. should be the inspiration of all systems, he was able to bring the two extremes together. Things came together so well that, thanks to Doctor Guala St. Alphonsus became our theological patron. This was a salutary step, long desired, and now we are reaping the benefit. Fr. Caffasso was Guala's right hand man. His virtue which withstood all tests, his amazing calm, his shrewd insight and his prudence enabled him to overcome the acrimony that was still alive in some probabiliorists against the Liguorians. Dr Felix Golzio,¹⁰⁹ a hidden gold mine among the Turinese clergy, was also at the

¹⁰⁶ G.B. LEMOYNE, , *Ricordi di gabinetto*, April 1884; he later included the contents of this in the *Biographical Memoirs* (cf. IV, 130-1). In another place Don Lemoine writes «Ardent incessant prayer kept Don Bosco always united with God. Savio Ascanio was convinced that Don Bosco kept vigil during long hours of the night and sometimes for the whole night, deep in prayer.» (BM III, 414).

¹⁰⁷ MO 99

¹⁰⁸ . AOMV [II Reg.] S. II, 255.

¹⁰⁹ Felice Golzio (1807-1873) was the spiritual director at the Convitto, where he had been a student of Cafasso, and whose confessor he became (cf. DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit., II, 196). He

Convitto. In his modest life-style he was hardly noticeable. But he was a tireless worker, humble and knowledgeable; he was a real support or better, Guala and Caffasso's right-hand man. The prisons, hospitals, pulpits, charitable institutes, the sick in their homes, the cities, the villages, and we might add, the mansions of the rich and the hovels of the poor felt the salutary effects of the zeal of these three luminaries of the Turinese clergy. These were the three models placed in my path by Divine Providence. It was just up to me to follow their example, their teaching, their virtues.»¹¹⁰

This extremely positive judgement expressed by Don Bosco in the years when the Constitutions were definitively approved (1874) and the *Society* was being consolidated indirectly provides some indications about the kind of programme regarding how «one learns to become a priest »: meditation, spiritual reading, two conferences a day, exercises in preaching, a secluded life...

Once again a re-reading of the *Memoirs of the Oratory* on this particular chronological level, that is, as an historical document enabling us to recognise the plan of priestly life proposed in his mature years to the Congregation he had founded, allows us to understand better the judgement of Don Bosco concerning a “successful” formation programme and in particular, about the role played by the life of prayer and a *secluded life*.

5. THOSE THREE YEARS IN WHICH DON BOSCO BECOMES DON BOSCO

In November 1841, therefore, Don Bosco entered the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin where he was to stay for almost three years as was permitted «for those young priests most noted for piety and study.»¹¹¹

The formation model of the Convitto left an indelible mark in his human and religious experience; in fact it seems to us that it can be said that it is not possible to really know Don Bosco without considering one by one the key elements of the « formation project » of the Turin Convitto and finding them reflected in his spiritual and pastoral experience.

Don Cafasso, in particular, exercising his gift of discernment, *accompanies* Don Bosco towards a plan of life in which love for God and love for the young come together in a coherent *pedagogy for holiness*.

We shall now attempt in a synchronised way to highlight some of the features of this project, without pretending to be exhaustive, but with the desire to *recognise*, to come to know the origin of some of the characteristic features of the life and spiritual development of our founder.

5.1 Here one learnt to be a priest ...

The «model» proposed by the Convitto is still that which emerged at the end of the Council of Trent, although with some particular characteristics and original emphases.

was a man of great humility and knowledge to which Don Bosco bore witness. After the death of Cafasso in 1860, he was Don Bosco's confessor until 1873, the year he died.

¹¹⁰.MO 100-101

¹¹¹Cf. G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del Servo di Dio D.Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit., 190.

Confirmation of this can be found implicitly in the second of the Regulations when «it entrusts this Convitto to the special protection of St. Francis of Sales and of St. Charles who established and promoted a number of similar ideas.»¹¹² On the whole the Regulations seek to form an ecclesiastic who is reserved and detached from the world.

The resolutions made by Don Bosco on the occasion of his ordination as a priest reveal even before he went to the Convitto, the effects of an austere concept of priestly life. These resolutions as we know are not found in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* but rather in a hand-written exercise book the contents of which are known to Salesians with the name *Spiritual Testament*, but its real title also written in his own hand is *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel Sac. Gio. Bosco a' suoi figliuoli salesiani*¹¹³.

Don Bosco began drawing up this important autobiographical document in 1884 and concluded it on 24 December 1887, little more than a month before the end of his earthly life, the day on which the notebook passed into the hands of his secretary at the time, Don Carlo Viglietti.

At the beginning of this little book devoted mainly to a series of provisions, pieces of advice and recommendations for the period following his death, Don Bosco returns to the time of his priestly ordination and the resolutions made on that occasion:

«I began the retreat in the House of the Mission on 26 May the feast of St. Philip Neri, 1841. The sacred priestly ordination was carried out by Mons. Luigi Franzoni our archbishop in his chapel on 5 June that year.

I celebrated my first Mass in St. Francis of Assisi assisted by my benefactor and spiritual director D. Giuseppe Caffasso from Castelnuovo d'Asti on 6 June Holy Trinity Sunday.

My conclusion from the retreat made in preparation for the celebration of the first Holy Mass was: the priest does not go to heaven or to hell alone. If he does good he will go to heaven with the souls he has saved by his good example; if he does evil, if he is a cause of scandal he will go to perdition with the souls that were damned through his scandal.

Resolutions:

1. Never to go for a stroll unless for grave reasons; visiting the sick etc.
2. Be very rigorous in the use of time.
3. To suffer, work, humble myself in all things whenever it is a question of saving souls.
4. The charity and gentleness of St. Francis of Sales are to be my guide in everything.
5. I will always be satisfied with whatever food is presented to me, if not harmful to my health.
6. I shall drink my wine mixed with water and only as a remedy: that is to say only when and to the extent it is a benefit to my health.
7. Work is a powerful weapon against the enemies of the soul. Hence I shall not take more than five or six hours of sleep. I shall take no rest during the day, particularly after lunch. Only in the case of illness shall I make an exception to this rule.
- [8.] I shall put aside some time every day for meditation and spiritual reading. During the day I shall pay a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament or at least raise my heart in prayer. I shall spend at least a quarter of an hour in preparation for Mass and another quarter of an hour in thanksgiving.
- [9.] I shall never indulge in conversations with women except to hear their confession or when it is necessary for their spiritual welfare.

¹¹² AOMV S. II, 255.

¹¹³ Fr Francesco Motto has produced a critical edition of this notebook with about 140 pages. Cf G.BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel Sac. Gio Bosco a' suoi figliuoli salesiani* edited by F. Motto, Roma 1985.

These were written in 1841»¹¹⁴.

