

UNDERSTANDING THE SILENT INDUSTRIOUS MAN:

Blessed Joseph
Allamano



JONAH MULWA MAKAU

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THE
SILENT INDUSTRIOUS
MAN:

Blessed Joseph Allamano,
The Founder of the Consolata
Missionaries

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F. Bernardi
J. Makau
R. Osila

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- Consolata Missionaries Morogoro
P.O. Box 769
0629 362 251

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FOREWORD

In the last 30 years literature about Blessed Joseph Allamano has greatly thrived: a monumental biography, short biographies, the publication of all the letters he wrote, small books, theses, reflections, articles. They have enriched our knowledge of his personality and activity in various sectors of apostolate.

The present book, written by Fr. Jonah Makau, leans heavily on the available material and draws from it, manifesting familiarity with many sources. But its particular perspective adds much to the wealth of the existing writings. The author has in mind formation, seminary educators, and the students in formation. The book combines biographical data with today's challenging times. It endeavors to re-read the teaching of the Blessed Founder in the context of globalization and inter-culturality, the new face of the Institute, both in its members composition and inner life, and its outgoing Mission. Many are the new interesting insights, expressed with live images, intelligent considerations and philosophical support.

The Blessed Founder clearly stands out as Father and Teacher. Father by the spirit and spirituality infused in his family of all times. That 'spirit' which he frequently spoke about, and of which he jealously considered himself the only proprietor and dispenser. Teacher, mostly through his life, and not just by imparting lessons and indicating ways and methods. Hence the 'silent man', indeed, speaks loudly. He speaks with his life. He is constantly present to our eyes and heart as a credible witness and a model to imitate. He was and lived what he taught, drawing from his personal experience. And greatly experienced he was!

The self-references are not self-gratifications but instructive indications for life and Mission. Blessed Joseph Allamano, as Father and Teacher, in all humility could rightly say like St. Paul: imitate me. Just as Jesus invited his followers to learn from him gentleness and humility of heart (Mt. 11:29). These, according to all the witnesses who knew the Blessed Founder, were his two typical traits. Typical traits...that he wanted engraved in the hearts and evangelization of his missionary sons and daughters.

FR. JOSEPH INVERARDI, IMC

PREFACE

In the world of today, it is probably asking too much to speak of an industrious and silent person. It may even appear incompatible to speak of the two traits in a single person, since industriousness today goes hand in hand with advertisement, publicity and a lot of media hype. This is why it must be a bit astounding to speak of an industrious silent person in the world of today.

It is however possible to speak of such a person if we mean a person who exists and lives through others, regardless of when he lived. In my quest to identify the few industrious and silent men who have existed, and who could direct a world engulfed by technological noise and indifference, I found myself staring at the picture of Blessed Joseph Allamano, the Founder of the Consolata Missionaries, an international religious and Missionary Institute in the Church, which is known for its concretized method of evangelization since 1901 when it was founded. Having heard questions like: why is Fr. Allamano still blessed after all these years? Why is Fr. Allamano so silent about our agitation to see him canonized? Why isn't Fr. Allamano doing another miracle? etc., I realized that I was actually gazing at one of the silent industrious people who lived. The above questions and many more have been asked by people who feel that Fr. Allamano is too silent to the prayers of his sons and daughters. Such people would have wished to see a glorious Fr. Allamano, who would not only be canonized, but also be active in throwing miracles left, right and centre. It is because Fr. Allamano is not that kind of a miracle worker that has caused many people to ask such questions that border frustration. Unfortunately, those questions are fruits of lack of understanding of who Fr. Allamano actually was. It is for that

reason I decided to re-look the life of this Turinese Priest, under the title “*Understanding the silent industrious man: Blessed Joseph Allamano*”. Although as a Christian it did not escape me that Joseph the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary was also a silent industrious man, as a Consolata Missionary, I decided to investigate the life and teachings of Fr. Joseph Allamano, the man behind the Consolata Missionaries’ fraternity in the world.

Being a young priest (not even ten years in priesthood), the effort to understand the Founder profoundly was not easy. This booklet is therefore a result of analytical reading of other books about Fr. Allamano. Although it may sound as just another fine synthesis of several other books on the Founder and his teaching, its originality is in the reflection of the implications his life and teaching have in our own lives as Consolata Missionaries, and as Christians in general, since Fr. Allamano is a model in the universal Church.

This book is therefore useful to you since it is as a positive catalyst to your spiritual life. It is advisable for those who due to challenges of life are about to give up. Fr. Allamano’s struggle to be a priest and his exertion for ten year before succeeding to begin the Missionary Institute, reveals that “we should not give up since sometimes it is the last key in the bunch that opens the door”. This is why this book is crucial for Consolata Missionaries’ formees, who from the struggle and achievement of their Father, can learn to respond to the call of God and to move calmly and steadily towards their vocation regardless of what they encounter. As much as this book is a result of my effort to understand Fr. Allamano better, it is also a fruit of the need for synthesized material about Fr. Allamano and his teaching, a need that was identified by the Consolata Missionaries Continental formators’ meeting that took place in Sagana (Kenya) between 18th

and 21st July 2019. Although this book is not exhaustive in itself in explaining the Founder, it offers our formators and formees of the initial stages of formation a clear and well analyzed presentation of Fr. Allamano's life and his teachings. It particularly looks at Fr. Allamano in his two characteristic qualities: silence and industriousness. It also looks at the Founder in relation to key aspects of religious and missionary life. As such, this book offers a deeper understanding and insight into what most of us have known about the Founder.

In this work, I would like to particularly acknowledge the great assistance of Fr. Joseph Inverardi, who tirelessly read and re-read the drafts that led to this piece of work, correcting and directing my ideas. I would like also to thank Fr. Francesco Bernardi for his support, which gave this book the layout/design it has. As we present you this book, we wish you a nice reading, and a fruitful reflection of the silent industrious man: Blessed Joseph Allamano. It is our hope that at the end of it all, you will concur with us that in a world that has lost the sense of the importance of silence through mass media hype, and hence nullified the importance of and the power of speech, a silent industrious person is needed to remind the world that 'noise does not produce any good, and neither does the good produce noise'. Fr. Joseph Allamano is that man, who continues to cause ripples in over 30 countries in the world, through silent but transforming evangelical acts of his sons and daughters, the Consolata Missionaries.

Chapter One

THE FOUNDER: BLESSED JOSEPH ALLAMANO

His background

Blessed Joseph Allamano, our founder, was born on 21st January, 1851 in Castelnuovod'Asti, Province of Turin, Italy. At this time Victor Emmanuel II was the king and Massimo d'Azeglio was the prime minister. Allamano got baptised the following day (22-01-1851). His parents were Giuseppe Allamano and Marianna. He had 3 brothers and one sister: (Bro) Giovanni (1841), (Sis) Orsola (1844), (Bro) Natale (1849) & (Bro) Ottavio (28-12-1853). Allamano was the fourth in the family. Their father died on 2nd December, 1853 of anthrax, when Allamano was barely three. The family was relatively well off, as it lived on free-holding farming. Marianna, Allamano's mother, was a very hard-working woman, she brought up the family efficiently, even after the death of her husband, and also managed to keep an eye on the needs of her neighbours, especially the poor and the sick.

Allamano attended the Pescarmona nursery school in Castelnuovo, which was run by Benedetta Savio, a woman who was so holy that Don Bosco referred to her to as a nun at home. Allamano was nine years old when his uncle (Fr. Cafasso, now St. Cafasso) died in 1860. After kindergarten Allamano went to elementary school in Castelnuovo and on 17th October 1860 he was confirmed. On 1862 he completed the fifth grade of elementary school (this year also his brother Natale completed his first year of junior high school in Turin, at Don Bosco's College (secondary school) in Valdocco).

Allamano the seminarian

At eleven Allamano entered the college (secondary school) at Valdocco, accompanied by his uncle Fr. Giovanni (this was 1862 autumn). Don Bosco was his regular confessor. Due to his brightness in academics, he managed to complete a five-year syllabus in a period of four years (this was on Sunday 19th August, 1866). Having completed his junior high school, the same year he went to the parish priest of Castelnuovo and received the cassock. He had decided to become a diocesan priest against his brothers' will. On 1st November 1866 Allamano entered the metropolitan seminary in Turin, accompanied by his uncle from Passerano. That decision was against Allamano's brothers who tried their best to urge him against the choice. To them it would have been better to go into a government school first. Obviously, the advantage of studying in the government school was that at the end, it would be easier to get a job. In addition, the life in the seminary was never easy, and the likelihood of not finishing was always a threat. Allamano brothers' discouragement was therefore not out of malice or envy. They just wanted their brother to be on the safe side in case things did not work out well in the seminary. Aware that human life is in the hands of God come what may, Allamano replied to his brothers' suggestion, "God is calling me now, and I am not sure that he will call me tomorrow". These may be seen as simple words, but they say a lot about Allamano and about the religious vocation. For him the now was very important.

The "theme of now" is paramount not only in religious life but also in the general Christian life. St. Paul writes, now is the moment of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2; Isa. 49:8). In other words, we should not wait until tomorrow, because it may be too late. Our response to our vocation

should be prompt, immediate, or swift if I may say. Just as the apostles left everything and followed Jesus immediately without asking questions, we must act on our vocation now. At least we would have expected the apostles to ask Jesus where he was taking them, how long they would need to follow him, how their families were to survive in their absences, etc. To our surprise, when Jesus said “follow me”, they acted immediately. Probably they sensed that if they did not act on Jesus’ call, they would lose a rare opportunity. Allamano knew that the voice of God he was hearing at that moment was likely to be drowned by many other voices if he did not act on it immediately. This tells us also that when it comes to the issue of vocation, there should be no question of tomorrow. We must respond now. It is understandable why Allamano did not want to postpone his going to the seminary. Probably he knew that many young seminarians lose their vocation because they live a tomorrow that has not yet come and forget the today that is before them. When young people struggle to know Latin and Italian while at the Propaedeutic level while not responding to key events like community moments of prayer, meals and recreation, one sees a person living a tomorrow that is not yet, while forgetting a today that is before him. When a young priest collides with everyone looking for leadership, power, authority and influence while refusing to obey his superiors, people see in him a person living a tomorrow that is not yet, forgetting a today that is before him. Such a person needs to be reminded that usually, those who are good at following orders and instructions most of the time become good leaders. That means those who are bad at following instructions certainly become bad leaders, since good leaders must also be good listeners. Fr. Allamano’s words should therefore be a wakeup call to all of us, whether in basic (initial) formation or on the on-going formation.

In the seminary, he was an excellent seminarian, taking pains to learn all the rules so that he may not break any one of them (very obedient). Again, he remained a studious student, especially because he believed that an ignorant priest does more harm than a wicked one. On 1868, his brother Ottavio fractured his hand while ringing the Parish Church bell for the evening Angelus. A certain doctor tied his hand very tight that blood stopped circulating. That affected the young man so badly that at last after several doctors saw him, they decided that amputation was the only option. With the help of Fr. John Allamano (uncle of Allamano) however, the young man managed to graduate in law at the University of Turin. Allamano lost his mother Marianna on 15th December 1869, making him an orphan, since his father had died long time before. We certainly don't need to be told the effects of lack of parents as one is growing. Allamano must have been very strong to withstand the blow, especially given that he was a person of poor health – yet he did.

Allamano the priest

On 25th May 1872 he received the tonsure, making him a member of the Turinese clergy incardinated into the diocese. On 21st, December 1872 Allamano received the sub-diaconate after making his retreat at Chieri (this stage involved a vow of perpetual chastity). On 23rd March 1872 he was ordained a deacon, and on 20th September 1873 he received his priesthood at a tender age of 22. In truth, Allamano should have been ordained in June that year, but he had not yet attained twenty-two years and a half by that month. As a result, he was forced to wait for another three months. What he did not know was that, that was the first lesson on patience that God was teaching him. Soon, other episodes of his life would demand maturity in the virtue. Fr. Allamano, like every young priest, would have wished

to be appointed to a parish after his ordination. In fact, he voiced that fact to Archbishop, Msgr. Lorenzo Gastaldi respectfully saying “I had hoped to be an assistant pastor and maybe later a parish priest in some little village”. The Archbishop responded “You wanted to be a parish priest? If that is what is bothering you, I am giving you the most important parish in the diocese: the seminary”. With those words Fr. Allamano found himself a formator at an early age. It is important to re-look this episode of Allamano’s life. What does it tell us?

First his word: He would have wished to be appointed an assistant pastor in a little village. The words of Allamano tell a lot about himself, and about how we should live our missionary life. Unlike many people, Fr. Allamano did not harbour ambitions of greatness and power. Many people would have demanded to be parish priests, but Fr. Allamano’s desire was to serve as an assistant. Even today, very few people like to be in the second position. We all like to be the first in everything and everywhere. The result of these hidden agenda in us is always jealousy, envy, competition in the ministry, hatred and backbiting in our communities and sometimes even malice. Many religious people and missionaries live their lives as heavy crosses just because their confrere(s) are not ready to be the second in different spheres. Fr. Allamano seems to have known that this was the foundation of conflicts in community life and avoided it like a plague.

In addition, we have read that Fr. Allamano would have wished to be an assistant pastor in “a little village”. Again, few people would have chosen that. Even today, no one wants to be sent in a little obscure parish. There are missionaries who wish to be sent in big parishes, which are economically stable. It is a bad sign when a missionary demands to know if the place he is appointed has a big comfortable house, electricity, internet, tarmac roads and

telephone coverage. We can call that a bad sign because Abraham Maslow, the great psychologist taught us that needs cause motivation, and when they are not satisfied, they cause frustration, conflicts and stress. This is why it is important to see things Fr. Allamano's way. The wishes of those who wish to be true missionaries should therefore be the same of those of Fr. Allamano. After all, it is what Christ teaches us when he says "do not carry a haversack, clothes, money, an extra pair of tunic, etc" (Mt. 10:9-14; Lk. 10:4; Lk. 9:3-5). Second, Fr. Allamano would have liked to be in a pastoral set up, but he found himself in a formative set up. It was not inappropriate for Fr. Allamano to have such dreams for he too was burning with the apostolic zeal that all young ordained priests should have. His openness to whatever the will of God brought in his young priestly life was therefore remarkable.

Fr. Allamano went to the most important parish according to his bishop: seminary. That is where he would begin his priestly ministry: following up young people and shaping their desires to serve God into honest, genuine vocation to be ministers in the Church. Fr. Allamano could not forget the advice of Archbishop Gastaldi: "Like a music teacher, who will not let a wrong note pass, even if it is only a little one, you too should not let even the most trivial shortcoming go by". The sentiments of the archbishop were not really a novelty to Fr. Allamano. He was naturally a serious person, who never took things lightly. For instance, Fr. Allamano demanded that in addition to paying attention in the Church, the students were not to make noise by sneezing or blowing their noses aimlessly. When feeding the cat, they were not supposed to soil the floor. And when in lavatories, they were not supposed to sing or whistle. These may certainly appear irrelevant details to follow, but those who ignore small details end up ignoring open and glaring big ones. After all, the scripture

itself teaches us that he who is faithful in little things will be faithful in great ones (Lk. 16:10).

With that understanding, Fr. Allamano embarked on the formative ministry, proving to be both fatherly and firm. He did not need to be told that before him was a huge responsibility. Assessing people's suitability for religious life has never been easy, and it was not even then. It was a task that demanded a lot of balance. Even today, one has to be fair to the young person, and accountable to the Church. That is why Fr. Allamano did not need to be told that it would have been a huge mistake to let unsuitable candidates continue to the ministry deliberately, since that would have been comparable to a watchman letting thieves to enter a house that he is supposed to guard. On the other hand, it would have been a terrible tragedy to discontinue young people who had genuine vocation, as that would have amounted to "vocational abortion" – an awful thing especially if it was deliberate. Being a formator was, as it is today, a tactical act of balance. One has to balance between being friendly to the students and still firm enough to command authority. Fr. Domenico Agasso noting the sensitivity of the task Fr. Allamano had taken to be a formator says "it was easy to get oneself hated by the lads".

In September 1876, after long protracted battles about moral theology at the Pastoral Institute, Archbishop Galstaldi relieved monsignor Bertagna of his duties as professor of moral theology, after the diocesan priests of Turin gave an unfavourable assessment of the moral theology that was being taught. Humiliated, Monsignor Bertagna went to the diocese of Asti, where he was made the Vicar General by the bishop. In the course of a few years, that position of lecturer of moral theology in the Pastoral Institute consumed men of great stature in the diocese. Canon Ludovico Chicco, who succeeded Msgr

Bertagna, ended up resigning in November 1879. His successor too, Canon Roetti, was also unable to do the job. He “simply walked out leaving the keys with the bursar”. Fr. Allamano watched from his post at the seminary the events that were happening in the Pastoral Institute. It was his nature not to put his nose in things that did not concern him. Probably he knew that meddling is the cause of most of the conflicts in the world even today. What he did not know was that sooner or later he would be heading the troubled ship.

The year 1880 began badly for Fr. Allamano. On 26th January, his brother Ottavio died of pneumonia at the age of twenty-six. The young man who was married to Benedettina Turco of Castelnuovo and with whom he had had a daughter, had completed his law degree two years before. The tragedy affected Fr. Allamano deeply. One time while he was with the clerics of Turin at the Hermitage, the Archbishop informed him that he had been appointed as the Rector of the Consolata which also meant being the Rector of the Shrine of St. Ignatius and the Pastoral Institute. “Thank you for trusting me, but I am too young for this huge responsibility”, Fr. Allamano said to the Archbishop. He was just twenty-nine years old.

“Perfect! It is even better that you are young, because if you will make mistakes you will have all the time to rectify them”, the Archbishop said encouragingly. He was sure that Fr. Allamano was not objecting the appointment, but that his response was the result of the initial shock and fear that all people experience when called upon to undertake a new assignment. He was right. Fr. Allamano was exemplary in obedience. He had no equal in that. He respected authority deeply and obeyed even what many people would have been seen as discretionary opinions of the given authorities.

Fr. Allamano in the Consolata Shrine

On 2nd October 1880 Fr. Allamano walked into the Consolata Shrine without warning. It was not his character to drum up electrifying and exorbitant reception for himself. His serene, cool and composed character made him avoid forums where people made themselves known. Fr. Giacomo Camisassa, who was just twenty-six years old, arrived at the Shrine the following day: 3rd October 1880. The two knew that they had a crucial duty before them. The Consolata was the Church in which many people of Turin took refuge when life became rough. There they went during wars, epidemics, public disasters etc. No one went there and returned home the same. Our Lady always ensured that those who went to her went home consoled by her son.

At the Consolata shrine, Fr. Allamano and Fr. Giacomo Camisassa discovered that the task they had taken was not as easy as it appeared. The Church was in a terrible situation. The structure was old and the paint had faded off. The Friars Minor who had been installed by the government in 1855 after the expulsion of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, were few and elderly and it would have been too much to demand of them much more than their presence. To help them retire in dignity, Fr. Allamano allocated four hundred lire a year as pension, an amount that the Archbishop raised to five hundred when he learned of it. With that, the three elderly Friars left the Consolata Shrine in a dignified way. One cannot miss the similarity of Fr. Allamano's action to the action of St. Joseph of trying to leave Mary in a dignified manner when he learned of her pregnancy. Those are not actions of people who raise themselves above others. Those are actions of people who value the dignity of others, people who see the image of God in those they meet, and people who

know that undermining others is undermining the creator.

Conspicuously, Fr. Allamano like St. Joseph, was a silent man. Both were people who spoke little but did much, people who did not like fanfare, but people who allowed God and other people to shine while they remained in the background. They were men of dignity themselves. Would we be making a mistake calling them silent industrious men? Fr. Allamano and Camisassa went on working. He knew how important the Pastoral Institute was to the diocese, but even more to the Consolata. The Pastoral Institute was a college where young priests went to finish off their studies. It was a launching pad to pastoral ministry in the diocese. Being near to the Consolata, the young priests offered their service to the people also. As such, Fr. Allamano knew that a fully functional Pastoral Institute was an advantage to the Christians. Fr. Allamano wished the Pastoral Institute were functioning. But the Archbishop had closed it down due to issues of moral theology. Many in the Turinese clergy had been against the decision. In fact, many blamed the Archbishop for various reasons, including being harsh and hasty.

Courageously, Fr. Allamano approached the Archbishop and gave him his opinion, which happened to have been very objective. Without blaming any side, Fr. Allamano explained that the presence of the young priests at the Pastoral Institute would have given the Christians a variety of priests for the sacraments, including Mass and confessions. He also made known to the Archbishop that many considered his action of closing the Pastoral Institute a punishment, and the best way to prove them wrong and to show that the closure was meant to rectify some issues was only to re-open the Pastoral Institute. Impressed by the argument of the young priest, the Archbishop said, "Well done! The Pastoral Institute will be opened on the condition that the teacher of Moral theology will be none

other than the Collegiate Doctor Joseph Allamano". Fr. Allamano did not believe his ears, but the Archbishop had spoken: the only way the Pastoral Institute would have been opened was to have him teach the moral theology.

True to his words, on 6th November 1882 the Archbishop re-opened the Pastoral Institute with Fr. Allamano as the Rector, and fathers Luigi Fassini, Giacomo Bertolone, Canon Ignazio Dematteis and Giacomo Camisassa as teachers. It is important to see deeper into this episode. Naturally, when there is a crisis, not everyone is given the chance to head crucial places. It is a sign of great trust to be handed an institution that is dead to bring it up. Certainly therefore, we cannot miss to see that Fr. Allamano commanded a lot of trust in the eyes of the Archbishop. Trust is a very expensive thing, and that is why you cannot get it in cheap people. Being trusted is a great sign of honour. Alas to him who cannot be trusted with anything. Lack of trustworthiness is the worst picture one can ever present to the world. Untrustworthiness means that people see dishonesty, hypocrisy, insincerity and pretense in a person. Such a person is the most dangerous animal among others because being dishonest also means that such a person is full of treacheries, corruption and fraudulence. In other words, such a person is not accountable. Simply put, no one can tell when such a person means what he says or does, when he says what he means and when is just kidding. Those who believe in such a person do so at their own risk.

The fact that Archbishop Gastaldi offered Fr. Allamano the Rectorship of the Pastoral Institute at that delicate moment showed that Fr. Allamano was an impeccable person. The trust of the Archbishop in Fr. Allamano came even more evident with time. Aware of the controversies that had rocked the Pastoral Institute, Fr. Allamano told the Archbishop that he would take the task on the

condition that he would not be forced to use other notes of moral theology except his own. To that, the Archbishop said' "Well, I trust you. Go on". That was another sign that the Archbishop trusted the young priest fully.

To allow him to use his own notes when the reason of the closure of the Pastoral Institute had been the subjective manner in which Moral theology was being presented was a noteworthy thing. Fr. Allamano got working. As he went along, he also incorporated the notes of the Archbishop, although he did not make them the main material. By that time, Fr. Allamano was an important figure in the diocese. His silent and keen manner of doing things seemed to favour him. After all, each one of us likes honest, faithful and serious people around us. That explains why he was becoming a key person around Archbishop Gastaldi. That fact was evident in that when the Archbishop decided to choose a group of young priests to help run things in the diocese, Fr. Allamano was one of them. Others included Fr. Giuseppe Maria Soldati who was put to be in charge of the Turin Metropolitan Seminary and Fr. Giuseppe Aniceto, who had implemented the Archbishop's plan to transform the Episcopal Institute at Giaveno into a seminary for the boys. As usual, not everyone was happy with the appointments. Some people felt that the Archbishop was elevating "young boys" to tasks that belonged to more mature priests. You can imagine how such people felt when Fr. Allamano was made a canon of the Turin cathedral on 10th February 1883.