This understanding of the life of a priest will find its authoritative confirmation in the teaching of Cafasso, which aims to give to the young priests a great awareness of their «dignity» but at the same time, also of their being «different» from other men.

From this point of view, the *model and the style* of the priest is Jesus Himself.

«If my thoughts» –Don Cafasso declares in one of his meditations to the clergy, «my affections, my actions are not those of this Divine Redeemer, I must stop deceiving myself: I may have the name, the title, the role of the priest, but in reality I am not one; I will be a priest yes, but unconnected, separated from the principle which ought to be animating me; a priest, but a deformed degenerate copy of the type and of the model.»¹¹⁵ It would be anachronistic to imagine, in the project of the Convitto, a theological reflection on the shared common priesthood, or a basis for the ministerial priesthood starting from Christ.

Just as Jesus is the model of the priest so in a similar way the priest ought to become the model for his flock; if he is holy, his whole life becomes a more effective means of preaching. «Nothing predisposes others more effectively for piety and the faithful worship of God» the Council of Trent had affirmed «than the life and example of those who have dedicated themselves to the divine ministry.»¹¹⁶

5.2 Pastoral charity, “working class” boys and the first catechism lessons

From the *identity* of the priest flows his *role* in the world. The image that emerges the most is that of the *priest-pastor*, who *takes the place of Jesus Christ on the earth*, dedicated to *preaching* and to the *confessional*, totally taken up with a burning zeal for souls, which makes him «creative», so as to respond to the challenges and to the needs of the «local area».

«Considerable support in the formation of the priest-pastor» Tuninetti writes in this regard «undoubtedly came from the Convitto Ecclesiastico at Saint Francis of Assisi, firstly under the direction of Dr Luigi Guala and then especially under the guidance and through the example of Fr Giuseppe Cafasso, and then from the Convitto Ecclesiastico at the Consolata, under the guidance of Fr Giuseppe Allamano. Both of them were schools for pastoral studies, at which those in charge knew how to discover and to propose new paths and much wider horizons in the face of the unforeseen needs to which the ordinary parochial pastoral approach seemed unable to respond in a satisfactory manner. And so Don Cafasso, Guala’s deputy, in the face of the immigration of so many young people left to themselves, suggested to a group of young priests at the Convitto, among them Don Bosco, the new way of the festive oratories and the work for street-sweepers.»¹¹⁷

Already in a first document, of Lanterian origin, this approach is clearly indicated. Regarding the purposes of the developing Congregation of the Oblates, it says: «assisting the sick in hospitals, prisoners, lower-class people, that is to say servants, artisans, etc. about 5 thousand of whom every year come out of hospital cured, having received there care for their souls and the teaching of the eternal truths and cultivating them by means of confession so that they

¹¹⁴ FdB 748 D 7-10.

¹¹⁵ G. CAFASSO, *Manoscritti* [Camisassa Copy], Medit. X, f. 1.

¹¹⁶ SS. *Conc. Tridentini decreta*, sess. XXII, 17 sept. 1562.

¹¹⁷ G. TUNINETTI, *Il prete e i preti nell’ottocento piemontese*, in *Rivista Diocesana Torinese* 74 (1997) 572.

ought to become good Christians and useful citizens.»¹¹⁸

Good Christians and useful citizens ... This quotation explains the inspiration which is at the foundation of one of the most characteristic summaries of the Salesian educative plan.

This care given to «those in prison and the lower-class people» to artisans, in continuity with the project of Lanteri, is a special feature of the apostolic activities of the Convitto. Cafasso's own activities are well known in assisting young prisoners and those condemned to death.

Don Bosco explains: «It was (Don Cafasso) who first took me into the prisons, where I soon learned how great was the malice and misery of mankind. I saw large numbers of young lads aged from 12 to 18, fine healthy youngsters, alert of mind, but seeing them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul, horrified me. Public disgrace, family dishonour and personal shame were personified in those unfortunates.»¹¹⁹

Another initiative promoted or supported by the Convitto was catechetical activity and the «animation» of children and adolescents. Di Robilant, drawing on many witnesses, states «with absolute certainty that (catechism lessons) began well before 1841»¹²⁰ and, therefore, before that 8 December which the Sons of Don Bosco have always considered the real beginning of the work of the oratory.¹²¹

5.3 A Society of laymen and ecclesiastics

As can be easily deduced from the first texts of the Constitutions, Don Bosco had it in mind to create a single *Society*, made up of ecclesiastics and *extern members*, in other words, of priests and of lay men who while continuing to live in their families, would be linked/tied by the same *rules* and together would collaborate in the education of poor youth.

In 1873, in discussions with the consultors who had the task of examining the text of the Constitutions of the emerging Society, the rejection of the chapter of the constitutionas about *extern members* was considered definitive. This had been a difficult debate from the beginning; in spite of the observations he had received Don Bosco had not wanted to have to give up his original plan and stubbornly presented it once again.

In the year following the approval of the Constitutions of the *Society*, in 1875, he began to draw up the general outlines of a plan for a lay association to which he initially gave the name *Union of St. Francis of Sales*, but which two years later was given recognition in a brief of Pius IX dated 9 May 1876 with the title of the *Union of Salesian Cooperators*. Its first Rule stated:

«The same harvest is proposed to the Salesian Cooperators as to the Congregation of St.

¹¹⁸ *L.c.*

¹¹⁹ MO 101.

¹²⁰ L. NICOLIS DI ROBILANT, *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso*, II, cit., 8.

¹²¹ Pietro Stella comes to the conclusion: «The catechism lesson that Don Bosco gave to Bartholomew Garelli in December 1841, only a few weeks after his arrival in Turin, was decisive for him as a young priest, but it was not the first given at the Turin Convitto ecclesiastico. In fact, it would appear that the teaching of doctrine to the young was part of the pastoral formation programme of the priests living there » (P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, I, cit. 95).

Francis of Sales, to which they intend to associate themselves. 1. To promote novenas, triduum, retreats and catechism lessons especially in those places where material and moral means are lacking. 2. Since in these days the great shortage of vocations to the ecclesiastical state is being seriously felt, so that those who are able take special care of those boys and even adults who possessing the necessary moral qualities and an aptitude for study give signs of being called [...]. 3. To promote good books in opposition to the irreligious press, through the distribution of good books, pamphlets, printed material of all kinds in those places and among those families where it appears prudent to do so. 4. Finally practising charity towards children at risk, gathering them together to instruct them in the faith, preparing them for sacred functions, advising them about dangers, leading them where they can be instructed in religion are other harvests for the Salesian Cooperators.»¹²²

The plan for the founding of the *Salesians Cooperators*, therefore, from an historical point of view can be seen as something of a necessary «backward step».