On 24th March 1883, an Easter Saturday, the Archbishop visited the Consolata Shrine to pray. As he was leaving, he noted that the Church was in a bad condition. Pointing it out to Fr. Allamano, the Rector said that he had a plan to renovate it. He had in fact been organizing himself to start external restoration of the ancient Church.

"Then get working on it", the Archbishop said

as he left. The two agreed to meet the following day in the Cathedral, and on Tuesday the following week for Lunch. Meanwhile, Fr. Allamano was to sign a contract with someone on Monday to begin the renovation of the Church. Unfortunately, however, the following day at 7.30 am the Archbishop was found unconscious on the floor of his room by his secretary. Two hours later he was pronounced dead, fulfilling the words of the scripture: “many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails” (Prov. 19:21).

With the death of Archbishop Gastaldi, the diocese of Turin received Cardinal Gaetano Alimonda of Liguria as its bishop. He was a man of good temperament and lover of peace. As it happens always when a new person takes over a given position, he brought with him several changes. Notable among them was the recalling of Msgr. Bertagna, whom Archbishop Gastaldi had dismissed from teaching moral theology at the Pastoral Institute. On 1st May 1884, the Archbishop consecrated Bertagna a bishop and appointed him his auxiliary, in addition to putting him in charge of all seminaries. That of course meant the dismissal of Fr. Soldati who the previous Archbishop had appointed as Rector of the Turin Metropolitan Seminary. More shocking, the new bishop began appearing in the Pastoral Institute and giving topics of moral theology to students. The topics became lectures which with time became regular. At last Fr. Allamano was edged out of his teaching post (Cf. D. Agasso, Pg. 52). He was however not surprised.

The new Archbishop seemed bent to undo what his predecessor had done as far as appointments were concerned. Fr. Allamano having seen several of his colleagues brought down, he knew that soon he would also face the music. He was not wrong, because not long after that, he was invited by the Archbishop to present the

accounts of the Consolata Shrine, together with those of the renovation he had been doing. Seemingly, someone had whispered into influential ears that Fr. Allamano may have been misusing the Church funds.

To their surprise, Fr. Allamano immediately delivered the complete accounts on the desk of the Archbishop, with every item of income and expenditure well recorded. With that, he returned to his duties and waited. To his surprise also, no comment ever came. Instead, the accounts were silently returned to him. It was obvious that the fault finding had failed to pin him down. Perplexed at how treacherous people could become, Fr. Allamano decided to visit the Archbishop and hand in his resignation. He was on his way to the palace of the Archbishop when he met with Fr. Felice Carpignano of the Oratorians. The latter was a respected clergyman in the diocese, who was also Fr. Allamano's confessor. It was him who aborted the resignation program in Fr. Allamano's mind. Convinced by Fr. Felice, Fr. Allamano returned to the Consolata and went on with his duties in silence and zeal – as usual.

It did not pass a lengthy period before the Archbishop himself visited the Consolata. He had begun seeing things differently, and the first reparation to what he had done was to appoint Fr. Allamano as the superior of the Josephite sisters, taking the place of Fr. Soldati who had died, and who had been unjustly and unceremoniously removed from the seminary. Sometime later, the Archbishop would openly say to Fr. Allamano in front of the Canons in the Cathedral that he had been misled about him. And with that he embraced him bringing into a closure what appeared to be misdirected feelings towards him. As the serene man that he was, Fr. Allamano went on living his life at the Consolata with Fr. Camisassa. They were at the time renovating the inside of the Consolata Shrine. The Rector, Fr. Allamano, to ensure that he kept

the people of Turin informed about the progress of every step they made in the restoration of the Church, began a magazine which he called “La Consolata”. Through it, he would send invitations for contributions; provide useful information, in addition to giving notices about the state of the work and the estimates of the remaining work. That action encouraged the people, as through Fr. Allamano they saw Fr. Cafasso, who in his time always encouraged reliance on people’s spontaneous generosity. The move was also a clear manifestation of Fr. Allamano’s transparency. A transparency that would be later demanded of his missionaries.

Fr. Allamano dares to dream

Each human person is created by God for a given reason. It takes real effort to identify what one is meant for. Although Fr. Allamano was a diocesan priest, he found himself inspired by people who seeing the need to make a difference in the world had begun institutions that transformed people’s lives. He too felt called to identify a solution to the problem of ignorance of Christ in other continents, especially in Africa. He wondered at the serenity with which the European Church went about her business as if Christ had been already known everywhere. He expected to see concern and desire to do something about the plight of Africa where people still lived in “spiritual darkness”. Fr. Allamano had wished to be a missionary himself, but his frail health would never allow him.

After his visit to Rome between December 1887 and January 1888 for the jubilee of Leo XIII (i.e. of fifty years of priesthood), Fr. Allamano began thinking of starting the implementation of the idea that had been cooking in his head for some time: beginning a missionary Institute. On 6th April 1891 Fr. Allamano wrote the first letter to Propaganda Fide, expressing his intention to

found a regional institute for priests devoted exclusively to missions. At the time, he was not asking for approval, but to find out if Propaganda Fide would allow such a project. Fr. Allamano's motivation could have as well developed from the fact that although Turin had many Institutes devoted to various courses, unlike other dioceses, it did not have a missionary society. The only similar efforts that had been witnessed in Turin included the efforts of Canon Giuseppe Ortalda, who had projected himself as a great missionary activist in Turin by building what came to be known as "apostolic school", only to end up dying in 1880 as a failure. On 13th April, Fr. Mancini informed Fr. Allamano that his idea had made a great impression to Propaganda Fide, and that it had been received well.

Fr. Allamano had explained to Propaganda Fide that his intention was not to animate and form young people to be missionaries and then hand them over to it to be assigned where it was necessary, as it had been the norm in the time, but to start an Institute destined to work in East Africa, and working under its own leadership. With the first initial positive sign, Fr. Allamano wrote back to Fr. Mancini saying that before going to Rome, as Propaganda Fide had requested, he had to inform his Archbishop since he had not said anything to him about his intention. Unfortunately, at the time, Archbishop Alimonda was sick in Genoa. Fr. Allamano wrote to the Archbishop explaining the facts of having such and such an idea, about having spoken to Rome (Propaganda Fide), and about having received a positive signal that this was a good idea.

It seems that the Archbishop was not impressed by the route that Fr. Allamano had taken. The Archbishop may have felt undermined by the fact that Fr. Allamano had already spoken to Vatican before even mentioning the issue to him. As a result, there was no reply to his letter for some time. After quite a period, a letter arrived from

Genoa send by the secretary of the bishop informing him that due to the illness, the Cardinal could not deal with the issue. With that information, Fr. Allamano and Fr. Camisassa could not honour an invitation to go to Rome to discuss the issue in person. Aware of the usual behind the scene activities that precede most public things in life, Fr. Camisassa wrote to Fr. Barbagli, the procurator of the Congregation for missions in Rome, saying that it seems someone was against the project, and that they were not ready to start anything without the approval of their bishop, otherwise it would be like stifling the idea even before it took root.

Fr. Camisassa made it clear that if Propaganda Fide would have spoken on their behalf to the Archbishop, they would be secure. He also requested Propaganda Fide to continue supporting them even with ideas as they waited for things to unfold. In a word, what Fr. Allamano did not know was that his time of test had begun. As an experienced person, he must have known that all worthwhile projects necessarily pass through myriads of tests before they succeed, but he may not have been aware his time of test had come. In fact, what he had just experienced was the first of many challenges that were to come on his way before he could ever speak of being a founder. Below are other challenges that came on his way before founding the Consolata Missionary Institute.

Chapter Two

CHALLENGE TOWARDS THE FOUNDATION

(a) Cardinal Alimonda misunderstands

Fr. Allamano

We have already mentioned that Cardinal Alimonda may have misunderstood Fr. Allamano's intention to write to Rome. Naturally, anyone would be vexed to know that something has already been discussed elsewhere and even worse, by people above him, yet it is being presented to him as if it is totally a new idea. We understand the Cardinal if he felt undermined. However, it is also true that the Cardinal did not know why Fr. Allamano had written to Rome, and probably it would have been wise to investigate the issue silently first before taking offence. Fr. Allamano did not intend to undermine his Bishop and neither was he requesting Propaganda Fide's approval. He only wanted to know if the idea seemed viable, since if Propaganda Fide would have said the idea was off, then there would have been no need to pursue it further with the Archbishop. His bishop however missed that.

(b) Cardinal Alimonda dies

Time heals. The issue between Fr. Allamano and his bishop would have probably resolved itself naturally, were it for the fact that on 30th May 1891, the Archbishop, Cardinal Alimonda died at seventy-three. Death closes all opportunities, even of con-

version. With the Archbishop dead, there was no point of going to Rome to discuss about the issue of the foundation. Everything had to be shelved until another bishop was sent to Turin, and the matter presented to him. Fr. Allamano's idea of the foundation was therefore being forced to wait indefinitely. It was in fact better when the Archbishop was alive, since he could have as well changed his mind. Now that he was dead, things had to stop until another person was chosen as the Archbishop of Turin. Fr. Allamano's letter to Fr. Barbagli in Rome expressed that feeling of uncertainty. "Can I be sure that the new Archbishop will understand this project properly and consequently know how to stand firm against the gossiping of those who, by complaining about the reduction of the clergy in the diocese will try to arouse the opposition of the Archbishop against me?" Fr. Allamano wrote. In a word, his idea of the foundation was as good as dead.

(c) Shortsightedness of many in Turin about missions

From the letter to Fr. Barbagli, it is clear that there were people who opposed Fr. Allamano's idea of founding a missionary Institute in Turin. Fr. Allamano himself speaks of gossipers. It seems there were people who were speaking aimlessly against his project. The letter also makes it clear that those who did it were not really evil people. On the contrary, they were good people – bishops and priests who were only afraid that sending priests to the missions would create a deficiency of clerical ministers in the diocese after some time. In other words, they were acting out of fear and ignorance of the need that was in Africa,

when parishes in Turin had many priests per parish. To Fr. Allamano they were just short sighted, because it seems to them the idea of having one priest less was more terrifying than thinking of the many Africans who did not have even a single one. We cannot however ignore the fact that some may have been gossiping against Fr. Allamano's project due to jealousy. All in all, Fr. Allamano decided not to take their yapping in seriously. He knew a time would come when they would be ashamed of his progress and keep quiet.

(d) Wild accusations against Fr. Allamano

There is a saying that says if people are not complaining against you, be sure you are doing nothing exceptional. I tend to concur with it to some extent. When people see a person living the same mediocre life like them, they can never complain. Even worse, when people see a person living worse than them most of the time they are contented – due to the natural human tendency to wish to be better than others. Fr. Allamano's effort to start the missionary Institute gave birth to many wild accusations. As Fr. Camisassa wrote, "Canon Allamano has been accused of taking advantage of his position to attract young priests to the detriment of the diocese". That was not a simple accusation. Fr. Allamano himself was diocesan priest. How was it possible that he was working against his own diocese? The problem in the world is that those who shout louder are the ones who are heard. And because when something is repeatedly said it ends up appearing as the truth, those who are frequently heard end up appearing as the genuine ones. Fr. Allamano knew that the only way to avoid useless

confrontations was to be silent and to wait. If it was the will of God, no one would stand against the idea of the foundation.

(e) Inability to debunk the accusations

There is no difficulty like the one of knowing you are right, but you have no way of proving it to people who think otherwise. Fr. Allamano found himself unable to persuade his distracters to see things the way he saw them. They were just too much bent not to understand. The abundance of priests in Turin did not seem to say anything to them. The cry of mission lands about the lack of evangelizers did not touch them. At least even if they did not understand his words, the reality was clear on the wall for all to read: someone had to do something for Africa. Naturally, if everyone said it was not his business, then at the end it would be nobody's business. Fr. Allamano knew that if things took that route of everyone minding his own business, then the Non-Christians in Africa were the ones to pay the price. In September 1891 Fr. Allamano at the request of Cardinal Simeoni, the prefect of Propaganda Fide, sent to him the overall plan for the Missionary Institute. He however ruled out the idea of going to Rome. Founded on his obedience, Fr. Allamano said that he did not intend to do anything before being sure that the new Archbishop would approve his idea. He was however happy that someone important in the Church saw things from his perspective.

(f) Cardinal Simeoni dies

The scriptures remind us always that we should not put our hope in human beings because human beings

are finite (Ps. 118:8; Ps. 146:3). Human beings are limited. They can fail and actually do fail. They can also disappoint, frustrate and humiliate – and they actually do it. If Fr. Allamano would have put his hope in Cardinal Simeoni, then he would have failed, because in January 1892 the Cardinal died of pneumonia at the age of seventy-six. We do not need to be told how Fr. Allamano felt. Probably if he had not been grounded in faith in God, he would have as well said that the trend of the events that seemingly opposed the foundation of the Institute, were a sign of God that the foundation was not his will. However, Fr. Allamano's hope was in God. Like Mary, he was convinced that "nothing is impossible to God." (Lk. 1:37). With that conviction he decided to wait God's appointed time. He was sure God's time was the best. He had no doubt that good things come to those who are patient enough to pray and wait.

(g) Uncooperative Prefect of Propaganda Fide

With the death of Cardinal Simeoni, Cardinal Mieczysław Ledóchowski became the head of Propaganda Fide. The new Cardinal was Polish, and a splendid figure and witness to the Christian faith. He did receive Fr. Camisassa in Rome, but his message was one of discouragement. Without beating about the bush, the cardinal noted that "Allamano's plan was of no interest, since there were already more than enough missionary institutes in Italy". That sounds like a knockout. With those words, I doubt if there was a need to push further. Fr. Allamano as usual remained calm. He must have remembered Psalm 108:12 and Psalm 60:11 which say that the help that a human being can give is worthless. Getting a green

light from the Cardinal would have been an encouraging thing, but that alone would have meant nothing. Strengthened by his meditations on the *Imitation of Christ*, the silent industrious man went on with his duties at the Consolata Shrine as if nothing so disheartening had happened. Now and then the words of his favourite book (the imitation of Christ) on patience would pass through his mind:

“You are not truly patient if you will only endure what you think fit, and only from those whom you like. A true patient man does not consider by whom he is tried, whether by his superior, his equal, or his inferior; whether by a good and holy man or by a perverse and wicked one...” (III, 19,1)

(h) Death of Archbishop Riccardi

The place of Archbishop Alimonda was taken by Archbishop Davide Riccardi. The new Archbishop arrived in the diocese on 23rd March 1892. He had been the bishop of Ivrea and then Novara. He was a nice man who loved working in the mass media. He immediately found a good working relationship with Fr. Allamano when he realized that Fr. Allamano could help him out in various issues. Fr. Allamano's cool temperament and serene character endeared him to people. After all who likes noisy crooks, disorganized chatterboxes and dishonest hooligans? Not even me. Soon Fr. Allamano was again in committees and commissions of the diocese. He was however not in a hurry to bring up the topic about his idea of beginning a missionary Institute even though the Archbishop frequented the Shrine for personal prayer. Surprisingly, the new Archbishop did not rule the diocese

for long. On 28th November 1897 the tireless bishop breathed his last. From a distance it would seem that Fr. Allamano's dream to be a founder was hitting a snag. However, God had his own plans. After all, was he not the one who said "My ways are not your ways and my thoughts are not your thoughts?" (Isa. 55:8,9). The death of Archbishop Riccardi saw the entrance of Agostino Richelmy as the new Archbishop of Turin. Fr. Allamano sensed that his time of trial was approaching the end. Archbishop Richelmy had been fellow student with Fr. Allamano, and that somehow opened a window of hope that things could still tilt to his favour. From a distance Fr. Allamano started seeing the truth of the words "God does not test us beyond our capabilities" (1 Cor. 10:13).

(i) Fr. Allamano gets seriously ill

The change of guard in Turin resuscitated Fr. Allamano's hope. He began counting his graces, and was sure that Archbishop Richelmy who was also a Cardinal would never turn down the idea of beginning a missionary Institute, not merely due to their friendship, but especially because his intentions to start one were genuine. Fr. Allamano must have counted the coming of Cardinal Richelmy to Turin as the Archbishop as one of his many blessings. He may have also counted the recent events in his life as moments of grace leading to the foundation of the Institute. To start with, Msgr Angelo Demichelis, a priest whom Fr. Allamano barely knew had left him a house along Corso Duca di Genova when he died. Then there was another house in Rivoli. In addition, Engineer Edoardo Felizzati, who had died due to influenza epidemic that took place between 1899 and 1900, had

left three hundred thousand lire to Fr. Allamano. All these must have been real signs that God may have been interested with the foundation. After all, it was only financially stable people who would ever think of starting huge undertakings like beginning missionary institutes.

Fr. Allamano was still counting those as his blessings when on 18th January 1900 he felt the first symptoms of the Flu. On 24th he was so ill that doctors lost hope of his recovery. Many had written him off. Few people thought that he would survive. Allamano himself thought that he would die, and for that reason he had told his archbishop that he was not in a position to found the congregation, so he was asking the cardinal to do it. Many people were already praying that he may go to heaven in peace after his wonderful service at the Consolata Shrine. All those were in for a rude shock. On 29th January, he was miraculously healed from a deadly sickness by Our Lady Consolata. On 6th April he wrote an official application to Cardinal Richelmy for the foundation of the missionary institute, and on September in a meeting with other bishops of Piedmont, Bishop Richelmy pleaded for the foundation of the institute. On 12th October, Cardinal Richelmy gave a verbal approval of the foundation, and on 29 January 1901, during the feast of St. Francis de Sales, he sent the official Decree of Foundation, bringing into reality the existence of the Consolata fathers and brothers. It is rather important to note that Fr. Allamano's idea was to start the Institute in 1891, but he ended up starting it in 1901 - ten years later. Without a doubt, this says a lot.

First of all, it tells us that Fr. Allamano lived in the hands of God like every other human person.

Remember, this fact did not apply just to Fr. Allamano. Even for the Holy Family, God did not make their lives any easier. True, in the Holy Family there was his son, but God did not make life for St. Joseph any simpler. Like all people, St. Joseph had to struggle to feed his family. He had to be a man. He had to work like everyone else to put food on the table. Like all people, Joseph had to make furniture, display them and wait for customers. If nobody came to buy, that day became a bad day. Why? Because if no one appeared to buy something, not only he and Mary his wife, but also Jesus their son, slept hungry. Similarly, just like God didn't favour Joseph by bringing to him miracle furnitures and customers, he didn't favour Fr. Allamano just because he had a good idea and good intentions. Although Fr. Allamano had plans, good dreams, admirable wishes and desires (of seeing the congregation begin), his convictions did not replicate the will of God. If the plans of Fr. Allamano were in conformity with God's will, it would have been possible to start the Institute in 1891 as he wished. This reminds us that the plan of God cannot be changed by good human plans and wishes, and therefore our duty in the world is to try to identify the will of God and follow it. It reminds us what we read in the Psalms "the soldiers can prepare the horses for a battle, but the victory comes from the Lord" (Prov. 21:31). It is important to note that it was not a mistake for Allamano to have good plans (of starting the Institute) - we should all have plans for the future. If we don't then we are dead, since man lives by hope.

Second, the ten years of waiting shows that Fr. Allamano was a man of very strong character. He was not the type that gives up after an initial fail-

ure. We certainly know that Fr. Allamano was not just sitting as the years went past. He was consulting and pushing in the corridors of power in the Church. Each failure motivated him to go ahead, since he had known another way how not to achieve his goal. This is certainly a lesson to all of us. Nothing comes easy. In fact, failure is already success if we learn from it. Many people in Fr. Allamano's position would have given up very early. His endurance however showed that he too understood what we know today: failure is only an opportunity to begin again, this time more wisely. Those who work with that attitude end up learning that in truth, failure is not the opposite of success, but part of it. Sometimes when we are in difficulties, we think that we have been buried underground forever, until we discover that we are actually planted to sprout out into new promising reality. The truth however remains that no gain is without pain and as our medics tell us, the pain that does not kill us instructs us and heals us. Fr. Allamano's ten years wait to start a congregation reminds us that we should fight for what we are convinced of, because if it is the will of God, it ends up becoming a reality. One who abandons his vocation just due to a few challenges and obstacles is not meant for that vocation. Even Jesus said that whoever holds a plough and looks back is not worthy of him (Lk. 9:62). The ten certainly frustrating years that Fr. Allamano waited for the will of God to manifest itself shows his endurance. The ten or so years that a person goes through to arrive at priesthood is also a test of endurance. When lived in serenity, they are also a confirmation of the authenticity of the vocation of a person. Endurance is a key quality since it is not those who start well who are

praised in any race, but those who endure to the end. As if to confirm the same, the bible itself tells us that “he who will endure to the end will be saved” (Mt. 24:13).

With the Institute founded, on 8th May 1902, our Founder saw the departure of the first four Conso-latas to Africa. I have no doubt that they remembered the words of the Founder each and every minute they sailed through the ocean:

...it's not enough to be called. It's not enough to answer that call. It's not enough just to enter the society. It's not enough even to go to the missions. One needs a full, generous and constant response to the grace of his vocation. Not everyone who is called perseveres, because not everyone responds. Judas was certainly called to the apostolate by Jesus himself - and still he lost his vocation (SL. 25).

These words of our Founder must never be forgotten. Even today, they are as fundamental as they were the time he spoke them. By repeating the word “enough” so many times, the Founder wanted to pass a key message to his missionaries. He meant that it was not sufficient just to be in the Church - one had to live accordingly. And the Founder was right. Even today, we know that just like the Jews believed that they were sons of God by the virtue of having Abraham as their father, but ended up cheating themselves, only to be woken up by the Babylonian exile, it is also very possible for us to believe that we have already secured our salvation by being close to the tabernacles and the Church compound. Fortunately, the gospels show us that even though there were many people pushing

round and about Jesus, it was only the sickly woman who felt the effect of touching him - actually his cloak (Mt. 9:18-26). In other words, it was not enough for people to be around Jesus – they had to have the right disposition in order to benefit from the nearness to him. Similarly, for us, the proximity to sacred areas does not matter. We may live in what many consider to be sacred grounds and as a result frequently touch him whom many are searching daily, yet live and finally leave (the world) unchanged. This explains why Fr. Allamano repeats insistently the word “enough” in the above citation. The hope of Fr. Allamano when he spoke those words was that his listeners like the old sickly woman who touched the cloak of Jesus and got healed, would one day manage to truly touch him who died for them before their final journey begins or actually ends. The four missionaries he was sending to Africa knew that very well: they had to respond generously to the gift of vocation that God had given them if they were to make any difference in the lives of the people.

They must have been also aware that those words of Fr. Allamano were an affirmation that we are created for something and to devote ourselves to it. They were on their journey to fulfil the usefulness for which God had created and called them. Even today, we must reaffirm that no one is created just to be in the world. God created us to do something in the world, to make a difference, to contribute in the on-going creation of the world and to make the world a better place to live. That is however only possible if we are aware of the choice we are meant to make: either live for something or die for nothing. Our search for that something therefore should be a response to

the plan of he who created us. In the scripture we also get the confirmation that God created us to do something. In Genesis, we read that God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it (Gen. 2:15).