This idea of this kind of special link with laymen was certainly also a result of the formation received at the Convitto. In the Constitutions of Pio Brunone Lanteri's Congregation of the Oblates of Mary the Virgin, in fact, it is possible to find something similar. At the school of Diessbach, Lanteri wanted to involve laymen too in the activity of the «cultural reconquest» of society, using as its main method in the apostolate the spreading everywhere of good books through the reading, study and examination of individual works among the different social classes. For this purpose, when in 1816 he founded the religious Congregation of the Oblates of Mary the Virgin, dissolved four years later and then re-established in 1826 with papal approval, he envisaged in the Constitutions the presence of the so-called «extern members»¹²³.

This idea and this terminology were to be taken up by Don Bosco who in the drawing up of the Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis of Sales would make wide use of the aforementioned Constitutions of the Oblates.

5.4 Preaching the Spiritual Exercises as the apostolic purpose of the Congregation¹²⁴

The *Biographical Memoirs* tell us that the tradition of the annual retreat became from the beginning one of the key aspects of Salesian work for the education of youth to the faith.¹²⁵

The first draft of the Constitutions of the *Society of Saint Francis of Sales*, known as the *Autografo Rua*¹²⁶, lists the *purposes* of the budding *society*. The first two are the

¹²² MB XI, 542 [this appendix is not found in the English translation BM]

¹²³ Cf. *Costituzioni e regole della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria V.*, Turin 1851.

¹²⁴ On this subject see our study: G.BUCCELLATO, *Gli esercizi spirituali nell'esperienza di Don Bosco e alle origini della società di San Francesco di Sales*, cit., 101-134.

¹²⁵ There could be very many references. See by way of example, BM III, 377ss. 423 ss; IV, 85 ss; 4, 124 ss.3284 ss; V,41, 139 ss. 605 ss; VI, 294. 526 ss; VII, 249. 390 ss; VIII, 216; X, 27. 41-2; XII, 110. 126 ss; XIII, 328 ss. 577.

¹²⁶ This is the oldest manuscript of the Constitutions, dictated by Don Bosco to Don Rua; for this reason it is usually called *Autografo Rua*. It probably dates from 1858 (cf. G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni della Società di S.Francesco di Sales [1858] – 1875*, critical texts by Francesco Motto, Rome 1992, 17). The quotations from the Constitutions which follow are taken from this critical edition.

sanctification of the members and the imitation of Christ; immediately afterwards the three «apostolic»¹²⁷ purposes are listed:

- to gather together poor and abandoned boys to instruct them in religion, especially on feast days;

- to accommodate some of them in hostels and teach them an art or trade;

- to give the spiritual exercises and spread good books. In this regard one reads in the first text of the Constitutions: «The need is now being seriously felt to support the Catholic religion also among adults of the lower classes and especially in country places, and so the members will devote themselves to giving the spiritual exercises, spreading good books, making use of all those means that hard-working charity suggests so that through both word of mouth and the written word there may be a barrier against ungodliness and heresy.»

This reference will remain substantially unchanged throughout the life of Don Bosco, as can easily be seen from the outlines in the critical edition edited by Fr Francesco Motto in relation to these articles on the *Purpose of the Society of Saint Francis of Sales*.¹²⁸

Then, in the last three revisions by Don Bosco, it is possible to find a reference to the obligation for clerical confreres at the completion of their studies in preparation for priestly ordination to draw up a course of retreat talks. «Let each member» one reads in the version of 1875 – «to complete his studies, in addition to the daily moral lectures, apply himself to compose a course of meditations and instructions suitable in the first instance for the young and afterwards adapted to the understanding of all the faithful.»¹²⁹ It is not difficult to verify that the practice of the young Congregation was consistent with this proposal.¹³⁰

This last reference in the early constitutional text takes us back to the *Amicizia sacerdotale* of Diessbach. The Statutes of the *Amicizia*, describing the apostolic means that the *amici sacerdoti* should use in order to «subject the whole world to Jesus Christ,» stated: «To scatter the holy word of God effectively, each one should compose with great care for his own use a good course of Missions, and a good set of the spiritual exercises.»¹³¹

The Constitutions of the Oblates also contained at that time, a similar reference in the first article of *Chapter Two*, entitled *With regard to one's own sanctification*: «(The members) in addition will prepare a course of meditations, and instructions in order to give the Exercises according to the method of St. Ignatius.»¹³²

¹²⁷ Cf. G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni*, cit., 72-79.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*, 72-81.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, 181.

¹³⁰ Many of these collections of meditations compiled by the first Salesians are preserved in the Central Archives of the Congregation.

¹³¹ Cf. C. BONA, *Le «Amicizie». Società segrete e rinascita religiosa (1770-1830)*, Turin 1962, 503-511.

¹³² *Costituzioni e regole della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria V.*, Turin 1851, 17. There are many other points of contact between the spirituality of the Society of Jesus and early Salesian tradition: the first formula of profession and the idea of the rendiconto are derived from the Constitutions of the Society; the Jesuit formula AMDG (*Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*) is constantly repeated in the early documents; the main devotions and

5.5 Don Bosco asks to enter the Oblates of Pio Brunone Lanteri

Another circumstance shows us the importance given by Don Bosco to preaching retreats. The *Biographical Memoirs* tell us that at the end of his three years stay at the Convitto Don Bosco made contact with the Oblates of Mary the Virgin, and for a certain time nourished the desire to «enter religious life» in that Congregation¹³³ and, therefore to devote his whole life to preaching the Exercises of Saint Ignatius.

The circumstances are confirmed in the biography of Cafasso, published in 1912 by Nicolis Di Robilant¹³⁴, and from a handwritten page in the *Cronichetta anteriore* of Don Giulio Barberis, the first master of novices of the Salesian Congregation, who writes:

«Here are some details from the life of D. Bosco that he himself narrated to someone in particular... "When the third year of moral theology was finished I had decided to join the Oblates of Mary the Virgin; I had everything ready and went alone to St. Ignatius to do the spiritual exercises there. When I had finished them I spoke with D. Cafasso so that he could give me a definite answer and he said no. This was a terrible blow for me, but I didn't even want to ask him for a reason. I returned to the Convitto and continued to study, to preach and to hear confessions."»¹³⁵

Cafasso, in whom Don Bosco continued to confide would have been, according to the accounts of Don Lemoyne and of Di Robilant, very decisive in guiding the discernment of his disciple. In June 1844 on the advice of Don Cafasso, after having gone to Saint Ignatius «to think about things better before the Lord,» Don Bosco took the decision to leave for the novitiate of the Oblates, prepared his bags and presented himself to his Master to say good bye to him. «But the good Father with a sweet smile on his lips, –“Oh! How thoughtful!” – he said to him, “and who now will look after your boys? Did working with them not seem a good thing to you? [...] My Dear Don Bosco,” he told him, “give up all thoughts of a religious vocation, go and unpack your bags and continue your work on behalf of the young. This and no other is God's will.”»¹³⁶

In a letter to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, with a view to the approval of the Constitutions, Pio Brunone Lanteri, founder of the Oblates, writes describing the period of the foundation: «The Oblates of Mary make known in this regard that according to the Constitutions and the Rules ... it is clear that the primary purpose is to give the Exercises of St. Ignatius without charge, as they always do and I can assure you so tirelessly that in the

practices of piety (*Month of May, Exercise for a Happy Death, Devotion to the Sacred Heart ...*) are of Ignatian inspiration; teachings about and the texts for meditation of the first generations of Salesians (Rodriguez and Da Ponte) clearly hark back to the Ignatian method; the choice of Saint Aloysius as a patron of the *Society*; the continuing excellent relationships Don Bosco had with his Jesuits contemporaries. On this subject which really needs further serious academic study see G. BUCCELLATO, *Appunti per una storia spirituale del sacerdote Gio' Bosco*, Torino 2008, 144-148.