Those words of Fr. Allamano, “it is not enough...”, reveal that it is a sign of personal maturity for a person to be able to devote oneself to a goal, steadily and calmly. This has never been easy for anyone. Even great people like prophet Elijah ran away at some point (1 Kings 19:3,4). Fr. Allamano must have told the four missionaries not to be under any illusion that things would be easy. Devoting oneself to a given goal is a tough task because there is always no guarantee that the effort of devoting oneself to something will be an enjoyable experience, will be appreciated by others or will be successful. In fact, history and experience has shown that most of the worthwhile ventures inevitably meet great challenges, which may even include opposition. In other words, there has never been any perfect environment in which all good things flourish and go smoothly - even God’s great enterprise unfolds in the face of evidently bitter defeat. The ruthless death of Jesus on the cross is one of the best examples we may cite anytime. Fr. Allamano must have repeatedly told the four missionaries that their work would meet difficulties, and that they would have proved to be mature missionaries if they recognized that difficulties are normal in life, and with that knowledge still calmly and steadily pursues their aim undeterred by the forces against it.

Today, if Fr. Allamano were to speak to us, he would tell us categorically that devoting oneself

calmly and steadily to a certain goal implies a capacity to delay gratification of other legitimate needs that may clamour for satisfaction. In other words, when we are in formation, our bodies do not discover that we intend to be religious and hence stop demanding for pleasure, power, or alcohol. They continue. After all that is their nature. We are the ones to learn to delay such gratification. The more we learn to do it the better, for we become experts in it. That way, at some point, such needs no longer bother us much (although it would also be self-deception to think that at some point in life, may be due to age, our bodies will be less tempted). Anyway, arriving at the point where our bodies do not disturb much requires a great deal of discipline and time. Of course, it would be a lie to say that we only need discipline. That would be like saying that we can actually do it by ourselves provided we are disciplined. In fact, this is one of the greatest lies of our world today: the fact that man is capable to achieve anything and everything provided he is disciplined and determined. History has proved that idea wrong. Man's efforts of trying to create monuments of pride have not only ended up as terrible failure, but also as terrible forces of destruction. That is why we must underline that man needs divine power if he has to make any worthwhile achievement. Anyway, the point is that in addition to the divine assistance that is needed to overcome ourselves, one's discipline is important. If the Founder came here today, he would not mince words telling us that an immature seminarian is not likely to succeed in delaying the gratification of such needs. Instead, he gives in when his body disturbs him. Certainly, this applies not just to the seminarians, but to all followers of Christ. We all know

that true happiness comes when needs are fulfilled and when desires are satisfied. Our needs however exist at different levels and the need to prioritize them is crucial. At the depth of the person, is the need for God (a thirst that only he can satisfy). This is why St. Augustine once said that we are meant for God, and we remain restless until we find rest in him. Fr. Allamano's happiness was beginning to get fulfilled. His dream was coming true.

As you would expect, the project did not attract admiration and joy from all quarters. Naturally, that is understandable. We are always surrounded by envious and jealous people, who are either not happy of our achievements, who feel that our achievements make them appear inferior, who hate to see us happy or who are simply hurt by our success. This has been a human tendency for centuries. Even in the time of Jesus there were people who seemingly felt bad when others benefitted from Christ's healing. Such people make us think that they would have been happy if the healed individuals would have been left with their suffering. In other words, it is unfortunate that we carry with us sadistic tendencies even as we claim to be sons and daughters of God. That too was the experience of Fr. Allamano.

While many people were thanking the Lord for the successful foundation of yet another religious Institute in Turin, there were those who had different opinion. Some considered Fr. Allamano's project a clear folly. How could he begin such a project? They could not understand how he had come to a decision of sending people to Africa at his own expense. Where would he get the money to run the institute? How would he maintain the people in Afri-

ca? It was sheer foolish to have made such a decision – they said. Fr. Allamano’s action became the talk of the town. Some other people wondered how on earth Fr. Allamano would run the Institute since he was already overloaded with many duties in the diocese, in addition to his frail health. They went to a point of claiming that he was looking for fame, popularity and recognition. “He will end up like Fr. Ortalda”, some said openly.

Fr. Ortalda had been a priest in Turin who enthusiastically began what he called apostolic schools for training missionaries. For a period, he became popular and many admired him. For some reasons however, he could not maintain the dream alive for long. With time everything collapsed and for that reason he not only ended up dying a frustrated man in 1880, but also becoming the word of caution to those who dreamt of beginning similar projects. Fr. Allamano went on with his activities while many of his colleagues went on spreading all sorts of stories about the end of his projects. Even Bishop Bertagna participated in spreading pessimism about Fr. Allamano ideas. Fr. Allamano was not surprised – everything was scriptural: Jesus was betrayed by one of the twelve men he had chosen as his apostles, just like Samson was betrayed by Delilah – the love of his life.

Today, with the Institute having made a strong foothold in Africa, if the Founder came to us, he would speak to us using African proverbs. I believe he would tell us “people do not throw stones to an empty tree, and neither do they kick a dead dog”. Naturally, people throw stones to a tree that has ripe fruits. Similarly, people are not likely to kick a dead dog, because it has no effect on them. They only kick

a living dog because they know it could bite. The Founder's life and experience depicted exactly that. The fact that many people were opposing his project or spreading pessimism about it was because they discovered in him something they did not have. Fr. Allamano was not an empty tree, and that was why they were throwing 'stones' at him. He was not a dead dog – and that was why they tried to discourage him. If he had been a mediocre person like many of his colleagues, that is, living a flat life that rotated between his sleeping quarters and the pulpit, they would not have fought him. Their efforts to fight him were signs that they had recognized that he was 'more' than what they thought him to be. Fr. Allamano's experience should teach us a lot. If we are second-rate, average or middling, people are not concerned about us because after all we have nothing much to offer. If we find ourselves doing the right thing and yet being persecuted, we should not stop, because it is a sign that we have something that others wish they had. If however we find ourselves being praised, recognized and sung about all the time, we should investigate the issue. Why? Because John the evangelist tells us that the world loves what is its own (Jn. 16:19).

In addition, the fact that Fr. Allamano was being discouraged by people in the Church should not surprise us too. One time, people took their children to Jesus so that he may touch them, but his disciples told them to go away (Mt. 19:13-15). Luckily, Christ noted the issue before the kids disappeared. Of course, it was a shocking thing that the disciples among whom were parents, could stop children from accessing Jesus when they had witnessed how much he did to the people who encountered him. If the ac-

tion would have been done by some passers-by we would not be surprised, but the disciples! The efforts of many people to discourage Fr. Allamano's tell us that we should not expect to be recognized even when we do well. There will always be a person full of envy, jealousy, and such feelings. Instead of getting annoyed, we should move on with our activities praying for them and hoping that they would change their minds. In fact, we should pray for them to live longer so that they may witness God's blessing taking effect in us and our lives radiating his majesty.

Furthermore, the discouragement that Fr. Allamano received from within the Church tells us also that Christ should be the only centre of our lives. Of course, we will always need mentors and other people to be good examples for us to follow, but the centre should always be Christ. When we understand this, even if those whom we consider to be our mentors fail, we will still remain standing, since they are not the central pillar of our lives. Again, our duty should be to pray for them, not to criticize or blame them – because what goes around has a way of coming around. Guided by this wisdom, that is exactly what Fr. Allamano did.

With the Institute a reality, Fr. Allamano continued forming people for its first step out of Italy. In the Consolatina, that is, the small house that he had received as a gift along Corso Duca di Genova, there were eleven aspirant missionaries: some priests and some brothers. Fr. Allamano ensured that they got the best preparation possible. He knew they were heading out of Europe into the jungle of lions and malaria. They deepened their spiritual life, studied English, general medicine, mathematics, natural sciences, and

other practical things like riding, carpentry, masonry, etc. It was the final step before his Institute found its way to Africa. It was what he had been working for all those years.

Chapter Three

CONSOLATA CHARISM

St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians deals at length with various Charisms, or gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12, 13, 14; [1 Cor. 12:4-11]), granted by God to different people for the full growth of the community just as a body needs different parts to be fully grown and healthy. Charism is also a particular inspiration to individual persons on how to live in a special way a specific aspect of the Gospel. In other words, it is an inspiration on how to imitate a characteristic trait of the life of Jesus. The Charism is sometimes called spirituality. That way, the charism or the spirituality is the religious or ethical value that is concretized as an attitude or spirit from which one's actions flow. (That is why other people speak of the spirituality instead of Charism). The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world (CCC 799). It applies to a person's belief in the divine transcendence, through which he or she fashions a lifestyle according to one's religious convictions. Charisms apply not only applies to persons, but also to communities. This is important to know so as to avoid confusion when later we hear a person use the term spirituality.

The life and teaching of Jesus are so rich and deep that nobody can live them fully. Some people are called to live in depth, one or another aspect of

it. For example, St. Francis of Assisi was inspired by the radical poverty of Jesus, St. Dominic tried to follow Jesus in his preaching of the word of God. St. Camillus was impressed by Jesus' loving care for the sick. Don Bosco was inspired by Jesus' concern for the children and young people. Mother Teresa was inspired by the Lord's love for the poor. This means that the founders and foundresses of religious congregations are among people whom God touched in different ways, and in that way inspired them to focus their attention on specific aspects of Jesus' life for the greater glory of God and in response to some peculiar needs of the surrounding society. To make their work more effective they were expected to call other people to join them. That is how religious congregations began, and that distinct way of living the Gospel is what we call charism of a congregation. It is the thing that is specific to each one of them. It is what differentiates them as a kind of individual identity. If you want to join a congregation, the first thing you should enquire about it is its charism and see if it appeals to you, if that is what God is asking of you according to your personality, feelings, talents, and limitations.

How did Allamano discover his Charism

A charism or spirituality is not necessarily the fruit of a sudden inspiration, dream, vision, etc. Most often, it is something that develops in time, through various events and through the sensitivity of the person in perceiving God's presence in such events, in reading the so called "signs of the time". This appears very clearly in Bd. Joseph Allamano, the founder of Consolata Missionaries Family - the fathers and brothers on one side and the sisters on the other. It

took a number of years before he had it clear in his mind.

Fr. Allamano had accepted, purely out of obedience, to be the Rector of the Consolata Shrine. He channeled all his energies and resources into that work without any kind of reservation, as it was his personality to offer himself totally in any task he undertook. Soon, however, he started questioning his role there, as a priest. What was he really supposed to do? He had been called there to be the visible presence of Our Lady for the people in need of comfort and consolation (after all she was Our Lady of Consolation). As a matter of fact, people were flocking into the Shrine and Fr. Allamano would listen to them and give them words of comfort and encouragement. But for what? For a sick person in a family or somebody who had died, a person in danger, a student facing the exams, the victim of an accident, a successful surgical operation, a safe pregnancy, a long journey, and so on. These are obviously human problems and worries, but are they the most important ones, true priorities for people who are Christians? Is this the main concern for Mary in her role as a consoler? Did Jesus die and did Mary suffer with him for these needs only? Is this not too restrictive? There are spiritual needs also. Jesus said “Do not worry about material things. Set your hearts on God’s kingdom first and all other things would be given as well” (Mt. 6:25-34).

Fr. Allamano remembered that when Prophet Isaiah was reminding the people of Israel about the coming of the Messiah, he spoke about God’s consolation. The whole book of Consolation (Isa. 40-55) talks about God’s concern for his people and his plan of salvation. “Console console my people”, “I am

your consoler” (Isa. 40:1; 49:13; 52:12). Here we find the famous Servant of Yahweh that Jesus emphasized and identified with his person and his mission. That became a spark of intuition for Fr. Allamano: God’s Consolation is Jesus himself, the consolation that Mary was asked to give to the world. Fr. Allamano’s role as a priest in that Shrine looked brighter: as the visible hand of Mary, he was there to give Jesus to the people. Reflecting deeply, Fr. Allamano realized that every priest is supposed to give Jesus to the people in his preaching, in the celebration of the sacraments, especially Eucharist, and in the building of the community of believers? Obviously, with Jesus, all the other gifts and consolations would come, since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for the sake of all of us. So, can we not expect that with him he will freely give us all his gifts? (Rom. 8:32)

Fr. Allamano was however not completely satisfied of all he was doing. Something was not fitting properly. Something was missing. It is great to give Jesus to the people, but the people who were coming to the Shrine already knew Jesus. They were already Christians. They were just trying their best to live their Christian commitment. They were lucky to have an excess of priests serving them. What about the huge number of people who in the world had never heard of Jesus? What about the millions who walked around on the face of the earth, but did not know about Jesus message and his salvation? Were they not in a greater need of the same God’s Consolation that he was offering to those who came to the Shrine? Fr. Allamano knew that there was a greater need in places where Christ had never been preached. His precarious health however, could never allow

him to become a missionary and go throughout the world spreading the Gospel. That did not mean that he could not do something - and something he did. He knew he could prepare and send missionaries; in that way he could magnify what he would have done alone were he to become a missionary himself as an individual. That is how the first idea of a missionary society started germinating in his mind. This tiny seed grew, gradually into a clear and detailed project. In this process, Fr. Allamano's spiritual journey could not be ignored or forgotten. The connection between Our Lady of Consolation, God's Consolation and Mission became clear each day for Fr. Allamano.

Fr. Allamano's spiritual venture ended into a very specific way of understanding mission and missionary work. His missionaries, the Consolata Missionaries, would go around the world to bring Jesus and his gospel with new flavor: very human, deeply felt and appreciating the flavour of consolation amid the human burdens, sufferings and problems caused by sin. Fr. Allamano's children would be missionaries, but different from other missionaries with their special charism. It is probably that distinctive view of the Gospel which induced him to propose to his Missionary congregations their characteristics: Family spirit, Gentleness, Love for the Eucharist and for Mary, and especially, sensitivity towards all human needs, including food, health and education. This sensitivity moved him to think about the salvation of the whole man, body and soul, thus considering the so-called human promotion as integral part of the process of evangelization. The Consolata Missionaries Institute was therefore approved as a missionary family in

which members are consecrated to God for mission “Ad Gentes”.

This is therefore the Consolata Charism: **“to bring to non-Christians, Jesus and the Gospel as Consolation of God to his children”**. We can’t bring consolation to others unless we have been fully impregnated by the spirit of the Gospel that we ourselves become joyful and confident people. This is why Allamano expected of his missionaries only first-class people in terms of commitment and generosity in the service of God and the Church, not half-hearted missionaries. After deep moments of silence and prayer, the Founder coined his expectation into the catchphrase ‘first saints then Missionaries’, in which he encouraged that his missionaries first cultivate their own sanctity as a basis of offering an acceptable and worthy service to their brothers and sisters, and then moving to apply the fruits of that sanctity to others. To live that charism, the Consolata missionaries are guided and protected by Our Lady of Consolation, whom Fr. Allamano considered our Foundress and patron, our model and mother. All our efforts are to present the consoling love of God, i.e. Jesus, as she did.

Counting the blessings

Sure that in a few days his dream of having missionaries in Africa would be a reality, Fr. Allamano could not avoid a smile. He was happy. After what had been a real trial, he knew that his project was ready to fly. He could not forget what had become clear grace of God after the heavy test that he had endured for ten years. To him, the appointment of his friend Agostino Richelmy as the archbishop of Turin was not just by chance. Remember that Fr. Allamano

was firm believer of the will of God in everything. Having noted that his miraculous recovery in 1900 had been the first grace from God that confirmed that he was the one to found the Institute, we can now say that the appointment of Cardinal Richelmy must have counted as the second of his consolation. God had “fed him with bread of tears and made him drink tears by the bowlful” (Ps. 80:5) for ten years, but now he was being consoled. Luckily, Fr. Allamano had not complained. He knew that faith in God meant also faith in his designs and timings. That conviction is what kept him calm and focused over the ten years he had waited. Although many people had presented themselves as opposers of his intention to start the missionary Institute, he was aware that the worst mistake he would have done was to lament, curse or blame others for the challenges he had gone through. In silence and prayer, he only allowed himself to see the hand of God in whatever happened.

Thirdly, the offer of Monsignor Angelo Demichelis who had died, gave the Founder the ground on where to start his project. Starting a religious Institute is not a task for the faint hearted. It requires not only courage and virtue, but also practical things like funds and property. Monsignor Demichelis before he died had left the premises in Corso Duca di Genova to Fr. Allamano. There, the Founder would later have his first missionaries, having nick named the house ‘Consolatina’. Fr. Allamano had also received another house in Rivoli and some money - all of which he accepted at the archbishop’s advice.

Fourth, the generosity with which people offered to support Fr. Allamano’s young project was a real sign of God’s encouragement to go on. Among

them was some three hundred thousand Italian Lire from a certain Edoardo Felizzati. He was an engineer and a friend of Fr. Allamano. The Founder only discovered that the man had left him such an amount only after the man's death. The same was the case of Fr. Nicolis, who provoked by the pessimism that was being peddled about Fr. Allamano's project and his capacity to support the Institute, decided to leave a fortune to the Founder. In February 1904 when the man died, Fr. Allamano was shocked to be informed that the man had left him two dairy farms at Verolengo, a library full of books and a golden chalice that the man had been offered for his first Mass. Fr. Allamano refused to take the two dairy farms, but after considering the generosity and trust that the man had had towards him, he accepted the value price of the two farms when it was offered to him by the man's family.

Lastly, the approval of the Institute by Cardinal Richelmy was the greatest grace that Fr. Allamano had experienced after a long time. It was the lack of such approval that had kept him floating for ten good years. The approval was the Church's consent he had been praying for for a decade. It was a real self-manifestation of God in his life. Today, reflecting on the generosity with which people offered resources to Fr. Allamano, we can easily identify something about the Founder. Naturally, people are generous to a good and generous person. The fact that many people offered their donations without informing the Founder, and the fact that he only discovered such offerings after the people's death says a lot about him. It evidently tells us that the Founder, unknown to him, managed to touch the hearts of many people who were around

him and those with whom he met even for a short duration. Whether it was his silent and prayerful character, or his open and transparent accountability, we may never be able to tell what really made people so generous to him. What we know for sure is that in his serene and absorbed disposition, Fr. Allamano was touching and transforming hearts and souls of many. That was certainly a testimony to what he would later demand of his missionaries: the good must be done well without noise. Today, if we discover that our apostolate attracts thunderous appraisals, we must be very concerned.

Chapter Four

POST-FOUNDATION DIFFICULTIES

With the Institute on its feet, and the missionaries ready to go, Fr. Allamano was a contented man. The comprehensive training that he demanded for his missionaries was aimed at ensuring that they would be jacks of all trades once in Africa. The Institute was a reality, but mission had not started in Africa. The post foundation period was not an easy one too. It was accompanied by a number of difficulties. The following are some of them.

(a) Change of plans from Ethiopia to Kenya

Fr. Allamano had been inspired greatly by Cardinal Massaia, who had worked in Ethiopia. Fr. Allamano had planned to send his missionaries to the Galla people in Ethiopia, but circumstances would not allow them in the territory. He thought of shifting slightly downwards, to the Galla lands under the Britons and partly under Italian control. Bishop Andre Jarosseau, a French Capuchin who was the vicar Apostolic of the territory and who supervised missionary activity in the territory agreed to host the Missionaries of Fr. Allamano on a trial basis. He even indicated where they would settle – near Lake Rudolf. Things seemed set, but it turned out that they would not work there because the British and Italian authorities could not guarantee the safety of the missionaries, and as such would not allow Europeans into the region. Fr. Allamano's project had begun well, but things were not going according to plan. With plans to settle in Ethiopia

hitting a snag, there was a need to go back to the drawing board. Luckily, with the help of Bishop Emile Allgeyer of the Holy Ghost Congregation, who was also the Vicar Apostolic of the territory of Southern Zanzibar including Kenya, Fr. Allamano managed to secure a territory of apostolate for his missionaries in central Kenya. With that the dais was cast: Consolata Missionary activities would start in Kenya and not Ethiopia. Now we can narrate the episodes in few lines as if they took just a few days. In truth however, all those movements required a lot of consultation, planning and evaluation, in addition to money and time. At the end, they were long protracted processes of discussions between Turin, Kenya and Ethiopia, which left the Founder drained.

(b) Limited Space

We can almost touch the feeling of contentment of Fr. Allamano when everything got set. He must have been very happy that things had finally straightened up. However, there were still a few hurdles to jump. Just before the Founder could send anyone, Bishop Allgeyer informed him that he did not need many missionaries at the time. He only needed a few. In fact, he would only receive four. You can imagine the disappointment of the Founder and the young zealous missionaries who were waiting to be sent. Left with no option, Fr. Allamano in silence and prayer chose the four: Fr. Tommaso Gays, Fr. Fillipo Perlo, Br. Luigi Falda, Br. Celeste Lusso. To commission their mandate on 3rd May Fr. Allamano gave them crucifixes in the chapel of the Consolatina. Four days later they went to the Archbishop to say goodbye, and on 10th May they departed for Africa.

(c) Mistrust among the whites

After a long tedious and boring journey of traveling by ship, on 28th May 1902, the four first Consolata Missionaries arrived in Zanzibar, where Consul Giulio Pestalozza was waiting them. On the evening of 28 June, after a train journey and then one in a caravan with porters, the four arrived at the place which would be their mission to the Kikuyu people: Tuthu. The following day, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the first Mass was celebrated on Kikuyu soil. One cannot miss the coincident symbolism: Peter represents tradition in the Church, and Paul represents dynamism. Maybe this showed that the missionaries would have been required to maintain the good aspects in the Kikuyu culture, as they tried to instill transforming evangelical values into it. Unaware to them, the Kikuyu territory was dominantly a protestant territory, with the Presbyterian Church of East Africa being very strong. At the time, the relationship between different Christian denominations was not very rosy. As such, a few days in the territory, the four missionaries were visited by an official of the British Government. His visit was followed by a report of wild accusations against them, and a recommendation that they were supposed to leave. In truth, an order to leave arrived, but the four missionaries acting on the advice of Bishop Allgeyer decided to stay put. They would learn later that the natives had nothing to do with the issue. The whole matter was about mistrust of the Catholic missionaries by their fellow whites.

(d) Empty House

Having an empty house is not really a problem, especially when it is new and one is slowly putting furniture in it. An empty house is however a shock when one had things or people inside, only to find it empty. After the

departure of the four missionaries to Africa, seven other men remained in the Consolatina. The action of being left out must have created deep disappointment, resentment and anxiety among them to an extent that they could not hold any further. The result was that Fr. Allamano arrived to the Consolatina to visit them as usual, only to find an empty house. Closing the house, the Founder took the key with him to the Shrine and said to the Consolata: "I have done my best. It is your problem now". Like Jesus who respecting people's right to choose and did not call them back when they began leaving him (Jn. 6:66,68), Fr. Allamano in silence and prayer left everything in the hands of God. He knew that although the episode was discouraging, it could have been God's way of saying that they were not really called to be missionaries. Remember, just before some people left Jesus when he spoke of himself as the bread from heaven, he himself had said that he was aware that some of them were following him just because they "had had all the bread they wanted to eat" (Jn. 6:26). In other words, he was aware that some people were following him for the wrong reasons. This explains why, when they began leaving him, Jesus never said "please don't go, let me explain this in another way". Instead, he respected their right to choose and left them to go. Similarly, although Fr. Allamano was deeply dispirited by the departure of the seven young missionaries, aware that nothing just happens by chance, he left them to go away.

(e) The rise of doomsayers

There is nothing more humiliating like meeting doomsayers after a failure. In an instant they become heroes. They show how they had seen everything from a far, how you had been short sighted, arrogant and stubborn to advice and how you will end up badly. Having been told

about Fr. Ortalda the missionary zealot who became a failure, Fr. Allamano knew that the pessimists would come yapping. The departure of the seven aspiring missionaries was a real blow. Someone would certainly tell him “we told you about this, and you refused to listen”. Worse still, if a young man went to ask for advice anywhere about entering the Consolata Missionary Institute he would automatically be discouraged to the end. Someone would openly tell him that joining the ‘empty Institute’ would be foolishly taking himself where there would be no future.