¹³³ Cf. BM II, 159.163.

¹³⁴ Cf. L.N. DI ROBILANT, *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso*, II, cit., 215-216.

¹³⁵ ACS A 003.01.01, 15.17.

¹³⁶ L.N. DI ROBILANT L., *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso*, II, cit., 216.

first years that is from November 1817 until May 1820, they gave 61 sets, while in the 4 following years although reduced to a very small number they gave another 115 sets.»¹³⁷

This therefore was the apostolate that Don Bosco at almost 29 years of age had in mind to carry out for the whole of his life.

5.6 A “retiring life” in Don Bosco’s spiritual experience

The expression *retiring life/recollection/seclusion* appears six times in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. Speaking about two members of the *Society for a good time*, Guglielmo Garigliano and Paolo Braje Don Bosco writes: «Both were reserved and pious, and they gave me plenty of good advice. On feast days after the practices of piety in common at the college, we used to go along to St Anthony’s Church, where the Jesuits gave marvellous catechetical instructions.»¹³⁸ The precious advice of Dr Borel is: «A vocation is preserved and perfected by recollection and frequent communion.»¹³⁹ The expression also appears in the resolutions he made on the occasion of his clothing as a cleric: «I will love and practise a retiring life.»¹⁴⁰

It is not difficult to appreciate the meaning of the term *retiring life* or *recollection* in Don Bosco’s mind. About a year before he began drafting the *Memoirs of the Oratory* he wrote to a woman: «You are giving a lot of thought to the choice of a state of life and you do well ... Prayer, frequent Communion and recollection are its foundations.»¹⁴¹

The term brings to mind many of the acts of renunciation on Don Bosco’s part with regard to «profane» games and entertainments, but it seems to us that it refers most of all to an interior life, to a fruitful solitude that needs to be cultivated in the secret of one’s own room and one that fosters recollection and prayer.

In this regard preaching to priests, Cafasso said:

«The Divine Redeemer, Head and Master of all priests every so often was able to enjoy a moment of rest from his constant labours as we read in the Gospel, as he used to go off alone and pray. Retreat/withdrawal and prayer, here then are the two wings which can raise the priest up so high as to make him like a God on earth. Retreat/withdrawal and prayer are two inseparable qualities; the one flowing from the other; I am speaking about a pious and virtuous retreat/withdrawal not just natural or a whim. The man who is naturally withdrawn loves prayer; the man who prays necessarily withdraws from the clamour of the world and seeks quiet and solitude. Retreat/withdrawal and prayer are two virtues which suffice because they bring with them and pre-suppose what is required to form a worthy and holy priest. It is impossible for someone who lives withdrawn and prays not to have a heart detached from this world and full of the spirit of the Lord.»¹⁴²

The first, the main «place» that Cafasso indicates for this daily «retreat» is the *bedroom*.

¹³⁷ T. GALLAGHER, *Gli Esercizi di s. Ignazio nella spiritualità e carisma di fondatore di Pio Brunone Lanteri*, Rome 1983, 33.

¹³⁸ MO 55.

¹³⁹ MO 92.

¹⁴⁰ MO 78.

¹⁴¹ This is a letter of 24 March 1872; the original letter, not yet included in the critical edition of the *Letters* which is being prepared, can be found in the Salesian house in Chiari (Brescia).

¹⁴² G. CAFASSO, *Istruzioni per Esercizi Spirituali al clero pubblicate per cura del Can. Giuseppe Allamano*, Turin 1893, 88-89.

«Only in the bedroom will we find that quiet, » he affirms, «that tranquillity, that calm that is so necessary to form a good priest.»¹⁴³ It is this «cell» that the priest has to learn to love: «Love for the cell where the air is purer for the soul, heaven more open, the Lord closer and familiar.»¹⁴⁴

Having left the Convitto Ecclesiastico, Don Bosco continued to go for confession every week to Don Cafasso until his death which occurred in 1860. For long periods he used to go every day to the Convitto to study and to find peace and quiet in a room that was kept for him, in particular while preparing the *Catholic Readings*, for which he often made use of the library.¹⁴⁵ In the teachings of Cafasso *study* in fact is considered as «one of the specific duties of the ecclesiastical vocation.»¹⁴⁶

Even more significant is Don Bosco's custom of going each year to the Sanctuary of Saint Ignatius for the annual spiritual exercises; and this even after the new Congregation, in 1864, «institutionalised» the practice for Salesians of the retreats, retreats which in the first years were held in the house at Trofarello, particularly dedicated to this purpose.

Starting from 1842 Don Bosco was a frequent visitor to the sanctuary. In fact, he went there each year almost without interruption¹⁴⁷ for more than thirty years until 1874. When Cafasso died (1860), Canon Eugenio Galletti succeeded him as Rector of the Convitto and of the sanctuary; then in 1864 Doctor Felice Golzio, Don Bosco's confessor between 1860 and 1873, the year he died. After their deaths Don Bosco again went for his retreat at the sanctuary in 1874; only the chilly welcome he received that year from the new Rector of the sanctuary, according to one of his biographers, Fr Angelo Amadei, persuaded him not to return the following years.¹⁴⁸

5.7 Commitment to the apostolate of good books

Also a commitment to the apostolate of good books, which as we have seen is one of the apostolic aims of the budding Congregation, draws its inspiration from the situation at the Convitto.

Diessbach, the teacher of Pio Brunone Lanteri, set himself to respond to the propaganda of adversaries through «good books » and the «private» union of men of good will, founding the *Amicizie cristiane*. Then Lanteri made a not inconsiderable contribution to the spreading of *good books* and, in particular, of the works of Saint Alphonsus, maintaining contacts with bookshops and printers in many European countries. As a response to the widespread Jansenistic and royalist spirit, Lanteri aimed to present the teaching of Alphonsus de' Liguori, either on his own initiative or through the good offices of the *Amicizie* and the apostolate of lay people and priests, by spreading the works of the holy Doctor,¹⁴⁹ which he

¹⁴³ G. . CAFASSO, *Manoscritti*, vol. V, 2085 B [85]. For this and the following quotation we have made use of the work of Flavio Accornero, giving the quotation just as the author does , and between square brackets the page of the text where we came across the quotation. The indications A and B refer to the fact that the pages of the manuscript often give two different texts separated by a horizontal line.

¹⁴⁴ G. CAFASSO, *Manoscritti*, vol. V, 1951 A [85].

¹⁴⁵ Cf. L.N. DI ROBILANT, *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso*, II, cit., 222-223.

¹⁴⁶ F. ACCORNERO, *La dottrina spirituale di S. Giuseppe Cafasso*, cit., 90.

¹⁴⁷ The only exceptions were in the years 1848 and 1849, since on account of the political movement for the unity of Italy, the retreats at Saint Ignatius were not held.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. DEPARTMENT FOR FORMATION, *Sussidi 2*, cit., 172; MB X, 1277 ss [not found in BM (English translation)].

¹⁴⁹ It is difficult to arrive at even an approximate number of the copies of the works of the holy Doctor which Pio Brunone spread in Piedmont and beyond. Tommaso Piatti writes that «he distributed in a single edition

described «as a library of all moral teaching».

Fr Pietro Stella has written: «Don Bosco gave himself no rest as a writer, publisher and propagandist, because he was personally convinced that preaching the good news by means of the press was a service which he necessarily had to provide for Religion, an essential expression of his vocation as an educator of youth and of the people. This was a belief he held in common with many of his contemporaries.»¹⁵⁰

In addition to his own personal commitment, that of his collaborators should be noted. There are a huge number of publications by the first Salesians which can be found in the *Catholic Readings* and in other places. The commitment to spreading good books was taken up by everyone, according to what the Constitutions declared as an essential element of the mission and of the «charism» of the budding Congregation.

5.8 Man of prayer

The priest formed by the Convitto is a *man of prayer*. For Cafasso prayer ought to be considered the fundamental duty of an ecclesiastic:

«Among the duties and the offices of the priest it can be said quite clearly that the first is that of praying: *omnis pontifex pro hominibus constituitur in iis quae sunt ad Deum*. The principal means, indeed the only means he has to keep this pathway open, this relationship, this communion with God, the means by which he is to carry out this great mission and special task is prayer: take prayer away from me, and at the same time you will take away every contact between heaven and earth, between God and man.»¹⁵¹

He has to be a master «in the great art of praying»: «And how will you succeed when you don't know how to and don't do so yourself?»¹⁵²

The writings and teaching of Don Bosco on prayer show us the results of the formation he had received.¹⁵³

In a *pro memoria* written by him on 16 April 1843, towards the end of his second year at the Convitto, concerning a fellow student of his at the seminary in Chieri, the young man Giuseppe Burzio¹⁵⁴ who had then become an Oblate of Mary the Virgin and had died prematurely in 1842, we read:

without counting smaller ones 36,000 copies of the *Massime eterne* alone » (T. PIATTI, *Il servo di Dio Pio Brunone Lanteri*, Turin 1934, 109).

¹⁵⁰ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, I, cit., 247

¹⁵¹ G. CAFASSO, *Manoscritti*, [Copia Corgiatti] VII, 2679.

¹⁵² *Ibidem*, VII, 2681.

¹⁵³ For a fuller treatment of the topic of prayer and in particular of mental prayer in Don Bosco see the doctoral thesis of G. BUCCELLATO, *Alla presenza di Dio. Ruolo dell'orazione mentale nel carisma di fondazione di San Giovanni Bosco fondatore della Società di san Francesco di Sales*, Rome 2004, published by the Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana.

¹⁵⁴ Giuseppe Burzio (1822-1842) arrived at the Chieri seminary at the beginning of the final year of theology of the cleric John Bosco, in November 1840. Don Bosco, ordained subdeacon in September of that year, had been appointed «prefect of the hall» and immediately established a close spiritual friendship with Burzio. In September 1841 Giuseppe Burzio entered the Congregation of Lanteri. Falling seriously ill he died with a reputation for holiness in 1842. One of his confreres, Father Felice Giordano, wanted to collect some evidence from those who had known him during his short life in order to write a biography which was then published in 1846. Father Giordano also asked Don Bosco for this purpose, to send him a memoir on his young companion; the testimony of Don Bosco can be found scattered throughout the short biography. It is possible to find it in G. BOSCO., *Epistolario*, edited by F. Motto, I, Rome 1991, 48-53.

«Great was his commitment to piety, in which he was indeed outstanding; I can only speak about what took place under the eyes of everyone; but whoever knew the sincerity of this cleric, his perseverance in good, could easily guess at the more and better hidden acts of his interior virtues. There was never a time in fact when he came to the practices of piety or took part in them in an indifferent manner or as a matter of routine; on the contrary, he was admirable for the pleasure and the desire that showed on his face; in fact no sooner had a sacred function or some customary exercise such as, for example prayer, or meditation begun or he had simply put his foot inside the chapel than he was immediately recollected and all his senses became focused so that on account of his devout disposition everyone could see how he was participating with all his heart, and how great was the spirit of faith that was animating him. Whether or not the Superiors were present Berzio's pious behaviour was always the same, since of him it could well be said that *ambulabat coram Deo*... In addition to the religious practices undertaken in common by all, and by him with great fervour, I could observe from his words and actions that he had a great devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to the Madonna, for which if there was any extra time available he consecrated it to expressions of love and gratitude. Quite often I saw him during recreation time like this. And above all on holidays, leaving his companions he went to church and spent time in sweet conversation with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and with his most holy Mother.»¹⁵⁵

Don Bosco was almost twenty-eight years of age and at the end of his time at the Convitto; the interest and the esteem that he shows to have nourished for that «spending time in sweet conversation» also «in the time of recreation» shows how he was thinking and his ideal of the Christian and priestly life.

He will never consider the time of prayer, of personal and silent communion with God «excessive» or inopportune; on the contrary his appreciation of this will be a link between many of those whose biographies he wrote - of young people and the not-so-young - who throughout his life he will continue to present as genuine models of Christian virtue and holiness.

5.9 The influence of Saint Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori¹⁵⁶

The first contact Don Bosco had with the writings and the spirituality of Alphonsus was probably through his first spiritual director, Fr John Calosso, chaplain at Morialdo, a place only a few kilometres from Castelnuovo. According to the *Biographical Memoirs* it was Fr Calosso who gave Don Bosco the ascetical works of Saint Alphonsus (cf. BM I, 177); but his much deeper familiarity with the teaching and the spirituality of Alphonsus certainly came in the years at the Convitto.

I think it can be said that the person and the work of Saint Alphonsus, known directly or through the teaching of Cafasso, had, in comparison with any other spiritual author, the most important influence on Don Bosco's writings, his spiritual pedagogy, even on his understanding of religious life. In addition, there are many works of Alphonsus quoted explicitly or implicitly or published by Don Bosco in the *Catholic Readings*.