Fr. Allamano knew that the departure of those boys had a deep negative impact on the young Institute. However, putting his trust in God, he simply said, “those boys have gone away, but others are coming”. His calm meditative character was never in vain – he saw the hand of God where few did. He was sure that everything, whether good or bad, happens for a reason. He did not need to be told that as human beings we may never understand the reasons why some things happen, but he who makes them happen knows not only the reason but also the goal. With that, in silence and prayer Fr. Allamano went on working. He knew that there was no need of blaming someone for what had happened, even if there might have been mistakes here and there. He was sure there was no need of complaining to God. He did not need to be told that God was in control. True to his gut feeling, the hand of God began revealing itself sooner than he expected. In the December of 1902 twenty new candidates enrolled for missionary training. Among them were two priests: Fr. Antonio Borda Bossana and Fr. Gabriele Perlo (the brother of Filippo).

(f) Challenging reality on the ground

The arrival of the four in Kenya revealed realities

that had not been expected. We should not forget that even evangelization takes place within social structures. The four found themselves in front of men and women, young people and children who needed their attention. As men they could only deal with issues that touched men or all people in general. They could not go deep into issues of women and children. That meant that they needed female counterparts. Where were they to come from? That became another headache for the Founder. By all means, he had to look for a solution. As time progressed, Fr. Perlo kept insisting that the need for sisters could not be ignored any longer. Fr. Allamano had to look for sisters who were professed. But from where? He didn't know. The solution was to communicate with as many religious Institutes as possible. Maybe someone would understand his predicament. Finally, after several efforts, Canon Giuseppe Ferrero, the superior of Cottollengo Congregation at the time, came to his rescue. Fr. Ferrero managed to gather a group of Vincentian sisters, who were ready to join and collaborate with the Consolata Missioanries in Kenya.

(g) Death of some initial Sisters

Around April 1903, another group of missionaries was sent from Italy. With the help of Fr. Ferrero, they included 8 sisters, 5 priests and a lay brother. They arrived in Murang'a around 23rd of July. Unfortunately, three months later, the reality of being in Africa revealed itself. As Br. Luigi later noted, "this third expedition seems jinxed, especially on the part of the sisters. Two have died, two are sick, two have gone back to Italy and the other poor souls are just young girls". The death of the two sisters motivated more sisters to come from Italy. This must have been a difficult moment for Fr. Allamano, especially because he had been accused of starting a project that would see

people go to their graves in Africa. He must have been suffering inside, as the events threatened to conform to the fears that had been alluded even before he began the Institute. It was his meditative character that saved his sanity. As usual, in silence and prayer, he left everything in the hands of God.

(h) Discontent begins among the Missionaries

Every beginning is always heavy. Barely a year after arriving in the missions, discontents began. It is understandable that having entered the Institute as adults who had different vocations from the beginning (some were lay while others were priests), and having received a short formation before they were sent to Africa, difficulties were bound to happen. In addition, the action of finding themselves in a totally different environment from the one they were born, brought up and formed contributed to the disgruntlement. In times of crisis, the real personality traits, character and temperaments of people come to the fore.

As the Missionaries settled, it was not difficult for them to discover that Fr. Perlo would be a difficult man to live with. Although he had been commissioned as the bur-sar of the group, he ended up taking its leadership from Fr. Tommaso Gays who was a calm and serene person. Fr. Allamano from Turin had to look for ways of calming the whole group by reining on Fr. Perlo's authoritarian personality. Naturally, you don't cool anger by more anger and outbursts. That is why Fr. Allamano's character served him best in solving wrangles that arose in his young Institute. As usual, he would go in the Church, present the issues to Consolata and wait. Later, after the period of silence and prayer he would write a letter to his Missionaries. Surprisingly that way of approaching things

always did the trick.

(i) Other operational difficulties

Naturally, it is not only the beginning that is hard. The beginnings of everything are always hard due to the lack of stability, and usually that challenge dies away as time goes. The real challenge ends up becoming the sustenance of the stability once it has been achieved. On 12 January 1904, other 12 Cottolengo sisters arrived in Kenya led by 3 priests, 2 brothers. At the time there were 16 sisters in the field, working side by side with Consolata Missionaries. In other words, it was a situation of people of two different congregations having different superiors, trying to coexist and work together towards a given goal. Before them was a language they did not know, distances to cover on foot, hunger, children to teach and sick people to treat, in addition to the usual social difficulties and embarrassments that come with living together. These operational challenges could only be solved on the ground. However, Fr. Allamano's advice offered great relief, because they were always fruits of silence and prayer.

Chapter Five

FR. ALLAMANO'S PASTORAL WISDOM

(a) The Murang'a Conferences

It is said that those who are outside the field think that they are the best players until they get into the field. This saying has the inclination of disqualifying the advice of those who are outside the field. Contrary to it, Fr. Allamano's opinions and advice went a long way in solving many of the problems the missionaries faced down in Africa. Fr. Allamano emphasized frequent meetings and sharing that would harmonize the effort that each missionary offered. In March 1904, there was a meeting of the missionary priests in Murang'a. The meeting came to be known as the 'Murang'a Conference'. It was aimed at exchanging experiences so that it would be easy to make a working plan that would ensure that all worked with unity of intentions. It had ten participants present, and two working in the rooms of the Consolata Shrine in Turin: Fr. Allamano and Fr. Camisassa. At the time it was too early to speak of conversions and baptism. The matter at hand was getting established and becoming self-sufficient. It all involved planting something for the salad, intercepting water to run the saw mill and to produce electric power among other things. Fr. Allamano and Fr. Camisassa followed the progress of the missions through the letters and diaries that the missionaries were sending, and through the same channel of communication, he would give his directives, opinions, and advice.

(b) The Consolata Method

The way a person does his activities decides if he will be successful or not. Does this look common place? It is not! It is one thing knowing what to do very well. It is also one thing having the energy and the intelligence to do what you wish to do. However, if one does not have the proper strategy to use his energy and intelligence to arrive at his goal, then he ends up as a failure. This explains why a nice method was needed if the first missionaries had to make any headways in evangelization. The Founder had warned the missionaries not to expect quick results. In fact, he had told them to avoid such a temptation. They had to take time to plan, to implement the plans gradually and to evaluate them not in a hurry. With that attitude, the Consolata Missionaries got involved in catechism classes, teaching in the open air or under-the-trees schools, visiting the villages, and attending to the sick. This is what came to be known as the Consolata Missionaries' method. It was quite peculiar. It involved a lot of contact with the people, and that did not need a hurry – otherwise it would have backfired in due time. The Consolata Missionaries' method had another uniqueness: it aimed at transforming the country, “not just through religious teaching but also by training the people in agriculture, the rearing of live-stock and manual skills” (*G. Tebaldi, Consolata Missionaries in the World*, 69).

(c) Respect for the Kikuyu culture

When Fr. Allamano was writing to his missionaries, the term inculturation was still unheard of in the Church. However, his directives on how to deal with the new culture would later come to fit what came to be called inculturation. The basis of inculturation is that the gospel is not neutral – it is always wrapped in the culture of

the gospel carrier, even if not in the message, in the way of life. Evangelization is a meeting of two cultures: the preacher's culture and of the person being evangelized. The missionary must try to instill evangelical values in the culture of the other person, yet he has to do so without appearing to be imposing foreign ideas or his own culture on people's culture. To do that, the missionary must involve the people being evangelized at all stages. Fr. Allamano aware of this, demanded that his missionaries be friendly to the people, and if possible, to involve the natives in small but progress bits of work. Fr. Allamano did not want his missionaries to be wandering evangelists or miracles workers who would suddenly appear in the cultures of other people to whip up repentance into them. As much as it was true that the missionaries were taking Christianity in those territories for the first time, the Founder expected his missionaries to know that they were supposed to work with the people not for the people. In other words, the missionaries were not supposed to make native people spectators of their activities. They were supposed to involve them. The missionaries' compliance with the Founder's directives bore more fruits than they had expected. First, it helped the missionaries to identify and prepare future workers of the missions. Second, it helped the natives to see work as a tool of improving standards of life (since they were paid). Thirdly, it created a close bond between the natives and the missionaries, by differentiating the missionaries who were cordial and interested in the lives of the people, from the colonialists who were authoritarian.

To the idea of evil spirits that pervaded the Kikuyu culture, Fr. Allamano directed that there was time for everything, and it was not the time to fight the belief. "Do not speak openly against superstition and sacrifices to the spirits however idolatrous and immoral that may be. This is a mat-

ter that requires great prudence. Those practices will collapse by their own. ...in removing the evil, you will need time and patience”, Fr. Allamano wrote. In a word, Fr. Allamano was convinced that the respect of the native people’s culture held the key to a successful evangelization. The missionaries had to understand that God had been among those people for centuries in many different forms, even if not in the Christian way. That realization would make them (the missionaries) docile and patient as they taught Christianity to the natives, and that would have a big impact on the people. As a matter of fact, the Founder was right. The people’s discovery that the new religion came with both spiritual welfare of their community and social development led to their openness and conversion.

As that was happening in Africa, Fr. Allamano was working tirelessly in Turin, bringing to completion the renovation work that he had begun in 1883 after being made a canon of the Cathedral of Turin. Surprisingly, the event of the completion of that enormous task coincided with the 800th anniversary of the finding of the Consolata picture. The result was a huge event that brought Turin to a standstill – five hours of procession! The event was attended by several cardinals. One would have expected that the event was the right moment for Fr. Allamano to prove his criticizers and gossipers wrong, but the silent and industrious priest of Turin diocese chose to say nothing. It seems he knew well that silence is sometimes the best response. Everyone was admiring and praising how magnificently the Church had become, but Fr. Allamano said nothing. He never demanded recognition, and in fact, few could identify him in the crowd. He was a person who never chose the seats of honour and prestige. Instead, he believed that it was the people of Turin who had done everything, since every bit of work succeeded due to their contributions and prayers.

Chapter Six

TIME FOR ANOTHER STEP

A journey of a thousand kilometers starts with a single step. The Institute was four years old, and real changes were coming up. On 12th September 1905, the Congregation of the propagation of faith (Propaganda Fide) decided to cut a portion of Bishop Allgeyer's vicariate apostolic, and to set it as an 'independent mission' under the Consolata Missionaries. Fr. Filippo Perlo was appointed the superior under the direct authority of the Holy See. The step put to rest many conflicts. The Consolata Missionaries had ended up in Kikuyu land because they could not manage to go to Ethiopia. In fact, their presence among the Kikuyu people was meant to be only transitory – they were supposed to be collaborators of Bishop Allgeyer while things calmed down in Ethiopia. In truth, it seems that Fr. Allamano had promised never to ask for part of the territory, meaning that his missionaries were supposed to use the vicariate as a learning ground, from which they would acquire experience to apply in Ethiopia. Fr. Allamano's request to Propaganda Fide that the territory where his missionaries were working be cut off into an independent mission must have appeared to Bishop Allgeyer as the worst breach of faith.

However, a keener eye can tell why Fr. Allamano took such a step that generally was not his way of acting. First, as a father and a Founder, Fr. Allamano was concerned of the efforts his missionaries had invested in the Vicariate. If the work of a person represents the fruit of his being (energy, time and resources), Fr. Allamano felt compelled to ask for an independent mission as a fruit of

his sons' struggle. Second, it was clear that the Consolata Missionaries had done something that Bishop Allgeyer and his missionaries had not managed to do after all the time they had been there. That in itself showed that even if Bishop Allgeyer could not admit it, the territory had a lot to be done, only that personnel was the problem. Fourth, the work that Fr. Allamano's Missionaries had done showed also that the territory was big enough to accommodate not only his missionaries and those of Bishop Allgeyer, but even more. Finally, the attention of the Vatican on the fact that the Consolata Missionaries were doing great, meant that the Vatican was noting the success of the Consolata Missionaries not in terms of conquered territory, but in terms of attained development through human promotion, and in terms of evangelization done as manifested by the number of catechumens in catechism lessons.

Although well-intentioned, Fr. Allamano's request portrayed the Consolata Missionaries in a bad light to Bishop Allgeyer. To him, Fr. Allamano's Missionaries were ungrateful guests who had not only overstayed their reception, but also invaders who were out to take over his territory. Evidently this episode shows that sometimes God acts in confusing ways. Just as his will was expressed in the conflicts between the people of Israel and their neighbours, the misunderstanding between Fr. Allamano and Bishop Allgeyer was part of the complex plan of God. Whether the conflicts were due to broken promises, inclination of Fr. Allamano towards his Missionaries' cry for independence, the inability of Bishop Allgeyer to accept the reality that he could not manage the whole territory alone, Fr. Perlo's thirst for mission and expansion, etc, the truth was that divine providence had a finger in it.

To Fr. Allamano, the decision of Propaganda Fide was justifiable, because he had tried to negotiate with

Bishop Allgeyer in vain, forcing him to turn to the evangelization body. Everyone, including Bishop Allgeyer, was proud of the success that the Consolata Missionaries had achieved. To the Founder, given that that success had come at a great financial cost, it was necessary to let his missionaries have the area as a foundation of their work. This was because, if the Institute was to retain its financiers, it had to have officially recognized and autonomous mission territory – and that could only be where the missionaries had been working. All said and done, regardless of the bad taste the event left in the two missionary institutes (Consolata and the Holy Ghost), it was a step ahead: the Consolata Missionaries were now independent. Again, we can affirm that no one could deny that it was part of God's will, after all the scripture is full of stories in which God acts in humanly unacceptable ways, some of which involve extermination of nations. By all means, he who decided that Joseph had to be sold by his brothers so as to become their savior in Egypt knew what he was doing. He who decreed that the prophets had to suffer terribly just to be a message for the people of Israel knew what he was doing. Certainly, he who sent his Son to die a ruthless and shameful death on the cross to save humanity still ruled the universe. Convinced of this, Fr. Allamano wrote to the missionaries in Africa about the decision of Propaganda Fide. It was a joyous moment as the missionaries pondered the implication of the decision. In Turin, the decision left many open mouthed. The Consolata Missionaries were now proving more than just a passing cloud as many had claimed.

With the Institute's star rising, Fr. Allamano decided to begin transforming it into a proper religious congregation. That step implied a lot of things. First, every member henceforth would be bound by vows instead of the oath that was required up to that time. Of course, that

meant many exchanges of letters with Rome, if he was to succeed in passing the stages of papal recognition. Secondly, he decided to open the institute to all. Previously, the Institute had its members mostly from Turin, and therefore almost all members were Piedmontise. Of course, that had its advantages. For example, with people of the same culture formation integration was easier. Third, he decided to build a new three storey building, which would be the new premises of the Institute. With a bigger space, he could also have a junior seminary for little boys. Lastly, he decided to establish a female congregation so as to have Consolata Missionary Sisters accompanying their male counterparts in the mission and working together. The Founder went on living at the Consolata Shrine, although he visited the Missionary Institute every Tuesday, Friday and Sunday at the Consolatina. He had to balance his activities so that his Christians at the Consolata Shrine would not miss his calm consoling voice which left all encouraged regardless of what tragedy they would narrate to him.

In 1906, the new house which today we call Corso Ferrucci began. It had to be big enough to accommodate the seminary, the novitiate, the boarding school for the young candidates and certainly the Church. The task was not easy. Raising the money for such a huge project was an uphill task, especially because the little that was coming in was being consumed by the missions. Fr. Allamano had to find means and ways to raise extra money. He and Fr. Camisassa knew they were not supposed to delay because the house was urgently needed. This was because Fr. Allamano had announced in 1907, the beginning of Consolata Missionary College for Boys, which later became St. Paul Junior Seminary. At some point Fr. Allamano and Fr. Camisassa had to strip themselves off of what they had in order to raise an extra coin, including selling

away some valuables he had received from some benefactress. For the rest providence would provide.

The first little group of six boys arrived in November, and since the house was not complete, they had to be accommodated in a building at Corso Duca di Genova – what was called the Consolatina. As time went more and more young boys came. Usually they were accompanied by their parents and parish priests. Fr. Allamano personally scrutinized them, dismissing many who saw missionary life as a springboard to adventure. He made it plain that religious passion and a yearning for faraway lands did not constitute a clear sign of vocation to the missions. To those who had such attitude, he did not hesitate to tell them categorically to forget it (missionary life). His idea was to form “suitable lads to be priests and brothers, holy missionaries”. Fr. Allamano in his firm voice made it known to all that he wanted quality not numbers. His message is as valid today as it was those years. We must by all means hear him telling us what he told the missionaries of the time: You are not a missionary just because you want to be one, or because you know or you think you know the techniques of persuasion. We are missionary because Christ has made us partake in his mission.

Chapter Seven

GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAYS

In 1907, two years after receiving the independent mission from the territory of Bishop Allgeyer, Fr. Allamano offered Propaganda Fide details of development in the missions in Kenya, and requested if the new territory could be elevated to Vicariate Apostolic. Naturally, the independent mission was supposed to be a Prefecture first, and then later a vicariate Apostolic. In other words, Fr. Allamano wanted the Prefecture stage to be skipped. Although we may not be aware of the reasons of such a request, we can easily speculate that Fr. Allamano must have looked at the speed at which the mission was growing, or at the level of development the independent mission had attained (something which was open to the evaluation of Propaganda Fide). As you would expect, the expectations were very high as they waited for the response of Rome. The response did not come as soon as they expected. Days turned into months and months became a year, raising anxiety both in Turin and in Kenya. A keen follow up revealed that the alleged file had gotten lost. In a hurry, Fr. Allamano made another copy and delivered it to Propaganda Fide. On 28 June 1909 the request was accepted and on 6th July 1909 Pope Pius X gave his ratification making the independent mission of Consolata Missionaries into Vicariate Apostolic with Fr. Filippo Perlo as its bishop. That action confirmed that Fr. Allamano's assessment of the growth of the independent mission had been actually correct.

The event of the consecration of the bishop elect took place on Saturday 23rd October 1909 at the Consolata

Shrine in Turin, where Cardinal Richelmy, Valfre' di Bonzo, the Archbishop of Vercelli, and Giovanni Tasso the bishop of Aosta laid hands on the great missionary. What had started as a tiny unstable project of a sickly man was now a Missionary Institute producing bishops. No one would doubt that that was the fulfillment of Jesus words:

"...the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field: which is indeed smaller than all seeds, but when it grows it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches (Mt. 13:32).

As if that was not enough, the same year, 1909, the Consolata Missionary Institute received the *Decretum Laudis* from Rome, opening doors to a series of other approvals which transferred the Institute from diocesan to pontifical jurisdiction. The decree also appointed Fr. Allamano as the Superior General for six years and Fr. Camisassa as his Vicar General. As such, the Institute was now under the jurisdiction of the Congregation for Religious. No one doubted any longer that Fr. Allamano had actually made it. The silent frail man whom few would have expected to live long, leave a lone start a successful missionary institute, was silently being elevated over many in the diocese. It was a case of "if you humble yourself you will be exalted" (Mt. 23:12). It was as if God had made him suffer previously only to raise him up. It must have been therefore even more painful for his previous distracters when Pope Pius X recognized, approved and praised the Consolata Method. Fr. Allamano could not hide his joy as he announced the news to the missionaries in Kenya. He wrote:

"In the past, people took it upon themselves to criticize our evangelization method, as though we were too concerned with material at the expense of spiritual welfare;

it was said that all that needed to be done was preach and baptize and not bother about anything else...” (*D. Agasso, pg. 116*)

Those words of Fr. Allamano made it clear that the criticisms of many people and the expectation of a number of others that the Institute would not go far were now a thing of the past. Encouraging his missionaries, Fr. Allamano reminded them that they were not the first to go through such hostile public opinion: Matteo Ricci suffered the same fate. His method of evangelization in China was not appreciated by many people, including Church leaders, but at the end of the day most of the people were pleased about what the enthusiastic missionary had done. This tells us a lot: First, we should not be quick to give up just because people are not on our side. Provided we are doing the right thing, determination should be our walking staff. Second, this episode of the Institutes life tells us that we should not have self pity when in difficulties. The Institute by being criticized, was going through what many had gone through before (and many in silence), and what many more would still go through in future. In other words, it was all part of the complex journey called life. As such, it would have been bad and useless to complain and blame all those who had spoken ill of the Consolata Method. The most important thing was to rejoice and thank the Lord for having proved that the Institute had been right all along.

Chapter Eight

CONSOLATA MISSIONARY SISTERS ENTER THE SCENE

Having relied on ‘borrowed women’ to complement the work of his missionaries in Kenya, Fr. Allamano was aware that he could not borrow Cottolengo or Vincentian Sisters forever. He had to do something about the issue. He was however in a fix, as at the time, there were already complains in the Church about the existence of too many female religious institutes and orders. In fact, the Holy See seemed determined to discourage foundation of more. The truth however was that the activities of the Consolata Missionaries required the presence of women urgently. The expansion of the mission had necessitated more female personnel, and the Cottolengo Congregation was in no position to continue sending religious persons any longer. In any case, there were already problems with the ones who were available. This is not to say that the sisters had problems, but that something was not working well between them and Bishop Perlo.

To be honest, the Vincentian sisters from Cottolengo had done a lot. They had been going from village to village helping the sick. Bishop Perlo however wanted people who could do literally everything. He needed Sisters who could help the sick, teach catechism in local language, do the laundry, teach in school, etc. Certainly, the bishop was going overboard. The sisters had been formed to work with the sick, and everybody praised their service including the bishop himself. However, demanding that they were supposed to do other tasks was a bit demanding

too much. The sisters had been trained to work in Europe, and therefore their acceptance to come in Africa was a real sacrifice. They had to adjust themselves to fit in a program they had not been prepared for and hence it was only fair to understand them. Bishop Perlo however could take none of that. He wanted people who could obey without questions.

What Bishop Perlo did not know was that his hyperactive personality was creating burdens for the Founder who had to clean up the mess by first looking for ways to reconcile with the Cottolengo fraternity even if they would not send any more sisters, and secondly looking for ways to get other missionary sisters. Fr. Allamano had it rough. At the end he had no option but to think of an option he had never thought deeply about: starting his own female religious and missionary institute. True, there had been girls who had appeared in the Consolata Shrine requesting to be accepted, but owing to the fact that the Institute could only receive male persons, they had been re-directed elsewhere. With all alternatives seemingly closed, Fr. Allamano turned to Rome.

In September 1909 when the Founder and Filippo Perlo visited Rome after the erection of the Vicariate Apostolic, he shared the issue with Cardinal Gotti, who was the head of the congregation for the propagation of faith (Propaganda Fide) at the time. Cardinal Gotti was aware of the prevailing coldness about that issue, but he also recognized that the case of the Consolata Missionary Institute was unique: the personnel needed were not just any sisters – but missionaries and specialists. The two also shared about the issue in the audience granted to Fr. Allamano and the new Bishop Perlo by Pope Pius X. The result was that they left Roma a happy lot: they had been given a go ahead to start a female Missionary Institute.

The journey to Turin was a joyous one, as Fr. Al-

lamano meditated the mysterious acts of God: somehow, he was overcoming big hurdles of which even himself doubted his own capacity. How could he explain the calm acceptance of his suggestion to start a religious and missionary institute when everyone knew that the Church at the time was not in favour of more female institutes? The Founder could not avoid a smile in his heart: truly for God all is possible. With God having given him a nod, the Founder brought the reality of the female religious and Missionary institute to fruition on 29th January 1910. To begin his new project, Fr. Allamano called on Sr. Celestina Bianco and Sr. Dorotea Marchisio of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph to start the work. The two did not have any candidate, so practically the Consolata Sisters Missionary Institute came into existence without sisters. Its growth was however very fast. By mid May there were already seven girls, fifteen at the close of the year, and by 1911, there were more than thirty. In truth, there could have been more girls, but Fr. Allamano did not loosen his rigour in selecting them. He was aware of what awaited them in Africa, so if one did not radiate the signs of missionary zeal, he quickly denied her request to join the institute.