5.9.1 The patron of confessors and exponents of moral theology

¹⁵⁵ F. GIORDANO, *Cenni istruttivi di perfezione proposti a' giovani desiderosi della medesima nella vita edificante di Giuseppe Burzio*, Turin 1846, 139-140. Don Bosco's long letter to Father Giordano is given in its entirety in G. BOSCO., *Epistolario*, edited by F. Motto, I, 48-53; it is dated 16 April 1843.

¹⁵⁶ Regarding comments about Don Bosco and Saint Alphonsus see, in particular, A. PEDRINI, *Don Bosco e Sant'Alfonso M. De' Liguori. La dottrina salesiana e alfonsiana nella luce delle celebrazioni centenarie*, in *Palestra del clero* 67 (1988) 921-936; VALENTINI E., *Don Bosco e Sant'Alfonso. Con aggiunta Vita cronologica di S. Alfonso M. dei Liguori Dottore della Chiesa a cura di Alfonso Maria Santonicola*, Pagani (SA) 1972.

The spirit found in the works of Alphonsus did not have much of a following among Piedmontese moralists; only the Jesuits were the more convinced supporters of this point of view. In contrast and in opposition to the rigourism of the Turin *major seminary*, there was the approach of the Convitto which was accustomed to forming a pastor of souls who was «benign in teaching and with a kindly manner.»¹⁵⁷

The option for benevolence was aimed mainly at the practice of the sacrament of penance and the *formation of confessors*. The *patron of confessors and moral theologians* achieved in this field a *Copernican revolution*, in so far as he knew how to exercise «the pastoral ministry in the context of human frailty,» making «forgiveness depend more on the mercy of God than on the law» and giving «to confession and to the confessor the role of an act of love.» From the pages of his work full of practical advice emerges a form of ministry in which fidelity to the mercy of God makes the confessor first of all a father and a doctor and then a teacher and a judge.¹⁵⁸

It almost goes without saying that the pastoral experience of Don Bosco was influenced by similar teaching. From this point of view it is more understandable that he should have so firmly opposed his Archbishop when faced with the possibility that his clerics might be forced to study at the Turin Major Seminary.¹⁵⁹

5.9.2 A holiness within reach

At the time when Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori was alive, holiness seemed to be almost a privilege linked to other privileges: social class, the professions, money, studies. Also from this point of view the Neapolitan saint was an innovator and the precursor of future times since he devoted himself to the *socialisation* of holiness, that is, making it universal and egalitarian: «God wants everyone to be saints, » Alphonsus used to say, «each one in his own state of life: the religious as a religious, the lay man as a lay man, the priest as a priest, the married man as a married man, the merchant as a merchant, the soldier as a soldier and so on.»¹⁶⁰

We can sum up his way of seeing things with one of his own telling phrases: it is a question of a holiness «alla buona»¹⁶¹, that is to say a holiness accessible to all classes of persons, of whatever age, culture or social class.

Don Bosco's pedagogy of holiness is based on these teachings. Don Bosco writes in the preface to *The Companion of Youth*: «I have drawn up a way of life brief and easy enough, which will enable you to be a joy to your parents, a glory to your country, good citizens on

¹⁵⁷ P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, I, Rome 2003, 163. Gioberti in *Gesuita moderno* will accuse the Convitto of *laxism* as well as of *Jesuitism* (cf. V. GIOBERTI, *Il gesuita moderno*, IV, Napoli 1848, 279-281).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. M. VIDAL, *Nuova morale fondamentale*, Bologna 2004, 416; S. MAJORANO, *Il confessore, pastore ideale nelle opere di sant'Alfonso*, in SM 38 (2000) 329.

¹⁵⁹ Among the various reasons given by Don Bosco for his rejecting the obligation for Salesian clerics to reside at the seminary as boarders is the explicit *unreliability* of the professors of the seminary, in particular in the area of moral theology, of sacred hermeneutics and church history (cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Gli arcivescovi di Torino e Don Bosco fondatore* in DEPARTMENT FOR FORMATION, *Don Bosco fondatore della famiglia salesiana*, Rome 1989, 263).

¹⁶⁰ ALFONSO M. DE' LIGUORI, *Pratica di amare Gesù Cristo*, in *Opere ascetiche*, Rome 1996, 90.

¹⁶¹ ALFONSO M. DE' LIGUORI, *Lettere*, I, Introduzione a cura di S. Brugnano, Rome 1887, 95.

earth and one day blessed inhabitants of heaven.»¹⁶²

Don Bosco's main concern is the salvation of all young people; but his spiritual teaching goes further than that. In fact, his gaze and his « educative drive» are fixed much higher so as to point out clearly that not only salvation but holiness itself is possible for everyone.

The biographies of Comollo, of Savio, of Besucco, of Michael Magone are examples of holiness achieved, which Don Bosco presents to everyone as possible models to imitate; it is precisely this form of *imitation* that is the *key* in which to interpret these and other biographies as a proposal and a plan for a life of holiness.

5.9.3 Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and frequent communion

The practice of the so-called *short visits* to the Blessed Sacrament which Don Bosco so much recommended to his boys was taken from the well-known work of Alphonsus, *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Most Holy for each day of the month*.¹⁶³ This little book was so successful that Giuseppe Cacciatore could write: «We can affirm without fear of contradiction that the reawakening of eucharistic devotion in Europe throughout the second half of the XVIII century and the whole of the XIX is due to this little book, the real key to the piety of St Alphonsus and of the most undiluted Catholic religious spirit.»¹⁶⁴

In this regard Karl Keusch explains:

«It was not Alphonsus who introduced into the Church the pious practice of visiting the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. All pious souls, all the saints of God have nourished their faith and built up their strength there. Nevertheless to our saint goes the merit of having given a particular form to this holy practice with his very affectionate and classic visits. And when they had a fixed form he allocated them to certain hours of the day and gave them a fixed time and place in the plan of all the works aimed at perfection.»¹⁶⁵

Don Bosco writes in his *Short Treatise on the Preventive System*: «Frequent confession and communion and daily Mass are the pillars which must support the edifice of education, from which we propose to banish threats and blows.» Also in the biographies of the boys Savio, Besucco and Magone, Don Bosco devoted space to dealing with the Liguorian teaching on frequent reception of the sacraments, in particular drawing on the text of Alphonsus *La Monaca Santa*; among other texts dealing with this subject we can mention: *The Month of May*, the *Companion of Youth* and two short works published in the *Catholic Readings* in 1866 and 1870 respectively, entitled, firstly *Devout Practices for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament*, and secondly *Nine days consecrated to Mary Help of Christians*.

5.9.4 Teaching about the Four Last things

Among the more frequent topics dealt with in Don Bosco's teaching about holiness there is an important place for the *four last things*: death, judgement, hell and heaven. «One of the evil features of modern pedagogy» – the holy educator used to say – «is its aversion to mentioning eternal truths, and above all death and hell.»¹⁶⁶

In some of Don Bosco's works dedicated to this issue the influence of the teaching of

¹⁶² G. BOSCO, *Il Giovane Provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri degli 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.*, Turin 1847, 7.

¹⁶³ This is a 1748 reprint of the original publication of 1745, which had as its title *Pensieri ed affetti divoti nelle visite al SS. Sacramento ed alla sempre immacolata SS. Vergine*.

¹⁶⁴ G. CACCIATORE, *S. Alfonso de' Liguori e il giansenismo. Le ultime fortune del moto giansenistico e la restituzione del pensiero cattolico nel secolo XVIII*, Florence 1942, 295.

¹⁶⁵ K. KEUSCH, *La dottrina spirituale di S. Alfonso*, Milan 1931, 413.

¹⁶⁶ BM II 168.

Alphonsus can be recognised, easily confirmed by a comparison between the works of the two authors. In particular two of Don Bosco's writings in which we can identify his direct dependence on the thought of Alphonsus are the *Companion of Youth* and *The month of May*, linked respectively to the *Eternal truths* and the *Preparation for a Happy Death*.

In the short introduction to the *Companion of Youth*, entitled *Means needed to lead a good Catholic life*, the author issues an explicit invitation to the young, those to whom the book is addressed, to devote some time «to reading some book which deals with spiritual things, such as the *Preparation for a Happy Death* by St. Alphonsus.»¹⁶⁷ In his *Don Bosco e Sant'Alfonso*, written in 1972, the Salesian Fr Eugenio Valentini has clearly shown how *The month of May* depends on the work of Alphonsus.¹⁶⁸

5.9.5 Devotion to Mary the Virgin

Also with regard to devotion to Mary, as Fr Valentini again points out, «in his expressions and in his fervour [Don Bosco] was perfectly Alphonsian»¹⁶⁹. In the booklet *Nine days consecrated to Mary Help of Christians*, for example, on seven occasions Don Bosco quotes the *Glories of Mary*,¹⁷⁰ the first major work of Saint Alphonsus from the year 1750.

Again, in the *Exercise of the devotion to the mercy of God*, we find intercessions addressed to Mary clearly drawing inspiration from Liguori, such as this one: «O most loving Mother of mercies, sweetness and consolation of sinners, grant that I may be heard, since you have never asked any grace from God that was denied.»¹⁷¹ The text of Alphonsus that is evoked in the *Preparation for death*, where we read in the XVI Consideration *On the Mercy of God*: «O Mary, my hope. You are the mother of mercy, pray to God for me and have pity on me.»¹⁷²

5.9.6 Love for music and singing

Alphonsus wrote and composed music for many hymns, some of which were not only familiar in Italy and in Church circles but became famous throughout the world: «For his poetic gifts» – Father Pichler writes «the artist Alphonsus deserves the highest honours. His songs have been translated into Latin and German, and some into French, English and Dutch. He is assured of a place of honour in world literature.»¹⁷³

Don Bosco too loved music and singing. He published some booklets such as *Scelta di laudi sacre* and *Arpa cattolica o Raccolta di laudi sacre in onore di Maria Santissima*,¹⁷⁴ in which he included some hymns which he said were by accredited authors; among these were a dozen or so which Alphonsus had published in his *Glories of Mary*.¹⁷⁵ Finally, among hymns to be found in the *Companion of Youth* could be mentioned the very well-known *Tu scendi dalle stelle*, which Alphonsus had published in his *Opere spirituali*.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁷ G. BOSCO, *Cose necessarie ad un giovane per diventare virtuoso*, introduction to *Il Giovane Provveduto*, cit., 18.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. E. VALENTINI, *Don Bosco e Sant'Alfonso*, cit., 58-59.

¹⁶⁹ E. VALENTINI, *Don Bosco e Sant'Alfonso*, cit., 61.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. l. c.

¹⁷¹ G. BOSCO, *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio*, Turin 1846, 38.

¹⁷² ALFONSO M. DE' LIGUORI, *Apparecchio alla morte*, in *Opere ascetiche*, II, Turin 1846, 154.

¹⁷³ K. KEUSCH, *La dottrina spirituale di S. Alfonso*, cit., 125-126.

¹⁷⁴ G. BOSCO, *Scelta di laudi sacre ad uso delle missioni e di altre opportunità della Chiesa*, Turin 1879³; ID., *Arpa cattolica o Raccolta di laudi sacre in onore di Maria Santissima*, S. Pier d'Arena 1882.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. E. VALENTINI, *Don Bosco e Sant'Alfonso*, cit., 64.

¹⁷⁶ ALFONSO M. DE' LIGUORI, *Canzoncine spirituali*, 239-240; they can be found on the site of the Biblioteca Alphonsiana IntraText at http://www.intratext.com/ixt/ITASA0000/P_9J.HTM (27.12.2010).

5.9.7 *The understanding of the religious life*

Already in 1854 John Bosco had gathered together his closest collaborators to tell them about his plans to give to the work of taking care of the poorest abandoned boys, which had been in existence for a decade, a stable long-term structure. On 18 December 1859 the *Society of St. Francis of Sales* was officially established.

In 1866 «for the budding Congregation the experience of the «self-managed» exercises began at Trofarello». In that and in successive years Don Bosco gave the *instructions*, based on the ascetical writings of Liguori.¹⁷⁷

A significant text to confirm the clear influence of Alphonsus on Don Bosco the founder is the *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis of Sales*, definitively approved on 3 April 1874, in which— in the opinion of Fr Pietro Braido — «from the point of view of their literary dependence the role of St Alphonsus was absolutely paramount.»¹⁷⁸ The introduction *Ai Soci Salesiani*¹⁷⁹ in the edition printed in 1877, which is considerably expanded compared with that of 1875, containing various additions attributable to Fr Giulio Barberis,¹⁸⁰ is clearly of Alphonsian derivation. Fr Braido has written:

«The sources on which Don Bosco draws most widely and explicitly in putting together the pages *Ai Soci Salesiani* are without any doubt the *Esercizio di perfezione e di virtù cristiane* (*virtù religiose*, in the third volume, interestingly) by the Jesuit Alphonsus Rodríguez (1541-1616) and *La vera sposa di Gesù Cristo* and the *Opuscoli sullo stato religioso* by the founder of the Redemptorists St. Alphonsus M. de Liguori (1696-1787).»¹⁸¹

A final important observation needs to be made regarding an appendix added at the end of the third and last edition in Italian of the *Constitutions* in Don Bosco' lifetime, that of 1885. In this appendix there is a circular letter by St. Vincent de' Paoli and six letters by St. Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori «addressed to their religious and also very useful for Salesians.»¹⁸²

A serious detailed study of these seven letters would enable us to recognise the plans, the expectations and above all the concerns of the founder of the Salesian in the years of the consolidation of the new foundation.