The new religious Institute had its residence in Corso Duca di Genova, in what was called the Consolata. In October 1912 during the month of October however, the sisters moved to the newly constructed house at Corso Ferrucci, which was then onwards referred to as the Mother House. Once there, the Consolata sisters took the place of the Sisters of St. Gaetano, who had been doing the housework. Their progress in religious life like their numbers went on growing. At the beginning of April 1913, the first eleven sisters made their religious profession and on 11th May Sr. Celestina Bianco of the St. Joseph's Sisters gave up her job as the initiator. The Consolata Sisters got

their own internal superior: Sr. Margherita Demaria who had the title of Vice Superior, as the Founder remained as the Superior with all administrative powers. With the Sisters' Institute now a reality, the anxiety and confusion that had developed after Cottolengo Sisters stopped being sent to Africa died away. On 3rd November 1913 the first group of the Consolata Sisters left Italy for Africa. They were fifteen of them and three male missionaries.

Chapter Nine

FR. ALLAMANO THE VISIONARY

When we hear of the word ‘visionary’, the word that comes into our minds is ‘prophet’. Why? Because prophets are the people who are said to see visions, and especially of the time to come. Some dictionaries give thinker, seer, futurist, inventor, etc, as some of the words that relate to the term visionary. One could then ask how was Fr. Allamano a visionary? Well, although the Founder was and remained a diocesan priest, he did not in any way close his eyes on the ecclesial reality around him. Sure, like other diocesan priests, he was preaching the word of God, confessing hundreds and hundreds of people and counseling many more. The Church of Turin which had an abundance of priests was doing well too, including collecting money and sending it to the missions. However, the fear with which the clergy (including the bishop of course) treated the issue of sending a few priests as missionaries to Africa appalled him.

Fr. Allamano was convinced beyond any doubt that the entire Church is missionary and the work of evangelization is God’s people’s basic duty. To those who had an unexplained fear of missionary activity, Fr. Allamano used to remind them that even bishops being members of the Episcopal body that succeeded the apostolic college, have been consecrated not merely for the dioceses, but for the salvation of the whole world. Wondering almost aloud about why it was difficult to see those facts, Fr. Allamano decided he could not just sit and watch as things ‘went south’. In truth, there were some congregations and orders that were doing a lot of

missionary animation all over Italy using slides taken from every continent.

As far as the Consolata Missionary Institute was concerned, Fr. Lorenzo was giving missionary talks here and there that were supported by the slides that Bishop Perlo was sending to him. Even with all those efforts the Founder could tell that something more drastic was needed to wake up the Italian Church from some form of missionary slumber. He ended up telling Fr. Camisassa one day, that there was a need to draw the pope into the issue, if it had to acquire the importance it deserved and have the impact that was needed. At least, the pope being the head of the Apostolic College, would deal with the scandal of bishops sabotaging missionary initiatives just because they were afraid of losing a single priest or seminarian. It was only the pope who could ensure that the Church doctrine taught in the seminaries included something about missions and missionaries, since the avoidance of such topics implied fear of making seminarians discover the truth about the need of missionaries in the world.

Acting on his guts, Fr. Allamano wrote a letter to five superiors of Italian missionary institutes on 29th August 1912, describing the situation. He was of course sure that many people in Italy knew the situation well, only that no one had the courage to raise it up. The five included: Bishop Conforti of Parma, Fr. Vianello of Verona, Fr. Figano of Milano, Fr. Traverso of Genoa and Fr. Callerio of Rome. Fr. Allamano's letter to the five did not beat about the bush. He outlined clearly that first, there was massive ignorance of missions in Italy. Secondly, that there was a general apathy among clergy and faithful. And thirdly, there was a scarcity of specialized vocations partly due to that fact that the bishops discouraged them even openly. He also noted that there was a need to

appeal to the pope to intervene personally on the matter as the head of the Church on earth. It is quite amazing thinking of the amount of courage that was needed to do such a thing. Even the thought of summoning the whole Church is appalling. How on earth did Fr. Allamano get the idea that he, an ordinary and sickly diocesan priest could write directly to the Holy Father? Didn't he think of the picture the clergy would have of him? In comparison, it is like a Propaedeutic student writing to the Superior General of a Religious Congregation to say that the Congregation has lost its direction due to laxity of its leaders. Doesn't it look like a person bypassing his superiors to accuse them of wrong doing? Today, owing to the Vatican II influence and the world's advancement we may talk of the freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. Thinking of the time that Fr. Allamano was doing that effort, one is left even more puzzled at his audaciousness – since we can't call it naïveté looking at his position in the Church at the time.

Interestingly, the five Superiors accepted his idea, and in a very respectful language, they drafted a letter to Pope Pius X. In the letter, they explained the situation of the Church in Italy, the issues they believed needed fixing, and concluded it with a request for the introduction of a mission Sunday, to be celebrated annually, with the obligation of a homily on the duty and methods of propagating the faith throughout the world. It was quite an ambitious thing to do, nevertheless, Fr. Allamano led other Superiors of Missionary Institutes to do it. This gives us a picture of Allamano that is fascinating. In his frail looking body, he was a silent force to reckon with – a mover of things in silence. Probably he had discovered what Fr. Francesco Bernardi, a Consolata Missionary and the director of *Enendeni Magazine* in Tanzania wrote one time: noise does not produce

any good, and the good does not produce any noise (*Ref. Enendeni Magazine, special edition, May-August 2019*).

This picture therefore somehow explains why Fr. Allamano always said “the good must be done well and without noise”. It is a picture that emphasizes the importance of silence. It is something that seems to tell us that when there is noise, publicity, media hype and advertising about a given activity, everyone should expect dismal performance. Maybe I am exaggerating, maybe I am not. In any case, no one can doubt that too much noise about something creates doubts about its genuineness – no wonder there is a Swahili saying that says *Che-ma Chajiuza, kibaya chajitembeza*. In my poor Swahili, I am meant to know that the saying could be loosely translated as “*whatever is good sells itself, but whatever is bad advertises itself*”.

With this in mind, now we begin seeing why prophet Elijah was not moved when a strong wind blew the rocks in the mountain, when an earthquake shook the mountain to its foundations, when fire passed ferociously in front of him, but only moved to the mouth of the cave in which he was hiding when a gentle breeze came (1 Kings 19:11-14): God who acts in silence was coming to talk to him. Whatever perspective we may wish to give Fr. Allamano’s silence, one thing remains: although silence could be due to lack of words, due to shock, fear or surprise, Fr. Allamano’s silence was never due to the lack of words. It was not caused by lack of knowing what to say, but by knowing much what not to say. His silence was always meditative: one which made him see the finger of the creator in act in all things, people and events. It could probably be compared to Jonah’s silent moment in the belly of the whale (Jon. 1:17), or to the three painful and lonely days that the apostles lived waiting for the resurrection of their master. That silence

was transforming, healing and rejuvenating. Fr. Allamano's natural silent nature was eye opening. It helped him to see things in angles that a person could have easily missed due to bravado. As such, his silence could be compared to the eye-opening silence of the three days St. Paul spent in Damascus being blind (Acts 9), or to the one year that St. Francis of Assisi spent in a dark, filthy, and lonely underground prison cell in 1202. It may be compared to the many moments martyrs spent in prisons waiting for either their release to freedom or their crown of martyrdom. Whatever we may choose to say, Fr. Allamano's silence was prayerful. He was aware that empty vessels make most noise, and he was never an empty vessel.

Having written to Pope Pius X, Fr. Allamano and his colleagues waited with baited breathe. Their letter however encountered various accidents on its course. First, the Congregation of the propagation of faith (Propaganda Fide) refused to give its official support to the pope. Secondly, the signatories made further mistakes, when instead of presenting the petition to the pope in person, they had it delivered by Fr. Callerio on his own. Thirdly, Fr. Callerio, not able to find Pope Pius X who was tied up with Christmas ceremonies, decided to deliver the letter to his secretary Fr. Bressan. Fourth, the physical strength of the pope was declining and lastly, the pope's state of mind was not stable, because he was very anxious about the state of peace since the drums of the First World War were already sounded in Europe. In other words, all odds were against their petition. For that reason, when Pope Pius responded to the letter on 31st January 1913, he did not address the whole Church nor the bishops as Fr. Allamano and his colleagues had wished.

Instead, he addressed his reply to the six Superiors, agreeing about the great duty of missionary work and praising them for the care they were taking in training teams of evangelizers. The pope did not say anything about the responsibilities of the bishops in supporting missionary efforts, nor did he say anything about the Mission Sunday. Worse still, the Vatican bureaucracy complicated everything by messing up the promoter's name and address. Instead of writing Canon Allamano, they wrote Canon Alemanno the Superior of the Immaculate Missionaries. Certainly, it must have been very disappointing for Fr. Allamano and his colleagues. Very disappointing indeed. However, instead of cherishing resentment and frustrations as many people would have done, Fr. Allamano in silence and prayer took to disseminating and commenting on the letter that the pope had written to them as a reply. With it, it was easy to arouse enthusiasm for the missions.

Although Fr. Allamano and his colleagues did not succeed in making the Pope address the whole Church, the issues they raised expressed their genuine concerns for the work of evangelization in the world. In addition, the fact that the pope responded to their petition, was a clear sign that he concurred with them that their concerns were valid. Although the pope did not set up the Mission Sunday as Fr. Allamano had wished, the necessity of such a day had been noted. That is why Pope Pius XI in 1926, the year that Fr. Allamano died, instituted the Mission Sunday as a day of praying for missions and reflecting on the Church's commitment to evangelizing the world. The Mission Sunday was fixed to be celebrated on the penultimate Sunday in the month of October and the first Mission Sunday was celebrated in 1927 – a year after Fr. Allamano's death.

How then is Fr. Allamano a visionary if he did not succeed in seeing fulfillment of his idea? Today, we all celebrate the Mission Sunday every year in October, but no one mentions Fr. Allamano in connection to it. However, the truth is that the Church began looking at the importance of the issue after the provocation by Fr. Allamano and his colleagues. To many, the action of Fr. Allamano may have appeared out of order, which is why Propaganda Fide refused to give its official support to the issue to the pope, but what Fr. Allamano was agitating for came to pass. Humanly speaking, the refusal of Propaganda Fide to support Fr. Allamano's petition could also have been a result of envy. It could have been an effort of not raising the profile of a sickly ordinary diocesan priest in front of the Vatican. Whichever way we may wish to look at it, Fr. Allamano's eyes had seen what Vatican II would end up emphasizing – and as such the Founder was a visionary.

As if not perturbed by the result of his effort to have the pope give universal direction, Fr. Allamano went on with his work. With the same clarity with which he saw the damage the Italian apathy was doing to the missionary effort, Fr. Allamano noted the importance of the black people in Africa not just as receivers of evangelization, but also as spreaders of the faith. Though in Italy, through the letters and diaries he was receiving from the missions in Kenya, Fr. Allamano arrived at an understanding of the issues surrounding the Africans with the certitude of a researcher. As such, he easily saw what the colonial imperialists had not managed to see: the future of Africa lay in the hands of the Africans themselves. For that reason, the Founder immediately ordered that the missionaries train and involve African catechists in the evangelization activities. The words of the Founder were candid, "it should be the business of

everyone to cooperate in training the catechists. Before sending them to the college prepare them well. When they come back from college guide them and make them part of the family circle. Keep them informed and do not overlook them. Missions are happy and productive where the catechists are happy and hardworking”.

The wisdom with which Fr. Allamano spoke of the situation of the catechists merits the title of a seer. Today, a hundred and seven years after Fr. Allamano’s words, we can still see the importance of the catechists as essential parts in the evangelization work. In fact, even today, catechists are the extension of the priests in the parishes. With parishes having many outstations and few priests, the catechists are the ones who attend to the places the priests are not able to reach. Even in the parishes where the priests reside, the catechists are the ones who teach the catechetical lessons, follow up the implementation of the parish policies in the small Christian communities, and ensure order in the liturgical space. Unfortunately, just as it was at the beginning of the evangelization work, today many catechists are poorly prepared, not motivated, not empowered, sometimes abused, and worse, not remunerated (or poorly remunerated) for their service in spite of them having families to take care of, and spending all their time in the Church. The result of that kind of work environment is lack of total self-giving, indifference and poor service to the Christians. This in itself leads to lack of understanding of the faith and superficiality of the Christian life. From this background of things, it is easy to say that Fr. Allamano’s visionary mind saw the importance with which the catechists as pastoral assistants of the priests would be given a century after his departure.

Chapter Ten

FR. ALLAMANO THE ACHIEVER

God gave man a duty to conquer the earth and rule the living things that he had created (Gen. 1:29). This means that man is meant to be a change maker. To be so requires careful planning and the execution of what is planned, so as to make a difference in the world. To do that, a person has to have a cutting edge, that is, an active incisiveness (penetrating keenness) in shaping events. In truth, not all people have that capacity. Well, to be fair, we are gifted differently, and some people will succeed better than others in that task of giving reality a new shape and creating a better outcome for the benefit of all. This is to say, although God created us to be agents of change in our environment and the society, not all people manage to do so even when they have good faith. Most of us have the good will, but the good will is never enough, if it is not accompanied by good measure of self-confidence and self-assertiveness.

Usually, since change is not always appreciated, a capacity to disturb the peace when that is necessary is required for one to be a change maker. That quality is what makes a person a go-getter. i.e. one who is not cowed by challenges that may come along his way. This explains why we refer Fr. Allamano as a go-getter and an achiever. Up to now, we have described a man whom many people would have easily written off as an invalid who would never become a priest owing to his weak health, but a man who through thick and thin fought his way to priesthood against all odds. We have seen a man who fought his way to be instrumental in many causes in the diocese, with-

out leaving behind bitter and resentful people. And that is what Fr. Allamano was: a silent strong person who went through and over many obstacles to become a Founder amidst doubting Thomases. His courage to petition the Holy Father left many dumbfounded if not shocked. Fr. Allamano was not the kind of a person who could just let things flow. He knew he had to make a difference in the world and that could not be done by people who were not in contact with the reality, or by cowards.

Today, the life of Fr. Allamano challenges us to avoid the two temptations of religious life which hinder people from becoming agents of change. These are passivity and perfectionism. Passivity is the tendency of people to take off their hands from the “steering wheel” of their lives, that way allowing the texture of the road to dictate the direction to be followed. Such persons cannot mold or shape events. They only react to what happens. They rationalize away the responsibility for the turn of events, or simply deny it. In other words, the passive persons allow whatever is happening to take place then spiritualizes everything by attributing it to the will of God. This is why such passive people appear very holy – because instead of being realistic they attribute everything to the will of God (which is escapism). Does this sound familiar? I knew it! Passive persons are great procrastinators. When there is danger lurking around, they console themselves and others by saying that nothing will happen. As things get bad, they begin saying “may be something is going to happen but we should not do anything about it”. Then things worse and they change their tune. They begin saying “maybe we should do something about the situation, but there is nothing we can do. Only when things get out of hand they say “maybe there is something we could have done, but it is too late now”.

In truth however, such persons are often very good people, who avoid conflicts at all cost. They do not want to offend anyone. They try to please all people by not taking decisions that touch other people in a not-so-sweet way. There is a joke that says “if you want to please everybody you better become an ice cream vendor and not a leader”. This is not meant to undermine ice cream vendors, but to underline that a leader must have a stand in things. That is, he can’t just be swayed by whatever comes his way and still claim to be a leader. Anyway, when passive people fail, they suffer inside a lot and shift the responsibility of what happened to others (by blaming someone). Although Fr. Allamano’s life would have easily turned passive because he was sickly and he was always at the Consolata Shrine, he chose to be an agent of change not only to the people of Turin who were coming to him for help at the Consolata, but also to Africans whom he was forming from a far through his missionaries.

Fr. Allamano knew that if everyone folded his hands and claimed that evangelizing Africa was not his responsibility, then Africa would remain in darkness for some more time, and the European Church would be failing in its call to go out to the whole world to make all people disciples of Christ. Fr. Allamano did not need to be told that such a behavior would be tantamount to hiding one’s heads in the sand and finally ending up becoming victims of circumstances and never agents of change. It is for this reason that Fr. Allamano refused to be passive. Today, the Founder encourages us to avoid passivity, also because passivity is a sign of deep entrenched fear. Fear is a strong emotion which has power not only to disrupt our lives, but also to make us inactive. This explains why Jesus told his disciples “do not be afraid” many times in the gospel. He knew that fear could immobilize them, and that would be the beginning of their failure as his witnesses.

That is why he said categorically that we should only fear God who has power not only to kill the body, but also to throw the soul in hell fire (Mt. 10:28). In that passage, Christ made it plain that even those who have power to kill only the body can do so only if allowed by God. That is why Jesus said that even the birds of the air that may appear cheap to us do not just fall down and die without God knowing (Mt. 10:29). Today, we don't need to be told why fear is something to avoid like a plague. First, in addition to making us passive, fear hinders our possibility to progress. Even in ordinary life, many people who would have been rich and wealthy fail to achieve that wealth due to their fear to invest. They fail to invest the money they have due to the fear of losing it. What if the investment does not work out well? What if I am not able to run the business? What if thieves come and steal? These kinds of thoughts keep them from investing.

Still in the ordinary life, fear hinders many people's social life from flourishing. How many people are single and would have wished to get married or to marry, but fear continues keeping them single? Generally, such people ask: what if the relationship does not work? What if I end up in a bitter divorce like my neighbour? What if I end up with a person with whom I am not compatible? Such thoughts cannot allow the person looking for a life partner to settle. As a result, even when such a person enters into a relationship, he or she remains on the lookout for signs of being played or cheated. With the attention so high on the possible negative outcomes of relationships, the person misses the chances of meeting prospective life partners. In other words, such a person forgets that the word "FEAR" could mean either "Forget Everything And Run" or "Face Everything And Rise", and that they have to make a choice between the two. Similarly, many young people would easily become great missionaries, but fear

prevents them from entering houses of formation. They admire and praise missionaries who work in different parts of the world, but they themselves are not able to decide to be missionaries. Why? Because sometimes deciding to decide is also another difficult decision. Indecision leads to passivity, procrastination and an endless agitation or restlessness.

Such young people ask questions like “what if I don’t make it to the end of the formative journey?” How can I get a guarantee of success? What if the “feeling” of having a vocation disappears along the journey? Such questions make many young people afraid of joining religious life. They forget that most of their fears are not really realistic, but only naïve doubts and improbable worries. In other words, they forget that the word “FEAR” could also mean “False Evidence Appears Real”. As a result, they choose options that they think to be less risky, either because they do not need a long time to mature or because the possible negative outcomes are “accommodatable” according to their judgement. Second, fear hinders us from living our faith well. How many times have we found ourselves afraid of making the sign of the cross in public. How many times have we hidden our Rosaries so that people may not know that we are Catholics? Fear can make us fail to live our faith appropriately. Third, fear pushes us to sin. We can reflect on many aspects of our lives, but just think about lying. Most of the time when we lie, it is because we are afraid of the consequences of our actions. We lie to protect ourselves, to save our reputations, to protect our careers or vocations, to appear good, to avoid getting into trouble, etc. Even King David killed Uriah out of fear of being discovered to have impregnated his wife (2 Sam. 11:14-17). In other words, fear makes us break God’s commandments, traffic rules, and regulations that govern our lives and association with others.

Fourth, fear kills our self-esteem. In truth, behind low self-esteem and low self-confidence is fear. People with low self-esteem are usually full of fear. They think that they are not as good as others. They avoid speaking in public due to the fear of being laughed at, fear of being seen as foolish, or simply fear of making a mistake. What they do not know is that in truth, fear kills more dreams than failure. Fifth, fear makes us unable to fight for what we are convinced of. As such, fear hinders our capacity to fight for our own rights and the rights of others. This means that fear can become an obstruction to justice. Finally, fear prevents us from correcting others. Instead of correcting others, due to fear we keep quiet in order to appear good or in order to avoid being accused of meddling. The result of this is that evil continues because those who are supposed to fight it fear appearing bad. From all these scenarios, it is clear that fear is something to be avoided. We cannot forget that fear made the disciples of Jesus not to ask him explanation of what he had been teaching them (Mk. 9:32), it made them to run away when he was arrested (Mk. 14:50-52), and made Peter to deny the saviour (Mt. 26:69-75). This explains why Fr. Allamano aware of the power of fear in immobilization of people, encouraged his missionaries to overcome it as a way of being active and never passive. The words of Fr. Allamano could never be clearer than this:

Be active. Be active because the time is short! ... If you are active, you will always have time for everything, with some time left over. Our Lord gives grace according to the effort one puts forth... (and note) When someone is in charge, he has to be more courageous than the rest. (SL. 402)

Fr. Allamano's words were a real representation of himself. The courage to petition the pope was quite a landmark action. It was a deliberate decision not to remain

passive. In truth, even today, few people would be willing to risk that much. Looking at that disposition of Fr. Allamano, it is not difficult to see that if there is something we are supposed to fear, it is fear itself.

We mentioned that the second temptation that our Founder would wish us to avoid is perfectionism. Fr. Allamano was never a perfectionist. True, he demanded things to be done in the best way, but he never cultivated exaggerated expectations. Granted, the petition to the pope was rather a very high goal. However, the fact that Fr. Allamano was able to accept and live with a middle ground proved that he was not really a perfectionist who would get out of control when things did not work out. While many people would have emotionally collapsed due to the knowledge that their failure was written all over the Italian Church to see, Fr. Allamano took everything gracefully. Probably the Founder knew what we know today: perfectionists start everything with a very high energy and passion, but soon they discover that reality is different and that their dreams may not at the end be fruitful. They have an inflated self-esteem so they think they can do everything and perfectly. When that does not happen, they feel as failures. That failure makes them to lose the will to try again. If Fr. Allamano had been a perfectionist, he would not have struggled for ten good years to start the missionary Institute. Instead, after the second or the third year of trying and waiting he would have said “it seems that it is not the will of God for me to start this congregation”. The attitude of Fr. Allamano makes him a go-getter and an achiever. He was balanced enough to avoid sitting and eating provided he said the mass and confessions – as many priests did. He also avoided having his head in the air. He knew that many truly gifted people ended up not fulfilling anything in reality due to inflated egos.

Chapter Eleven

FR. ALLAMANO'S RIGHT HAND MAN

We have heard the saying “show me your friend and I will tell you who you are”. Maybe we have never thought much about it, but when the scripture emphasizes it saying “for as a man is, so is his friend” (Sirach 6:14-17), then we take time to think. It is without a doubt that for Fr. Allamano, the frail silent but industrious man to succeed, a reliable, honest and equally hard-working man had to be present. That man happened to be Fr. Camisassa. Fr. Camisassa was from Piedmont just like Fr. Allamano, from a town known as Caramagna. He was born on September 27th 1854. His parents were Gabriele Camisassa and Agnese Perlo. They were peasants who lived an honest, pious and hard-working life in the village. One of Fr. Camisassa’s sisters joined the Congregation of Mary Auxiliatrix while another got married to Anthony Perlo, the parents of the future Fr. Perlo, who was among the first Consolata Missionaries to go to Kenya. His two brothers Gabriele Perlo and Luigi Perlo would also later enter the Institute.