5.10 *The sentire cum Ecclesia and obedience to the Pope*

In the field of *ecclesiology* the ideas of the Convitto followed the path of ultramontanism which was a characteristic of the founding of the *Amicizie*. The authority and the prestige of the Pope were defended against the «enemies of the Primacy» and misleading teachings, but also in consequence against every possible opening towards «modernism».

To create this atmosphere of enthusiasm regarding the Pope several factors made their contribution coinciding with the French Revolution. Above all Gallicanism, which having underlined the particular nature of the French church in opposition to that of Rome, had poured cold water on relationships between the two; and in the second place, Jansenism, which showed itself to be at odds with the centralism of the Roman Curia. Already

¹⁷⁷ Cf. E. VALENTINI, *Don Bosco e Sant'Alfonso*, cit., 38.

¹⁷⁸ P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, II, Rome 2003, 269.

¹⁷⁹ This introduction is fundamental as it makes more explicit the fundamental theological basis and the special understanding of religious life that constitutes the key to interpreting the text of the *Constitutions*.

¹⁸⁰ The additions by Fr Giulio Barberis, the first Director of Novices of the Salesian Congregation, were revised and corrected by Don Bosco himself, as can be seen from the manuscript preserved in the Archives of the Generalate (cf. ACS D 473.02.10).

¹⁸¹ P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco fondatore. «Ai Soci salesiani» (1875-1885). Introduzione e testi critici*, Rome 1995, 37.

¹⁸² G. BOSCO, *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales secondo il Decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874*, Turin 1885³, 87.

Diessbach, distancing himself from these attitudes, had founded the *Amicizie* based on a programme of «adhesion without reserve » to the «Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church.»¹⁸³

The priest formed at the Convitto, therefore, was able to *sentire cum ecclesia*; even more so he was markedly *pro-Roman* on all issues not only religious but also political, and with a critical attitude towards all the social tendencies which in those years looked on the Pope as a possible adversary.

It is not difficult to recognise in this description the «political» position which Don Bosco constantly maintained even during the difficult years of the wars of independence, and the characteristic features of his love for and devotion to the Pope.

¹⁸³ Cf. P. ZOVATTO, *La spiritualità dell'ottocento italiano*, in *Storia della spiritualità italiana* edited by P. Zovatto, Rome 2002, 508-511.

CONCLUSION

«My brothers, let us never forget that the meaning of our life is found more in the spirit than in works [...]; that if we want this spirit to reign in us, not to be hindered, but rather increased, set on fire, a continuous and constant vigilance over ourselves is necessary, is indispensable; and absolutely necessary is a place, a time of retreat, of study, of examination of our day, otherwise what is the result? We study, we preach, we hear confessions, we undertake a thousand things but in the meantime what is happening inside, what profit do we make and how do the reckonings of our heart add up?»¹⁸⁴

At the conclusion of our journey it seems opportune to make some reflections.

The first is of a semantic nature. From the beginning of our contribution, we have chosen to use expressions such as *spiritual direction*, *spiritual accompaniment*, *spiritual guide* and similar ones, considering them as equivalents, without concerning ourselves with the modern day reflection that as we know gives to these terms different connotations and emphases.

From what has been said it is sufficiently evident that the relationship that links Don Bosco with Don Cafasso has a strongly *asymmetric* nature in spite of the difference in age between the two being relatively modest. The expression *spiritual accompaniment*, of more recent origin, is intended to safeguard the role of the one being *helped* as a protagonist in the relationship and does not belong to the language of the 1800s.

It is scarcely needs to be pointed out that *obedience to the spiritual director* does not necessarily imply *passivity*, but, basing ourselves on a very ancient tradition in the history of spirituality, contains in itself an *active acceptance in the Faith*, of a plan or of a task in addition to a guide; analogously the nature of such a relationship does not imply an affective *distance* or an emotional detachment. Perhaps in these days of radical subjectivism, in which everyone seems to have become the *norm* for himself, a relationship like this constitutes an occasion for reflection and a sort of provocation.

In the course of our study we have been able to recognise how great is the *debt* that the founder of the Salesians and his spiritual family owe to Don Cafasso and to the formation received at the Convitto; a debt, which perhaps was never entirely paid not even by the first generations of Salesians, too much taken up by the extraordinary person of the founder and more inclined to highlight his originality, in addition to his virtues and merits. Along these lines what has always seemed particularly strange to us has been the *neglect* of the sanctuary of Saint Ignatius which is rarely included in the itineraries for visits to the places of Salesian interest, which undoubtedly represents a not-to-be-forgotten «dimension» of the spiritual experience of Don Bosco.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ G. CAFASSO, *Manoscritti*, [Corgiatti Copy], 5, 1874-1875.

¹⁸⁵ For more than thirty years Don Bosco went to the sanctuary of Saint Ignatius for his retreat, but also on many other occasions, at first with Cafasso and then with Golzio, to help with retreats for lay people and as a confessor. By way of example see, BM II, 371; BM III, 377; MB X, 892 [BM does not give these appendices]. At the sanctuary Don Bosco nearly always occupied the same room, where now there is a lift; only since 2007 has a small notice recorded his presence.

When at the end of June 2007 the small Sant'Alfio (CT) Centre for Studies of Salesian Spirituality organised a Congress on the subject *Saint Joseph Cafasso, Don Bosco's spiritual director*,¹⁸⁶ the intention was to highlight the person of the Saint from Castelnuovo and his relations with the founder of the Salesians, as well as to examine more deeply and personally the spiritual experience of Don Bosco. «Research into the spirituality of Don Bosco and of the Salesians today» Fr Stella wrote in 1973 «has perhaps not been so developed as that into the educational system. This impacts on the studies of the historian and on whoever wants to predict the next possible developments in the Salesian question [...]. It might be said that the emergence or not of a spiritual reflection within or associated with the Salesian movement, could be symptomatic of what the Salesian Family might be.»¹⁸⁷

The living memory of Don Bosco requires *listening* lovingly to the founder, meditation on his writings, fostering the interior life, study, prayer and reflection; and this needs to be undertaken without any simplistic generalisations, without any dangerous *playing down* of the charism and starting from well-founded hermeneutical criteria, so as to «recognise» and to give due weight to some of the essential charismatic elements.

¹⁸⁶ The Acts of the Congress were published the following year by LAS with the same title. The volume, which we edited, also contains the talks by Fr Giuseppe Tuninetti, Fr Lucio Casto and Fr Raimondo Frattallone.

¹⁸⁷ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco e le trasformazioni sociali e religiose del suo tempo* in *La Famiglia salesiana riflette sulla sua vocazione nella chiesa di oggi*, edited by P. Brocardo and M. Midali, Turin-Leumann 1973, 167-168.