Fr. Camisassa was a bright young man, but the poor situation of his family forced him to become a blacksmith immediately after elementary school. The young man who was fifth in a family of six children inherited the hard-working quality of his parents. He was doing rather fine in his business when his sister Anna Maria, the eldest in the family, in collaboration with the parish priest succeeded in making him resume his secondary

school education at Valdocco with Don Bosco. While at Valdocco, the young Camisassa worked really hard with one aim: to become a priest. He was easily noted for his singing ability, since he had a heavy voice. He later attended the Metropolitan Seminary of Turin and was ordained in July 1877, after which he attended a two-year course in the Pastoral Institute. In 1880 he was preparing to go to Pecetto Torinese as a junior curate when he was intercepted by a letter of Fr. Allamano inviting him to be his assistant and bursar at the Consolata Shrine, where Fr. Allamano had been assigned. Fr. Camisassa arrived at the Shrine on 3rd October, one day after Fr. Allamano.

Fr. Allamano had known Camisassa at the seminary and it seems Fr. Camisassa made a strong positive impression on him. This is explained by the fact that the assignment of Fr. Camisassa to the Consolata Shrine by Archbishop Gastaldi had been to fulfill Fr. Allamano's condition that if he was to accept to be sent to the Consolata Shrine, then Fr. Camisassa had to be his assistant and bursar – a request which the Archbishop willingly accepted. Fr. Camisassa like Fr. Allamano was a silent man. He had a not so nice temperament, and could get rather assertive at times, especially when a person opposed what was self-evident. However, even then, Fr. Camisassa remained obedient to Fr. Allamano.

This explains why the two managed to live together for 42 years, ending up becoming almost like blood brothers. His humility was exemplary: even with three doctorates in theology, canon and civil law which he acquired in 1898, Fr. Camisassa did his duties without advertising or raising himself. He was a canon of the Turin Cathedral for six years. In 1909 Pope Pius X sought to make him a bishop, but the intervention of Fr. Allamano and the discouragement of his candidacy by Cardinal Richelmy saw the offer overturned. Fr. Camisassa loved

meditating on the Psalms. He loved calmness, silence and serenity. Offering the whole of himself, he buried himself at the Consolata Shrine as the assistant of Fr. Allamano to extent that few knew he actually existed. He gave himself fully to the restoration of the Church and follow up of everything with keenness a kin to military precision. This made him the best person that Fr. Allamano needed to begin his missionary project. With the same sensitivity he was inspecting every task in the restoration of the Consolata Shrine, Fr. Camisassa took personal dedication in packing, checking and dispatching shipments to the missions after Fr. Allamano founded the Institute. In addition to all the duties he was performing as the assistant of the Rector, Fr. Camisassa was also the editor, censor, layout man and proof-reader of "*La Consolata*", a missionary magazine which initially published events of the Consolata Shrine, but which with time began publishing news of the missions. In addition, all the reports that came from the missions passed in his hands. He would receive, read and classify them before filing them appropriately.

Fr. Allamano loved and trusted his vice very much. The two understood each other so well that if you knew the opinion of one you could tell the opinion of the other. In fact, the fact that they were able to live together for 42 years says a lot about each of them. Certainly, anyone can tell that such an experience demands great quantities of patience, honesty and kindness. We cannot lie to ourselves that everyday was a moment of smiles and more smiles. However, openness and trust with which they treated each other were enough to extinguish any conflict. This is why Fr. Allamano did not hesitate to send Fr. Camisassa to Africa on 8th February 1911. Fr. Allamano, whose health could not allow him to travel much was convinced that Fr. Camisassa would represent him completely in the mission. As if to show his trust and transparency,

Fr. Camisassa before leaving Italy, wrote his will, making Fr. Allamano the main beneficiary, and then Fr. Gabriel Perlo and Aquilino the son of Caneparo the carpenter who had worked in the Mothers House for long. Fr. Camisassa was realistic: going to Africa carried with it the possibility of not returning to Italy, and therefore it was appropriate to prepare for any eventuality. Today, few people would do that. Instead of helping building the Church by leaving their properties to esteemed Church leaders, many would instead take from the Church to give to their relatives and friends, returning to the same act that made the Church to impose mandatory practice of celibacy to all ordained ministers many centuries ago: abuse of Church goods.

Fr. Camisassa's journey to Kenya was to last until November 1911, but he ended up extending it to April 1912 due to the many things he had to see, evaluate and document. Once in Kenya, Fr. Camisassa moved from mission to mission accompanied by Bishop Perlo whose energetic hand and skill of bringing things to fruition was undoubtedly visible. In front of him were the missions he had heard of, the missionaries he had seen depart from Italy and the Africans whom Fr. Allamano had always insisted to be involved in doing things to make them learn. By the time he was concluding up his journey, Fr. Camisassa had put down forty-four long letters addressed to Turin. In them were his impression of the missions, the things he heard and the things he sensed. Fr. Camisassa's calm composure helped him to learn a lot without being told. He for example noted the improper temperament of Bishop Perlo, which made him almost allergic to lay helpers, assistants and advisers. He noted the uncertainties, misunderstandings and mistrusts that needed time to heal off.

Fr. Camisassa concluded his African tour by looking into the issue of expansion. After learning that the British government was in favour of Consolata Mission-

ary missions in Meru, Fr. Camisassa took the opportunity to visit the area. After the Bishop had visited Meru and returned with a positive report, Fr. Camisassa decided to travel there too. He had to cover a distance of almost 450 kilometers partly on foot, partly on a mule revealing a self-giving attitude of the highest order. Finally, together with Bishop Perlo, Fr. Camisassa spoke about the possibility of Consolata Missions starting missions in upper Congo or in Ethiopia so as to bring Fr. Allamano's dream of taking up Guglielmo Massaia's work among the Galla people to live.

Coincidentally, while Fr. Camisassa was in Kenya, Fr. Allamano had gone to Rome for the beatification process of Fr. Cafasso. While there, the Founder took the opportunity to speak to the prefect of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Gotti about the issue of Ethiopia, and the matter was agreed. As such, the Founder informed Fr. Camisassa to pass in Rome to the Propaganda Fide to propose the matter again with the details of Kenya that he had. On 19th April 1912, Fr. Camisassa was already in Cardinal Gotti's office. The matter, just like the previous one of Bishop Allgeyer, brought bad feeling to Bishop Jarosseau, who felt that Propaganda Fide was unfairly taking part of his extensive Vicariate to give it to others. Justified as he may have been, it was also true that after thirty years in the area, he had not done much. His reasons were of course genuine: he had problems of personnel, and also there had been conflicts and he was waiting for more peaceful time.

However, given that the area was very vast, and someone (Consolata Missionary Institute) was willing to provide the personnel and risk entering the zone, there was no way Propaganda Fide would have denied the people of that territory the Gospel, just because someone (the French Capuchins led by their bishop Jarosseau) claimed the right of ownership of the same. In January 1913, the

decree of erecting the Prefecture Apostolic of Southern Kafa entrusted to the Consolata Missionaries was made. Four months later, Fr. Gaudenzio Barlassina was appointed the Prefect Apostolic.

Chapter Twelve

THE GREAT DISRUPTION

The Holy book tells us that it is when people think it is peaceful that the worst happens. At the beginning of 1913, Fr. Allamano received a decree entrusting the Kaffa Apostolic Prefecture to the Consolata Missionary Institute. It was truly a piece of good news. The territory however had been entrusted to us without us being there. The appointed Apostolic Prefect, Fr. Barlassina Gaudenzio was still in Kenya. He had to move to Ethiopia to begin his work. Towards the end of 1913, he travelled to Italy and a year later he was still there. The death of Me-nelek, who had been helped by the Italians to seize the empire created by uniting warring Ethiopian territories, had thrown the country into a spin. At the time, Ethiopia was a playground of foreign powers, with the British, the French and the Italians each pushing for their own interests against the chiefs who were also fighting among themselves.

The turn of the events demonstrated clearly that getting the Prefecture had been the simpler task. The true test of reality was entering Ethiopia in that political moment, getting into the Prefecture and governing it, when Italians were not looked upon favourably by the Ethiopians and the white missionaries were not esteemed by the Orthodox Church. The Institute's attention was in opening Ethiopia after a successful missionary work in Kenya. However, things were thrown out of control when the prince of Hungary was assassinated in Sarejevo, throwing Europe into an enormous conflict. On 28th July, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and soon

Germany, Great Britain, France, Belgium, Russia, and Japan joined into the conflict. That brought to reality the war that Pope Pius X had dreaded. The pope wrote to the world appealing for calm but it was too late even for him, because on 20th August he breathed his last, leaving the world on fire and many Christians desperate for peace.

Although in Italy the war had not yet began, and although Italy declared herself to be neutral, the conflict was already affecting the activities of the Institute. In Kenya, the conflict between the British and the Germans had deep negative impact on the missions. For example, maritime communication between Bishop Perlo's Vicariate and Italy became more difficult each day. Ships were sunk and crucial shipment consignments for the missions were lost. Running the schools and hospitals became increasingly difficult demoralizing many missionaries. On 24th May 1915, Italy entered the war. It was a time of distress. Many families had their sons taken for the military service, many of whom did not come back. As for Fr. Allamano, the war came knocking.

In a matter of days, thirty-eight priests and brothers were taken into the military and the few who were left in the Mother House had to content themselves with less food and winter without heating. In a word, the missionary Institute was emptied. Things were becoming bad for Fr. Allamano. The situation was even more compounded by an earthquake at Marsica, which in January 1915, left over 30,000 people dead and thousands injured or displaced. Fr. Allamano like a great prophet turned into a mouthpiece of God's hope. With people flocking to him at the Consolata Shrine for consolation, he found himself sometimes overwhelmed. Many spoke of what was happening to be a punishment of God. Otherwise how were they to explain the tragedies that were befalling them? The earthquake had left an unspeakable pain, the Spanish

flu had wiped out thousands and thousands of people and through the war families were losing fathers, husbands and sons. People's property especially domestic animals were being taken to feed the improvised teams of soldiers and therefore families were not only being robbed of people, but also property, leaving behind many poor widows. Fr. Allamano remained the hope of such cries assuring all that God has reasons for whatever happens in the world and that even that situation would pass too. As if to reassure the people, in April 1915, having sold the building of Corso Duca di Genova, Fr. Allamano began work to extend the Mother House with a view of admitting 100 sisters. In a time in which no one would have thought of doing any worthwhile project, that action of the Founder was a real sign of courageous trust in God. This act can only be compared to that of prophet Jeremiah's call to the people in exile to settle down, take wives and husbands, instead of remaining dejected, frustrated and in mourning.

Fr. Allamano had his hands full: he also had to minister to his missionary sons wherever they were. At least he had to give moral support to those who had been taken to the war by writing to them regularly either personally or through Fr. Umberto Costa. He also kept them informed by sending them the Institute's publication, the *Da Casa Madre* (From the Mother House). At some point, actually at the end of 1916, the heroic effort of the Founder to keep things going as usual came down, not only because the Archbishop decreed the house to be closed, but also because there was only one seminarian left. The new wing of the Sisters in the Mother House was barely complete when in February 1917 the military authorities took it and turned it into a depot for medical store, and later into a barrack.

In Africa, war was ravaging the missions, creating more humanitarian needs. The war between the British

and the Germans caused many Africans to be deployed in the battlefield as carriers. They were the ones to supply the soldiers with food and ammunitions. Caught in the middle, they died in their thousands. That led to the British authorities setting up make shift hospitals in Mombasa, Nairobi, Kisumu, Taita Taveta, Kisii, and Voi. The situation of many injured people created a pastoral call, which saw Cottolengo Sisters and Consolata Missionaries being called upon to help. That is how Sr. Irene Stefani found herself amidst bloody situations at the age of twenty-five. In Italy, the war had taken another dimension. The year 1917 ended badly, with starvation and hunger. There was no bread in Turin. This led to frequent demonstrations, which within no time turned into a revolt. They began as peaceful demonstrations, but soon exploded into barricades, attacks on and looting of shops and finally into brutal assault on some Churches. Many were burnt, profaned and even vandalized. Luckily, for Fr. Allamano, the Consolata Shrine was not vandalized due to the presence of guards, but a few windows were broken.

In June 1919, four years after the war began, things began returning to normal. On 7th September, the Founder led the community to sing the Te Deum, to commemorate the re-union of all who had been scattered. Things were back on course and the Consolata Mission Institute was once more intact. Fr. Allamano could only tell the missionaries “it is a time to thank the Consolata”.

FATHER ALLAMANO'S LIFE IN PICTORIAL FORM



The village of Castelnuovo, yesterday and today,
where the Consolata Missionaries' Founder was born in 1851.





**Marianna Cafasso,
the mother of Blessed
Joseph Allamano.**



**Saint Joseph Cafasso,
the uncle of Blessed
Allamano and brother
to Marianna Cafasso.
Father Cafasso was
a well known formator in
the Pastoral Institute, where
Father Allamano
later worked.
He was also the “Priest
of the prisoners” who were
condemned to death.**



ABOVE:
Allamano with other seminarians during theological studies.

BELOW:
Father Allamano as a young and elderly priest.





The inside and outside appearance of the Consolata Shrine in Turin, where Father Allamano worked for 46 years.





ABOVE:
Father Camisassa
and Cardinal
Richelmy.

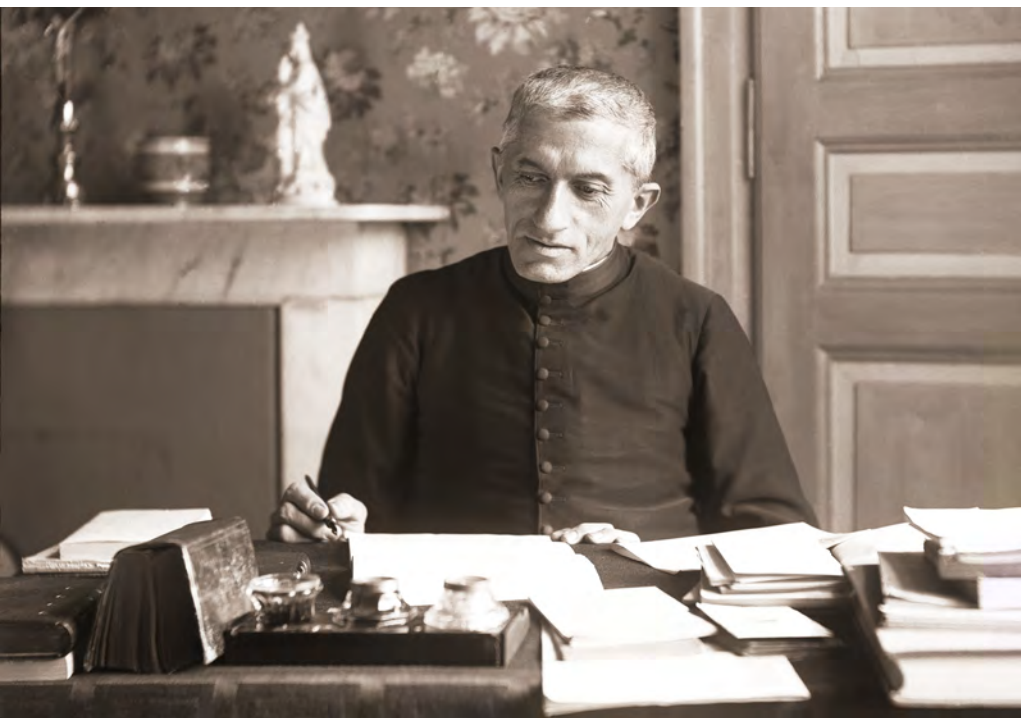


BELOW:
Bishop Perlo and
Father Barlassina.
These were close
friends
and collaborators
of Father Allamano,
especially Father
Camisassa with
whom he lived 42
years
at the Consolata
shrine in Turin.





The house of Rivoli where, after his recovery from his grave illness, Father Allamano wrote a letter asking for the permission to found the Consolata Missionaries.





The Virgin Mary Consolata is the main protector of the Consolata Missionaries. Clockwise from top: the classical image of the Consolata, the image of Consolata in Kenya and in South Korea.





**The First Consolata Missionaries in Kenya
(Fathers and Brothers) in 1902 and the first Consolata
Missionaries Sisters in Kenya in 1913.**





ABOVE:
the Cottolengo Sisters who accompanied the Consolatas
in 1903. They worked among the Kikuyu people led
by Chief Karoli (below).

LAST:
The Immaculate Sisters founded by Bishop Perlo,
a Consolata Missionary.





ABOVE:
the first residence of the Consolata Missionaries,
called the “Consolatina”.

BELOW:
The current “Mother House” in Turin.





The beautiful churches of Nyeri (Kenya) and Tosamaganga (Tanzania), built by the Consolata Missionaries. These churches were among many key stones in the evangelization of these countries.





Some of the magazines produced by the Consolata Missionaries in the world. Communication is essential for evangelization, according to Father Allamano's teaching.

His tomb is used as an altar nowadays in the Mother House.



Chapter Thirteen

KEY QUALITIES OF FR. ALLAMANO

(a) Gentleness

One peculiar quality that was noted by all who passed in the life of Fr. Allamano was the fact that he was among other things a very gentle man. Generally, when we speak of gentleness, the words that come in our minds include tenderness, kindness, compassion, etc. Gentleness is therefore the tender and compassionate approach toward others, and especially towards their weaknesses and limitations. Gentleness is a strong hand with a soft touch. This is why those who are easygoing are called gentlemen. Speaking to the seminarians, he always wanted them to be gentle on things. He presented outward carelessness as a sign of lack of gentleness. As such, he demanded gentleness even in ordinary daily activities. Fr. Allamano was not only quiet but also peaceful and rather temperate. His soft voice is mentioned by many, who wondered when it was that he got annoyed.

Whenever he spoke, his acknowledgement of the sensitivity of the others was in his mind. He seemed to measure his words not to hurt people. This does not mean that he was dodgy on truth. He spoke the truth, sometimes even painful truth, but in doing so he also guarded his tone so that the truth could be well received. Fr. Allamano knew that even truth if it is badly put it ends up hurting people more than lies do. The manner of delivering the truth expresses the internal disposition of the person de-

livering it. That is why gentleness is contrasted with anger and cruelty or brutality. A gentle person is serene, composed and relaxed, but one who is not gentle is agitated, excited or worked up.

Since a gentle person understands the importance of being sensitive to people situations, he is also said to be understanding, lenient and forgiving, or simply humane. This explains why gentleness is closely associated with religiosity. It is in fact an outgrowth of love. It is when we care enough to *choose* not to be harsh, rash, angry, or rough. Having been made a formator immediately after his ordination, Fr. Allamano found himself with the burden of balancing being friend of the students and also their formator. With a duty of correcting them, he had to state out the regulations that they may not have wished to hear. His gentleness is what won them. They realized that he was out not to harm them, but to help them attain their goal of formation and education. Gentleness is choosing to act in a way that does not hurt others, or make them angry. To those who spoke against his effort to start the Institute so as to discourage him, Fr. Allamano either gave a gentle response or the gentlest response: silence. He knew that a gentle response tends to create fewer enemies and more friends. As such, by not antagonizing them, he pulled many to himself. At the end even those who were against him changed their minds.

It is not natural for human beings to be gentle. From the beginning of life, competition is part of us. Survival for the fittest is a rule of nature, and by the time we are born the principle is already in act. As a result, gentleness goes beyond 'instinct', or 'education', or 'society's influence'. We are simply not gentle creatures. As we grow, the merciless reality of the competitiveness of life forces us to develop hard edges that if not smoothened end up becoming the face of cruelty. This is the reason

we are called to learn in the school of Christ. Why? Because in truth, gentleness is a fruit of the spirit of the Lord. Like the other spiritual fruits, gentleness is an aspect of God's character which God's followers take on as they follow Christ (Gal. 5:22-23). The spirit of Christ enables us to be more like him (Eph. 4:14-16). When we are filled with the Spirit's fruit of gentleness, we will correct others with easiness instead of arguing in resentment and anger, we will forgive readily, because any offense towards us is nothing compared to our offenses against God. Gentleness reduces competition and sectarianism as the goal becomes less about ourselves and more about preaching the gospel. The success which Fr. Allamano's pastoral efforts demonstrated prove to us that gentleness does not mean being weak. The competition that we see in life today, tend to present gentleness as a weakness. Those who are gentle are seen as people who lack the capacity to defend their course, to fight for their rights and those of others, and to guard what they believe in. Contrary to this view of things, Fr. Allamano gentleness made him to be loved, to be trusted, and to be believed. He seems to have known that sometimes it is not the strength that cracks the hardest shell but gentleness. As a result, he excelled where few would have thought he would.

Lastly, it is not difficult to see that a person's gentleness is usually a sign of and a fruit of his or her inner disposition. A person who is gentle is also a person who is sufficiently emotionally stable. The fact that Fr. Allamano was a gentle person means that he was very emotionally stable. That was the only way he managed to live serenely with the experiences of many people who tried to hinder or sabotage his missionary project. Essentially, we are saying that the fruit of his gentleness towards everyone regardless of what they had done to him, showed a very refined and balanced interpretation capacity of whatever

he encountered. To explain this well, an example is appropriate. In my responsibility as a formator, one day I was teaching psychology to my students. Particularly, we were talking about emotions. I asked the students, “what would you think if one morning you greeted me and I kept quiet?” Three students responded.

One student said, “I would think that I did a mistake and you are annoyed with me.” The second student said, “I would think that you have not heard my greetings”. The third student said, “I would think that you are indifferent – that you don’t care”. Seeing that they had responded differently, I asked them what would be the result of what each had thought. The first acknowledged that he would become fearful and anxious, because my silence would probably mean that later I would call him for punishment. The second one said that he would remain calm and peaceful, because my failure to respond to his greetings would not have been the result of any hostility between us. The third one said that he would become very angry because my silence would have shown my ‘don’t care attitude’ towards others. From that episode, it is not difficult to see that the emotional outcome of the students was a result of how each one of them would have interpreted my silence. In other words, although the action of not responding to the greetings would be common to all, each would have reacted differently, due to the interpretation he would have made of the action. That is how the same action would produce fear, peace and anger to different individuals. This shows us how ideas in our minds become concrete and end up affecting our lives practically. What the students would have thought (about my action) would be their ideas, but what they would feel and demonstrate would not be ideas but lived experiences in the community. Their emotional response would not particularly depend on my action of not answering their greet-

ings, but especially on their own interpretation of the same.

This is what makes Fr. Allamano unique. A person's gentle response to all people regardless of what they do to him is a sign of his positive interpretation of whatever they do. Yet the positive interpretation depends on how stable emotionally one is. Fr. Allamano should have been one bitter man, after people presented themselves as obstacles of his dream of founding the missionary Institute, to an extent of spreading pessimism about it and about his capacity to run it. His gentle response was a clear sign of his emotional stability. This is something that is key in life. In truth, it is due to lack of it that most conflicts begin. When we interpret wrongly people's actions and words, we end up reacting wrongly as well. For example, if a woman interprets her husband's lateness as a sign of extra marital affair, she becomes anxious, fearful for her marriage and angry against him, even if his lateness was due to commitments in the office, a flat tyre, traffic jam, etc. Her anger and anxiety may easily turn physical, the moment she picks up a fight with her husband. That way, what begins as a thought ends up getting fresh as family conflicts. Fr. Allamano, by interpreting the actions and words of his distracters positively, as tests of his determination, he did not need to get annoyed with them. He knew that they were indirectly helping him to succeed by sharpening or motivating his determination to be a founder and to see Africa evangelized by his missionaries.

(b) Firmness

In addition to being gentle, Fr. Allamano was a very firm person. A quick look into the meaning of the word firm gives us words like strong, well-founded, unyielding, determined, etc. Were it not for this quality, Fr. Allamano would not have even become a priest. His brothers ad-

vised him otherwise, but he remained strong that God was calling him then, and he did not know if the Lord would continue calling him. Fr. Allamano's health failed him many times. A clear example was his inability to become a missionary, his being rejected in the military service and his near-death experience in 1900. He also had to leave school many times on account of his health, but then he would resume when things calmed down. In that situation, Fr. Allamano did not allow his health issues stop him from becoming a priest. When he finally became a priest, his style of life reflected a solid man who would not yield to pressure. To the students Fr. Allamano's inflexibility in bending the regulations was clear. He could not just bend the rules to make them happy. His insistence about universal obedience to the seminarians for example, tells us how much grounded the Founder was on firmness.

In silence and prayer, Fr. Allamano commanded authority to be imitated. The firmness of Fr. Allamano came to the fore more clearly when he decided to start a missionary Institute. If he had not been firm enough, today the congregation would not be alive. The discouragement, gossips and malicious talk that followed his effort should have killed his morale. However, that was not the case. He knew that when toxic people cannot control a person, they try to control how others see him or her. That is why he did not waste time responding back. Even when he was accused of threatening the stability of the diocese by taking young people to Africa to die there, Fr. Allamano stood firm. He did not flinch even an inch. He knew gossips reveal more of the gossipers than of their victim. As such, he remained resolute to go on with his mission. That quality kept him going even when failure directly stared at his face. The episode of the empty house and the doomsayers raising their choruses of "we told you about Fr. Ortalda" should have broken Fr. Allamano's spirit, but

surprising, it didn't. That is why firmness is easily linked to perseverance, courage, and patience. Firm people are not shaken by little things. They are also ready to go through anything for a given aim. It is on this quality that all the achievements that Fr. Allamano got are hinged.

It is however important to know that firmness is not authoritarianism. It is not a better name for inflexibility or rigidity. Firmness is the resoluteness to follow up things to their logical conclusion without wavering. This is a very important quality for leaders. Leaders who lack firmness end up becoming under-achievers, since they allow the opinions and suggestions of others to confuse their decision-making capacity. Lack of firmness leads to indecision. One who is not firm is not able to tell which option to take among many. Faced with needy missions in Kenya and Bishop Perlo demanding for 'hundreds' of missionaries, Fr. Allamano's firmness carried the day: no one was to leave Turin having not finished his formation, regardless of what need was there in the missions. Those kinds of decisions are the once which saved the Institute many years of regret – poor prepared missionaries would have been a disaster. Fr. Allamano's conviction that people had to be thoroughly prepared before going for mission explains why he always used to say, "An ignorant priest is an image of sadness and disappointment, for the anger of God and the desolation of the people". Today, there is a need to relook the teachings and lifestyle of Fr. Allamano if we have to understand him well and live as he did.

(c) Respect of Authority

As human beings we always have a natural tendency of craving for some kind of independence, and usually independence from authority even when we know

that life would be chaotic if there was no authority over us. As such children resist the authority of parents, pupils the authority of teachers, employees the authority of management, citizens the authority of their government, formees the authority of their formators, etc. It's an inherent human tendency, which is changed by our learning the meaning and purpose of authority. One of the things that made Fr. Allamano tick was his natural inclination to respect authority.

When Archbishop Gastaldi sent him to the seminary instead of sending him to a parish as he would have wished, Fr. Allamano expressed his wish, but obeyed immediately. Of course, he did not know that he was being prepared for similar but greater roles of formation, nevertheless he obeyed straightaway. When the archbishop sent him to the Consolata Shrine, again he expressed his wish (to have Fr. Camisassa as his bursar), but went at once. Fr. Allamano was convinced that respecting and obeying his superiors was obeying not just them, but God who worked through them. That perspective of obedience made it easy for him to obey even when what was being proposed was not of his liking.

Fr. Allamano knew that one could not separate respecting the authority and obeying. Speaking about the duties of the members of the Institute towards the superior, the Founder said, "your duties are three: reverence, love and obedience" (SL. 62). Today, like in Fr. Allamano's time, when people obey not because they respect the authority and what it represents, they are not truly obeying. In fact, such a situation is more of slavery than obedience. When we respect the authority and what it represents, our obedience is true obedience. It is false obedience when we obey out of fear, when we obey grudgingly and when we obey only to please a person. Fr. Allamano knew and taught that God authorizes both ecclesial and civil author-

ity, because He knows it's absolutely essential for society's survival and development. A chaotic world indeed would exist if everyone did as he likes in his own eyes. That's why God through St. Paul tells us to be subject to the higher powers (Rom. 13:1-7). He has ordained them for our good. For us to resist these powers is to resist the ordinances of God. Respect of authority gives us the right to be listened.

Since Fr. Allamano respected authority, Archbishop Gastaldi listened to him and even opened the Pastoral Institute in 1882, after it had been closed for years due to controversies about moral theology. The respect of authority gave Fr. Allamano a diplomatic way of presenting issues that were a thorn in the flesh of many. Certainly, Fr. Allamano was never a sycophant. His respect of authority did not mean bootlicking as modern English puts it. Fr. Allamano happened to have a natural sincere way of dealing with his superiors, which revealed his honesty. With such kind of a character it was obvious that he would be a darling of many. Respect and obedience of authority gave Fr. Allamano almost a child's innocence. If that was not so how would you explain his petition to Pope Pius X. The pope must have been taken aback by the courage of Fr. Allamano, but the language which Fr. Allamano and his colleagues used possibly presented them as the most frank priests the pope had ever met.

The example of Fr. Allamano leaves us thinking deeply. Just like children are to respect and obey their parents, parents their rulers, employees their employers, teachers their principals, citizens their government, formees their formators, so also, religious should respect and obey their superiors. And they should do so not because they have no alternative (Rom. 13:5), but because in them they see the author of authority. Of course, leaders, especially religious leaders, have a duty to represent faithfully

the author of authority: God. Religious are supposed to remember the words of Jesus: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28:18).

With these words in our minds, it becomes easy to see that if we will all submit ourselves first to the authority of Jesus, then the matter of our submitting to the authority of others will be taken care of because we will want to please Jesus through them. This makes it evident that the issue of respecting and obeying leaders depends heavily on our attitude. If our attitude is right towards authority, we will realize that authority is approved by God and, as his children, we are to respect it. A bad attitude, toward authority will sabotage one's whole future and opportunity to please God and our fellow man. This explains why Fr. Allamano insisted to the seminarians and missionaries that they were supposed to respect Bishop Perlo whose leadership style was a bit authoritarian. It was not that he approved everything that Bishop Perlo was doing, but being the man at the helm, he had to be respected as the symbol of unity in the community, but also because he was a human being like those under him and as such he had his own weaknesses just like they had theirs. Fr. Allamano wrote extensively about obedience as both virtue and vow, in that way left behind what he himself lived throughout his life.

This whole business of authority and our responsibility toward it begins in the home. Children who aren't taught obedience in the home usually have a hard time submitting to authority of any kind - that of teacher, boss, policeman, formator, or even God. Submission to authority is learned more easily while people are young than at any other time. Formators should insist on it from the onset in formation. When this aspect lacks, there is no doubt that the candidate even if he appears holy, will later have problems with his superiors. When formators don't insist

on respect and obedience to authority because they want to appear humble and friendly to the students, or because they claim to believe in equity, they do disservice to the congregation since not even the African culture equates a son to his father.

In formation, especially the early stages, the formators must be like Fr. Allamano who “like a music teacher” could not overlook even a tiny mistake, but corrected it promptly and gently. That is the only way the Institute can ensure that those joining it from a poor parental background do not end up becoming a bother to the superiors later. Failure to do that, many students who have a negative attitude towards authority will sulk every time they are corrected, because they consider all authority oppressive, or because they see correction as humiliation. Each candidate of religious life must learn to imitate the attitude of Fr. Allamano on authority.

Even after Propaganda Fide was pleased by his suggestion to start a regional missionary Institute and in fact invited Fr. Allamano and Fr. Camisassa to Rome to discuss the issue, Fr. Allamano through Fr. Camisassa wrote to Propaganda Fide saying “We cannot proceed against the wishes of our Bishop” since they had not yet informed Archbishop Alimonda. As if to prove his point on respect and obedience to authority, even when Archbishop Alimonda died in 30th May 1891, Fr. Allamano did not take advantage of the vacuum to initiate the process with Rome before another Archbishop was elected. Instead, while sending the overall plan for the Missionary Institute to Cardinal Simeoni, he still insisted that he was not ready to do anything until he was sure that the new Archbishop would approve his idea. In other words, Fr. Allamano would never proceed into anything until and unless his superiors approved it. We too could benefit from Fr. Allamano’s attitude on this

issue. Speaking to his young missionaries he once said, “I can affirm that the good spirit in a community blossoms or withers away in proportion to how well the practice of respecting the superiors is maintained”. The founder knew and taught that respecting legitimate authorities could not be separated from obeying them. One could not say that he respected the authority when he did not obey. That was the reason the Founder always taught his seminarians that they had to develop a universal obedience.

A universal obedience meant first obeying all superiors without distinction. It did not matter if the person in front of them was the Regional superior, a superior of a certain house of the Consolata Missionary Institute or their formator – they had to learn to respect all superiors. Again, it did not matter whether the superior in front of them was old or young, highly learned or not, saintly or otherwise – they had no option but to obey. At some point in fact, he told the seminarians, “You should obey me just the same as if I were a saint”. Second, universal obedience also meant obeying the commands or directives of the superiors regardless of how they were given. It did not matter if the superior spoke in a polite language or a harsh one. (Cf. SL. 287). Third, universal obedience meant not making distinction between important commands of the superiors and less important ones. The Founder expected them to respond to all the directives of the superiors regardless of whether they were real orders or “mere” suggestions. One had to obey each and every command of the superior, and each superior as if obeying Christ the Lord. Fr. Allamano himself had no equal in this. He was convinced beyond any doubt that God spoke through the superiors, and therefore if a religious person wanted to do the will of God, he only needed to do what the superiors commanded. This explains why Fr. Allamano always said to the young missionaries and the seminarians “You must see God in the superiors”.

As if to emphasize what he had been saying for sometime, one time Fr. Allamano told the young missionaries at the Mother House, “most of the problems that arise in the missions trace their origin to failures in obedience” (*This I want you to be*, pg 162). Aware of the truth of the Founder’s sentiments, we must imitate his supernatural motive of obedience: respecting and obeying our superiors because we see God in them. When that is done, as the Founder himself said, we will not obey a superior due to his intelligence, age, sanctity, or wisdom. On the contrary, we will obey the young as well as the elderly superiors, the wise as well as the unwise, the intelligent as well as the less intelligent superiors, the holy as well as the humanly weak superiors, etc. Why? Because we will be obeying the God speaking and acting through them (Cf. SL. 285).

(d) Love of quality

To many, quality is just one of the nine Aristotelian accidents of things. However, usually when we talk of quality, at the back of our minds we contrast it with quantity. Quality is the attribute that speaks of the degree of excellence of something. Fr. Allamano grew up as a unique person as far as this aspect is concerned. He never went for what was just available. That attribute of his was evident in everything he did and said. Love of quality meant never accepting anything that was below excellence. Certainly, that characteristic said a lot about the Founder himself. When we are people who accept anything and everything we depict ourselves as worthless too. It means we do not consider ourselves worthy enough for what is valuable. When we fall for anything we undermine ourselves and by doing so mock even our creator. Fr. Allamano never went for just what was given. As a formator, he insisted that he needed first quality mission-

aries. Of course, the founder did not mean that he needed angels. On the contrary he understood that all people have to be guided to attain perfection, which in truth they never achieve in this life. He was sure that readiness to be accompanied and personal effort to change were key in achieving not only a certain level of perfection, but also holiness. Fr. Allamano insisted that his missionaries had to be saints. He did not understand why with good will and reverence to the saints one would not be a saint. He did not want missionaries who were just good people.

Speaking to his seminarians about responding to the vocation in the Mother House, the Founder once told them “for some people, it is enough to be just good. They don’t care to become saints. They respond with little generosity, study and work a little, obey to a certain point and pray only to the bare minimum” (C.f. SL. 29). To the Founder, such people did not merit to be his missionaries, because they were mediocre. He needed quality seminarians who would in turn become quality missionaries. And for him quality missionaries meant holy missionaries – nothing less. These words of Fr. Allamano show that to him it was not enough for a candidate to avoid doing wrong or avoid getting into trouble. In other words, avoiding doing wrong or getting into trouble did not point to the presence of a vocation to the priesthood. Simply put, lack of negative evidence in a candidate did not point to vocation to priesthood. A seminarian had to manifest positive evidence of an authentic calling and that evidence had to be visible in the life of the person and open to the scrutiny of the formative team. To the Founder, growth to holiness was the pointer or evidence of one’s vocation and that growth had to be manifested in the change of attitude, behaviour and capacity as a result of the formation programme. This explains why he always gave examples of saints in his talks, and at the end he even proposed six-

teen saints to be models of the Institute. Why? Because he was convinced that only those who had lived a quality life could inspire and assist his missionaries to do the same. Fr. Allamano did not have doubt that quality seminarians would certainly be reliable enough to produce quality missionaries. It was that conviction that made him not to not accept just anyone into religious life. Reliability is the question of how well a thing or a person maintains his original level of quality over time and through various conditions. Aware of the missionary challenges that awaited them in the missions, Fr. Allamano knew that only quality seminarians could be able to produce missionaries who would withstand the test of the time and remain to be evangelical forces to reckon with in the apostolate. In other words, it was only they who would be reliable enough to transform themselves into reliable missionaries. It was that love of quality that made the founder to say:

This is what I want: few candidates but good ones, ones in order: they should have spirit; they should be both willing and capable to work for others. It is not quantity but quality that counts - quality and spirit. Numbers can be important if they are accompanied by quality.

Fr. Allamano's love for quality had a practical implication. He himself noted "it is not easy to train many (candidates) well as it is to train a few.... Better fewer candidates but first-rate candidates" (*this I want you to be*, pg 81). Even for the people who wanted to join the Congregation while already priest, Fr. Allamano did not loosen his standard to favour them or make their entrance into the Institute. One time a bishop told him that he had a priest who wanted to join the Institute. Fr. Allamano for the love of quality told the bishop "if that priest is as white as the flour that makes the Eucharistic hosts, let him come. Otherwise, keep him". This shows that although Fr. Allamano needed missionar-

ies in his congregation, he did not need just anyone, and neither was he desperate to have the institute full of people. Our Founder's sentiments should be a means through which we can evaluate the Institute and ourselves. Do we love quality as much as he did? Probably if we understood the Founder's concerns very well, today we would re-look our animation and formation process deeper. Maybe, we would even find a way of reducing the many problems in the Institute, many of which can be traced back to the animation-formation strategies and processes.

Fr. Allamano's love for quality was not just about formees and the young priests. It was also about the missions. Several times the Founder told Bishop Perlo that it was better few but well looked after missions than many missions done haphazardly. With the speed with which Bishop Perlo was opening missions, Fr. Allamano saw the risk of having huge territories which the Institute would not be able to run effectively. Our Founder knew of the desire of many superiors to have their congregations all over, as a way of making a name for themselves. He was however never attracted by such presences which only existed nominally. To him a Consolata presence anywhere was supposed to be one which had tangible impact in the lives of the people and their environment. Even today, Fr. Allamano would frown at the idea of parishes with only one priest. Why? Because it is not difficult to see that the Christians in such parishes only get the bare minimum from the allegedly celebrated Consolata presence. There is no way such a priest can be in the office, visiting the sick, celebrating the sacraments in the parish and its outstations, visiting and following up pastoral program in the academic institutions around the parish, coordinating and following up catechetical formation of the catechists in the parish, as well as doing administrative duties calmly. In other words, the issue of personnel (availability, scar-

city and distribution) does not escape Fr. Allamano's trait of love of quality. Probably, if the Founder was to meet us today, he would remind us that few overloaded missionaries do not give the best of themselves, and neither do they give the best testimony. Having too much to do means divided attention, fatigue and being moody all the time. Those are not the traits of people who are likely to offer quality evangelization anywhere. Therefore, If Fr. Allamano was to speak to us today, his words would probably be as follows:

"My dear sons, to me it is absolutely unacceptable that some of our missionaries suffer loneliness and extreme fatigue because of living alone. What adds salt to injury is that such loneliness and extreme fatigue are as a result of Regions deciding to multiply our presences in a country. First, it is not fair at all to the particular missionaries who have to work unnecessarily extra hard. Second, the 12th General Chapter demanded that at least all Consolata communities should have at least two members, and mostly important, it is unfair to the Christians who lack necessary services just because a priest is alone in the parish. It is better that several priests live in a parish with one or few outstations, since their service will be thorough, well focused and personalized to the needs of the people. Such priests will have more impact in the lives of the people than a priest whose only service is the celebration of the Mass in numerous outstations, leaving people yearning for more moments of encounter with Christ – which are not available. In short, my sons, put quality as a priority over quantity – as I have always taught you"

(e) Missionary Zeal

Zeal is the energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or objective. Other words that express the same notion

include: passion, commitment, dedication, enthusiasm, fire, love, tireless devotion, etc. Naturally, zeal is that force that moves people beyond themselves, beyond their shortcomings, beyond their failures. It is a positive obsession of doing something. We attribute missionary zeal to Fr. Allamano because from a very young age, he wished to be a missionary. Even when he was a seminarian, he wished to be a missionary like Massaia who worked in Ethiopia. In truth, were it not for his health, Fr. Allamano would have ended up as a missionary. All of us have an inclination to something. When we are able to align our inclinations and vocations or missions, miracles happen. The fact that although Fr. Allamano did not become a missionary but managed to create a community of missionaries point to his inclination. Missionary force was within him. However, sometimes in religious life we may not end up in what is aligned to our natural inclination and for that reason, we have to initiate and develop a passion for it since passion is some kind of strength that pushes us ahead. Given that as missionaries we participate in the mission of Christ, it is demanded that the task through which we live and participate in Christ's mission be done in exemplary way. This is where missionary zeal comes in. Missionary zeal is therefore:

- That passion with which we participate in the missionary command of Christ.
- The fire that lights the desire of making Christ known, loved and served.
- The passion of seeing people living their Christian life.
- The passion for evangelization.
- The passion of seeing people know their faith.
- The passion of seeing people's standards of living changing for the better as a means of making them

acknowledge the love and generosity of God that works through others.

- The passion of being a finger of God among the people one finds himself.
- The strong desire of seeing charisms which are gifts of the Holy Spirit propagated for the benefit of the people of God.

Although this may touch a number of things, it particularly involves:

(i) Being fired by the Holy Spirit

To be able to work zealously, one has to be fired, or better inspired by the Spirit of God. As Christians we easily say that St. Paul had zeal in his work due to the accomplishments that he achieved regardless of the challenges and obstacles that he went through. That portrays a power beyond him. His words “woe to me if I don’t preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16) showed one who was under obligation. Having been chosen and sent, the missionary has to avail himself to the Holy Spirit who lives in him. We have a duty to preach Christ and to imitate him. Since humanly speaking there is a level to which we can perform whatever action we choose, when one is able to achieve beyond that level, we see not only the dedication of the person but also the power of a hidden hand behind him. Spiritually speaking, missionary zeal is therefore the work of the Spirit of God in us, since it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the gifts that we are supposed to present in the community of believers. The Holy Spirit gives not only the gifts but also different tasks and how they are to be used in the Church for the common good of everyone. This is what St. Paul tells us: to some, his gift was that they should be apostles; to some prophets; to some evangelists; to some

pastors and teachers; so that the saints together make a unity in the work of service, building up the body of Christ... (Eph. 4:11-16).

(ii) Personal devotion

Given that passion may also be due to dreams of achievement and recognition, true zeal in anything is seen in the capacity of doing it well. Missionary zeal in addition to being a fruit of cooperation with the Holy Spirit, is also the personal effort that people put in the effort of making sure that the gospel message takes effect in the way of life of people (culture). That task demands knowing well the way of life of people, knowing the gospel of Christ, and how our understanding and acceptance of the people's way of life can impact on the two. The fact that Fr. Allamano was fired by a missionary zeal is seen not only in the fact he was fired by the Holy Spirit, but also by the readiness that he demonstrated in availing himself to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. In other words, he was not passive. He read much about missionary life, tried to be a missionary, and overcame the obstacles of founding the Institute, and patiently formed communities of missionaries from his office at the Consolata Shrine – just to say that he put himself into it.

(iii) Insertion in the community

Given that being a missionary means “being sent”, and usually to people of other cultures, it is important to try to understand the mentality, outlook of life and the worldview of the people for whom and with whom one is to work. Since Fr. Allamano could not go to the missions himself, he did so through others. Through letters and diaries, he got the wind of what was happening in the mis-

sions as if he was there. To those who were in the missions in person, Fr. Allamano taught that they had to try to insert themselves harmoniously among the natives. The Founder knew that one could not talk of having missionary zeal if he was not able to coexist with those he was expecting to serve. It would have been even worse, for a missionary to be unable to fit in his own community. The capacity to live and work with others from the same community was the basis of true evangelization, that is why Fr. Allamano said, “each one has to learn to tolerate the weakness of the others, as he works on his own”. Fr. Allamano did not need to be reminded that working in Africa was different from working in Europe or America or even Asia. Even today, we say Africans and Asians are animated while Europeans and the Americans are calm and reserved. Certainly, this is a very broad way of looking at the continents and without a doubt it involves a vast generalization. However, it shows that no person is a photocopy of the other. A missionary therefore must try to understand the people he is intending to serve, if he has to add any value to their way of life by changing that which needs to be changed using the word of God. The minister has to help the people to assimilate the word of God in their culture, but to do that he has to be more or less one of them because only then can they trust him and entrust themselves to him. That process of the missionary transforming himself to fit in a given cultural context is called adaptation.

In truth, adaptation is a fundamental requirement in missionary life. A missionary who is not able to adapt and to fit in a given society cannot talk of missionary zeal. True missionary zeal is contextualized by the capacity to adapt. This is what St. Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthians saying

Though I was not a slave to any human being,

I put myself in slavery to all people, to win as many as I could. To the Jews I made myself a Jew, to win the Jews; to those under the law as one under the law (though I am not), in order to win those under the law; to those outside the law as one outside the law, though I am not outside the law. To the weak I made myself weak, to win the weak. I accommodate myself to people in all kinds of situation, so that by all possible means I might bring some to salvation. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its benefits with others “(1 Cor. 9:19-23).

St. Paul was able to adapt to all situations so that those who were in those situations could benefit from the gospel treasure that he was carrying. Probably that was the reason Fr. Allamano chose St. Paul among the models of the Institute. Today we also say that it was the reason Fr. Allamano ensured that the young missionaries who were being prepared in the Mother House were taught as many practical skills as possible. They were supposed to be able to settle fairly well in a land they had never been, and a land which would turn to be their home together with the natives of those lands. Fr. Allamano's aim was therefore not aiming at offering just technical skills. His aim was to prepare the missionaries into an experience of personal conversion, in which they would forget themselves, their country, and plunge themselves totally in the new surroundings. That did not need the missionaries to deny or reject the values of their own cultures. Instead, it demanded them to universalize their good values integrated with Christian faith because that way they would offer a balanced gospel to the natives.

In other words, the whole effort of Fr. Allamano was to ensure that the lads were prepared well to be able

to adapt in the environment they would find themselves. Even today, “adaptation is not separated from vocation discernment” (*Vocations and their Formation today*, pg. 89). From the moment a young man enters the house of Formation, he has to start opening himself up to live with new colleagues, to be far from his family, to follow a strict program of life, and to be ready to be guided, corrected and shaped into a future minister in the Church. That is adaptation already. Of course, adaptation does not end with the ending of the basic formation. It is a lifelong process that gives us the capacity to serve the people of God happily and devotedly wherever we find ourselves.

Chapter Fourteen

THE WILL OF GOD

The will of God is a complex topic; however it is possible to speak about it from hindsight. Between 1919 and 1922, several events which can now be attributed to the will of God took place in Fr. Allamano's life. At the beginning of 1919, having ended the war, it was time for people to return to their daily lives and particularly to rebuild their broken families and lives. In June 1919 at the Mother House, a small celebration took place to commemorate the reunion of the missionaries from the war camps. As you would expect, there were prayers and hymns and a lot of food and drinks. Fr. Allamano led the community to end the bitter episode of the war and to reopen a new hopeful chapter of their lives by burning all the letters that he had received from those who had been in the military camps. A large bonfire was lit and in it went the painful moments, tears, fears and anxiety that had characterized the war period. In a few minutes, all those bitter moments turned into smoke and ashes. Fr. Allamano reminded the community that all had happened not by chance but through the will of God. He, God had reasons for everything.

As if to console the Founder, jubilant events followed immediately. First, there was the expansion of the Consolata Missionaries field of work to Tanganyika. Strange as it may appear, the conflicts between the Kenyan British authority and the Germans in Tanganyika had created a pastoral need. The defeat of the Germans in the First World War led to the expulsion of the Benedictine Missionaries in Tanganyika, forcing them to leave a vast

mission territory they had been taking care of in the south Eastern side of Tanganyika. Pressed as he might have been by scarcity of personnel, Fr. Perlo send four missionaries from Kenya, to take the place of the numerous Benedictine Missionaries who had left Iringa. The four included: Fr. Giovanni Ciravegna, Fr. Giacomo Cavallo, Fr. Gaudenzio Panelatti and Fr. Domenico Vignoli.

The four were assigned to Tosamaganga and Madi-bira missions in Iringa. Tosamaganga mission already had 1642 baptized Christians and a network of 312 schools with 7,191 pupils. Madibira had fewer schools, but almost 2000 baptized Christians. Without wasting time, the four missionaries took their positions immediately and began working. It was not easy for them, since they were entering a very different situation from the one they had left in Kenya. The history of the people was very different the Kikuyu people of Nyeri in Kenya, the language, traditions, tribal formations, the colonial system, etc., everything meant a new start. They worked so hard to an extend that in 3rd March 1922, the Prefecture Apostolic of Iringa was created, entrusted to the Consolata Missionaries, and led by Fr. Francesco Cagliero as the Prefect Apostolic. In those three years, the number of the Consolata Missionaries had increased to 10 priests, 4 lay Brothers and 6 Sisters “in a territory that had once been run by around 40 German Benedictines who also had enjoyed unlimited means and the support of a sympathetic government” (G. Telbaldi, *Consolata Missionaries in the world*, pg, 107). This is to say that the few Consolata Missionaries had a lot to do with limited resources. They were of course not the only ones who were feeling the heat. The opening of the Tanganyika mission added Fr. Allamano’s already heavy work. He, at the age of 71 years old, had now three African territories to follow and support yet the need for personnel was becoming acute each day. As usual, Msgr.

Perlo was demanding for more missionaries from Turin. The events of Kaffa Prefecture required close follow up, and a keener eye was needed for the new Prefecture of Iringa. As such, the beautiful work of expansion of the missions was for Fr. Allamano a sign of God's will in action.

The second event that was a consolation to Fr. Allamano and the Institute after the unpleasant experience of war was the beatification of his uncle Fr. Cafasso. Fr. Cafasso was the maternal uncle of Fr. Allamano. He had lived and worked at the Pastoral Institute for many years, and his excellence in teaching moral theology was known by all. Fr. Allamano had put it as one of his resolutions to see Fr. Cafasso beatified, not just because he was his uncle, but because Cafasso would have been a noble model for priests and religious. Fr. Cafasso had been known and respected in Turin as the Priest of hope due to his work of counseling and confessing those who had been condemned to death. On 23rd May 1906, pope Pius X issued a decree ratifying the introduction of the apostolic process of the beatification of Fr. Joseph Cafasso. Usually, the process of beatification is not a joke. It involves a lot of work. Most of the time it requires setting up of committees, asking for help from the bishops, and a huge amount of money for the work of documentation and traveling. In Fr. Cafasso's case, there was nothing of that sort. Behind the whole process was Fr. Allamano the frail diocesan priest of Turin, assisted by Fr. Camisassa. How Fr. Allamano and Fr. Camisassa managed to do the whole task is still baffling, especially because he was still working at the Consolata Shrine, guiding missionaries in Africa without forgetting the Pastoral Institute. Certainly, this paints a picture of a no nonsense man in responsibilities. His dedication to the cause was an unimaginable.

In May 1911, Fr. Allamano witnessed the opening of the coffin of Fr. Cafasso at the Pastoral Institute, an event that was led by His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop Richelmy. In the spring of 1919, the examination concerning the miracles having been finished, Fr. Allamano took the documentation to Rome himself, where he was received by Pope Benedict XV. In 1921, Fr. Allamano was again in Rome, for the last and decisive run up for the finishing decision. Although Pope Benedict XV died on 22nd January 1922, the process continued during the pontificate of pope Pius XI. Finally, the news that Fr. Allamano had been waiting came. The event of the beatification had been fixed for 3rd May 1925. On 1st January 1925 when he got the message, Fr. Allamano had to save the last drop of his energy by staying inside. His energy had been sucked up by his frail health which had now been compounded by old age. When the day arrived, Fr. Allamano travelled to Rome with the students of the Pastoral Institute, all at his own expense. He was happy that his uncle was being raised to the altars. Fr. Cafasso's feast was also a feast for the students who were studying in the place he had worked for years. To crown the event up, on 21st June 1925, Fr. Cafasso's remains were carried into the Consolata Shrine in a ceremony that was attended by Archbishop Gamba and other bishops of Piedmont. Fr. Allamano literally dragged himself along painfully in the procession. Contrary to the expectations of many, Fr. Allamano who was the closest relative to the blessed, the promoter of the cause, the Rector of the Consolata Shrine and the Pastoral Institute, did not participate in the procession wearing the best liturgical vestments, but as usual, he joined the rest of the priests in his usual cassock. It was the highest level of humility many had ever seen. Given that he who sows in humility harvests in joy, in 1947, twenty-one years after the death of Fr. Allamano,

the work he began reached its apex in the canonization of Blessed Cafasso.

Amidst those happy events, the death of Fr. Camisassa on 18th August 1922 became a real blow to Fr. Allamano and the Institute. Fr. Allamano had lived with Fr. Camisassa close to a life time. Theirs was not just friendship but ‘bloodship’. Their relationship demonstrated how good friendship is essential for a fulfilling and fruitful religious life. The two had been brother’s keeper to each other. When Fr. Allamano was in Rome to follow up the beatification of Fr. Cafasso, Fr. Camisassa wrote secretly to Fr. Ferrero in Rome telling him Fr. Allamano’s diet. He also told him to ensure that Fr. Allamano ate his food, and to keep informing him every day about his situation. Certainly Fr. Allamano must have been surprised to find his favourite meal in Rome without having told anyone about it. Unknown to him, someone in Turin was taking care of him. That was how close their relationship was. The death of Fr. Camisassa therefore hit Fr. Allamano like a thunderbolt. In silence and prayer, he moved through the rooms they had shared for almost half a century together, wondering why God had decided to be so unpredictable. Things had been brightening up after the war. The beginning of the Iringa Prefecture had thrust the Institute in the path to glory, but now the death of Fr. Camisassa revealed the mysterious hand of God. Fr. Allamano hoped that one day Fr. Camisassa would head the Institute after him. With him gone, Fr. Allamano would one day tell people “we promised to tell each other the truth and we always kept it”.

The last event which pointed the will of God for the Institute was the approval of the constitutions of the Institute on 27th February 1923. Remember that in 1909 Rome had given Fr. Allamano a *Decretum Laudis*, giving the Institute self-governing capacity and nominating Fr.

Allamano as the Superior General and Fr. Camisassa as the Vice-Superior General for two consecutive six years periods. After that decree, nothing more had taken place – of course the war was to blame. Fr. Allamano had to invoke a general chapter in 1921 which was to give the Institute its permanent organs of governance: the Constitutions. The general chapter took place in two sessions: 22nd and 24th November 1922. With the approval of the Constitutions on 27th February 1923, Fr. Allamano was among the happiest people in Turin. His Institute which people, and many of them his fellow priests, had seen as just a passing wind that would end up like that of Fr. Ortalda, was now a stable religious and missionary Institute in the Church. He could only thank God. He was now sure that what had begun as just an idea some twenty-three years before was in fact the will of God. He could now afford a smile as he waited to see how things would unfold.

Chapter Fifteen

FR. ALLAMANO'S FIELD SOLDIER NUMBER ONE

Good ideas are useful if they are put into practice, otherwise they remain just like that – good ideas. Fr. Allamano's intention to start and succeed in establishing his missionary Institute needed a strong person on the ground. It would have been useless to have a good idea when he did not have the appropriate persons to execute it, especially given that his poor health had made it clear that he would never be a missionary himself. To do what many would have failed, Fr. Allamano needed someone to do 'the donkey's work' if the Institute had to be established in Africa and if it had to succeed in its maiden mission. Fr. Allamano found that person in Fr. Filippo Perlo.

Fr. Perlo was among the first four missionaries who went in Kenya in 1902. He was the nephew of Fr. Camisassa, since one of Fr. Camisassa's sister was married to Antony Perlo, the man who became the father of the future Bishop Perlo. Fr. Perlo was a bright, animated and hardworking person, whom the Founder had appointed as the bursar of the first group of missionaries who went to Kenya. It seems that from a young age he, Fr. Perlo, developed a vibrant character, which was accompanied by a special meticulousness that saw him bring things into fruition whenever he set his mind and effort in them. That spirited character of his became evident soon after they arrived in Kenya. While Fr. Tommaso Gays

was supposed to be the superior of the group, within no time he was taking orders from Fr. Perlo. The serene and reserved Gays gave in, and before long he handed in his resignation to the Founder. There was no need of being called superior just by name when in fact someone else was calling the shots. The Founder reluctantly accepted the unilateral decision of Gays saying, "I would like to reiterate my sorrow over this decision". He went on to say that he hoped that Tommaso Gays would continue "helping Fr. Perlo with his advice and cooperation." (Cf. *G. Tebaldi, Consolata Missionaries in the World*, pg. 66). At the beginning of 1904, Fr. Allamano appointed Fr. Perlo as the superior of the group saying, "Do not seek any excuses because I have no intention of accepting any." (*Letter of Giuseppe Allamano to Filippo Perlo, 30th October 1903, pg 668*). With that position, Fr. Perlo became the superior of the group.

As a person, Fr. Perlo was a nice person, who was animated by the spirit of conquest in simplicity and urgency. He was very strict on the use of temporal goods and therefore an excellent administrator. In all truth he was God sent in the Institute, as through him the institute expanded within a short time like bushfire. As soon as they arrived in Kenya, he led the rest in learning the Kikuyu language, writing the first Kikuyu- Italian 'dictionaries', to construct schools and health centres. That spirit of accountability saved the Institutes a lot of avoidable expenses, and ensured that every single coin went to its appropriate use. Fr. Perlo's austerity could however sometimes go overboard. On 23rd July 1903 after the Murang'a conference, Fr. Allamano had to tell him to allow the missionaries to have a bit more food, and at least a

glass of wine at meals. Fr. Allamano's request was as a result of constant complains that he was getting from the missionaries through the letters and diaries they were sending to him every now and then to inform him the state of the mission. In truth, Fr. Perlo was not just strict with others. He was first of all strict with himself. His life was more of a soldier than a priest, no wonder we refer him as the first foot soldier of the Institute.

Personality incompatibility is a reality. As the missionaries went on working in Kenya, Fr. Allamano's way of thinking and doing things proved to be very different from Fr. Perlo's. The Founder believed in slow but sure approach of doing things, an approach which allowed growth gradually. He would never do things in hurry. Fr. Allamano seemed to believe that it is not possible to convert the whole world in a day. Fr. Perlo on the contrary wanted to accomplish everything immediately and with whatever means that were available. In 1902 for example, while Fr. Allamano was agonizing over the departure of the seven missionaries who had remained in Turin after the first missionary expedition, Fr. Perlo in Kenya was already demanding that the Founder send 100 to 200 missionaries. His position was that the Founder was supposed to send whoever he had – trained or not. Even those untrained persons would learn everything on the ground. In fact, Fr. Perlo did not mind even if the Founder sent people who had no language preparation. They would learn through conversation in the missions. Fr. Perlo went on to say that even if the Founder did not have priests to send to the mission, he could have as well sent sisters because they (Perlo and his team) were ready to convert the Kikuyu us-

ing the sisters. That was Fr. Perlo: a hyper-active man who believed no obstacle was unconquerable.

Fr. Perlo's speed of action transformed what was originally collaborative mission with the French Missionaries of Bishop Allgeyer into an independent recognized missionary territory by Propaganda Fide. In 1905, Propaganda Fide cut Bishop Allgeyer's Vicariate and gave it to the Consolata Missionaries, appointing Fr. Perlo as its superior. Of course, the action brought conflict between the Institute and Bishop Allgeyer. In 1909, four years after the independent mission was set up, Propaganda Fide elevated it to a vicariate. Fr. Perlo who had been the superior was to be the bishop. In September 1909 the new bishop elect was received by Fr. Allamano in Turin where they shared about the progress of the missions. Fr. Allamano was happy to know that the schools were doing well, the hospital were attending many people and the African gradually were learning to wear clothes. Fr. Allamano insisted that the missionaries had to ensure that the African developed humanly as that would prepare them to be good Christians.

On 23rd October 1909 the same day that the new huge and spacious Mother House was being inaugurated, in the Consolata Shrine, the bishop elect, Fr. Perlo, was consecrated a bishop. After that Bishop Perlo returned to Kenya where he went on with his missionary work while he was waiting for Fr. Camisassa his uncle who was to visit the missions. During the 'canonical visit' of Fr. Camisassa between February 1911 and April 1912, Bishop Perlo was very instrumental in ensuring that the Vice-Rector experienced all that the Institute had done over the ten years. Fr. Camisassa noted also the acidic tempera-

ment of Bishop Perlo, which made it difficult for him to cooperate with others.

After Fr. Camisassa returned to Turin, Fr. Allamano continued receiving letters and diaries of missionaries complaining that Bishop Perlo was not fatherly and that he was more a military general than a Bishop. Even with those complains threatening to taint his name, Bishop Perlo demonstrated his missionary zeal on 24th October 1918 when he founded a female religious Institute: The Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Nyeri (SMI). It was the first local Congregation in Kenya, and the second in Africa, after the Banabikira of Uganda. Originally, the Immaculate Sisters of Fr. Perlo were meant “to be lay assistants to the white sisters, helping them in housework and in the fields.” (Cf. G. Tebaldi, *Consolata Missionaries in the World*, pg. 73). The First World War was on its last year, and Bishop Perlo having seen how important women had been in evangelization could not close his eyes in front of the need that was evident. The war had caused a lot of pain and destruction, and therefore after the war there was the huge work of rebuilding people’s lives and livelihoods. That is what made Bishop Perlo to found a congregation whose Charism was “*Sharing the love of God in purity of heart through ministries with passion and compassion*”. It is important to note that although Giovanni Tebaldi says that the congregation was “officially founded” by Monsignor Giuseppe Perrachon the successor of Msg. Filippo Perlo after the decree of Propaganda Fide in December 1926, Msg. Perlo still gets the credit because first of all he started it, and second, Msg. Perrachon found a community that was already alive and functioning. As such we still

maintain that the religious Institute was founded by Msg. Filippo Perlo, who was instrumental enough in seeing the need of African women as collaborators in evangelization, in spite of the “underdevelopment of women in Kikuyu society that time.” (Cf. *G. Tebaldi, Consolata Missionaries in the World*, pg. 73). Like himself, the Sisters of his Institute were moved by apostolic enthusiasm and zeal. Like their Founder they got involved in activities of human promotion that changed greatly the lives of people wherever they were working.

Bishop Perlo’s courage and determination was unrivalled. After the Vatican assigned the Prefecture of Kaffa to the Consolata Institute, while Fr. Barlassina was still held in Italy and prevented from entering Ethiopia by the chaos that resulted from the death of Menelik II, Bishop Perlo sent a group of missionaries to Ethiopia on 22nd November 1914. The group was headed by Fr. Angelo Dal Canton and included Br. Anselmo Jeantet, Br. Aquilino Caneparo and 7 Kenya porters. Even after the group failed to reach its destination due to bureaucratic issues (in spite of having entered Ethiopia), Bishop Perlo never stopped trying new ways of achieving his objective of seeing Consolata Missionaries in Ethiopia. At some point, he even planned to register a fake commercial company so as to use it to take missionaries in Ethiopia in the guise of being employees of the company. Of course, you can be sure that Fr. Allamano did not support such kind of tricks. Propaganda Fide also categorically prohibited such schemes. Although Bishop Perlo did not manage to send missionaries in Ethiopia, the courage with which he planned and executed his decisions was unmatched. True, even though finally Fr.

Barlassina decided to take charge of his journey into Ethiopia as a way of avoiding turning evangelization effort into political-commercial activity, Bishop Perlo had done a lot behind the scenes. At the end, as if to sanitize the scheming that Bishop Perlo had planned, when Fr. Barlassina finally found his way (also illegally) into Ethiopia on the night of Christmas 1916, he ended up using similar schemes to survive until he was able to legitimize his presence.

Bishop Perlo was whirlwind in the mission: powerful and effective. Complaints against him went on for some time and sometimes they appeared exaggerated. The truth of the matter however came out between April and November 1921 when the Bishop went to Turin. In those few months, Fr. Allamano realized that what the missionaries had been saying all the years was actually true. It was difficult to live with Bishop Perlo. At some point, the two were not in talking terms. The result was talking through small notes even though their rooms were opposite to each other. At the end of Bishop Perlo's stay, he left Turin without even saying a word to the Founder. Their communication had degenerated that low. Fr. Allamano was however always open and loving to Bishop Perlo. In fact, the Founder considered Bishop Perlo the best fruit of the Institute. That was the reason he did not hesitate to vote for Bishop Perlo during the general chapter which gave the Institute its constitutions in November 1922. With the advice of Propaganda Fide, Bishop Perlo was not only elected a councilor but also the Vicar General of the Institute with the right of succession. As usual, the unpredictable Perlo refused to accept the position. It was clear: he did not want to leave Africa. Accept-

ing the position meant he was to return to Italy. A bitter exchange of correspondence between the bishop and the Founder ensued through letters to a point that Cardinal van Rossum the Prefect of Propaganda Fide had to intervene. Bishop Perlo was ordered to lay down his position as the Vicar Apostolic in Kenya and return to Italy after submitting a list of names of possible successors. Unhappy with the decision, Bishop Perlo only appeared in Turin in 1924 to take his role as the Vicar General of the Institute. Having returned in Italy, he immediately took the role that he had been assigned: Vicar General of the Institute.

For two years he worked as the assistant of Fr. Allamano. Certainly, we do not need to be told how their relationship was, having seen what had happened previously. In any case, the Bishop remained with the Founder until 16th February 1926, when Fr. Allamano died. With the death of the Founder, Bishop Perlo became the Superior General of the Institute. He however remained in the office only for three years, that is up to 2nd January 1929, when he was removed from office amid a myriad accusations ranging from authoritarianism, immersion in commerce, negligence of theological formation, to other accusations touching on financial impropriety and administrative issues. His effort to return in Africa did not materialize. Instead, he was obliged to leave the Institute for sometime, choosing to retire into private life in a house he had acquired in Rome, where he lived with his brother Monsignor Gabriel Perlo and his sister Agnesina. With his departure, the Institute fell in the hands of Monsignor Luka Pasetto, a Franciscan Capuchin, who had been sent by Rome as an Apostolic Administrator. Monsignor Pasetto would remain

at the helm of the Institute until 28th June 1933, when Fr. Barlassina Gaudenzio who had been in Ethiopia was elected as the Superior General. Bishop Perlo died on 4th November 1948 in Rome, a month or so after the death of his brother Monsignor Gabriel, having been re-admitted into the Institute for sometime. After many years, his remains were later transfer to Nyeri, in the house of the Immaculate Sisters, the congregation that he had founded while in Kenya.

Although the ending of Bishop Perlo's narrative is not very appetizing, one thing should be clear: except for his queer personality, Bishop Perlo proved to have been a real foot soldier of the Institute, since he did not spare himself and others in ensuring that the Institute achieved its apostolic mandate even with the crudest means possible. In his position, many people would have lamented daily on arrival in Africa. Anyone can tell how difficult it is to establish any enterprise from zero. Yet Bishop Perlo with his amazing energy struggled to see a group of only four people create the foundations of what is the Consolata Missionary Institute. Through his ever-burning passion for missionary activities, the Institute's patrimony grew as more and more people came on board to assist the Missionary Institute that had caused ripples in Africa soon after its foundation. This is why we cannot lose sight of the fact that Bishop Perlo was the first and probably the best thing that happened to the Institute. His story is not different from Prophet Elijah whom after all the great things he had done ended up running away from a woman (Jezebel) (1 Kings 19:1-8). And yet God did not disqualify him after his acknowledgement of having failed. Instead, God took him to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings

2:11,12).

Similarly, we see the same thing in Peter the apostle. Even with all his love for Christ, he ended up denying him in the most crucial moment. Many of us would have easily denounced Peter as a person who could not be depended on. Yet Jesus did not take it to heart. He still installed him as the head of the Church at the sea of Tiberias (Jn. 21:1-25). We have not forgotten also about St. Paul. The damage that he had done in the Church before his conversion was so enormous that many of us would have easily associated him with the Devil himself. How Christ ended up choosing a man whose name caused fear and panic among the Christians is still a mystery to me. These examples tell us that God uses whoever he chooses and whenever he wants. They also tell us that no one is beyond salvation and that it is not our business to judge anyone. The much we should do is learn from each other, and let God do his will. The experience of Bishop Perlo is an important lesson for us: no matter how much good we do, we still remain human and should therefore guard ourselves from ourselves by entrusting ourselves more to God. That is the only way we can ensure that our achievements do not take over our heads and our failures do not take over our hearts.

Chapter Sixteen

FR. ALLAMANO THE FORMATOR

(a) Deformation for reformation

To form is to give shape to something. In truth, to form involves removal of certain things on a substrate so as to be left with the desired figure. It also involves putting or adding something on a substrate so as to get the intended figure. Formation therefore involves a negative aspect of removing something and a positive aspect of adding something in order people can get the intended figure. It may be said that formation is therefore deformation for reformation, or one may also say ‘destroying in order to build’. The best image one can think of here is the image of the potter. The potter does whatever he wishes with clay in his hands. He can form vases and destroy them in order to make better one or simply different ones. Formation is one of the essential aspects of the Institute that our Founder never joked with. This is why from time to time he loved telling his seminarians, “I am interested in your formation” (SL. 67). To remind them that their formation had a specific goal, he always said, “if you don’t prepare a good measure of virtue here (in the seminary), when you will be in the missions rather than saving souls you will run the risk of losing your faith” (SL. 90). The positive aspect of formation to him included growing in virtue.

To ensure that that goal was achieved, Fr. Allamano was personally involved in formation, even where there was a person in charge of a given group. This was not because the Founder wanted to interfere with people’s duties or because he did not trust them. It was because he as the Founder was the one who was giving the spirit of

the Institute, and he had to do it personally if his recipients were to be able to pass the same spirit to others. In any case, formation is a crucial aspect of any entity since it determines the future of the given entity, and therefore the Founder had to be sure the foundation of the Institute's future was guaranteed. Luckily for Fr. Allamano, he was made a formator immediately after his ordination, and practically throughout his life he was involved in some way in the formation of the clergy. We can therefore authoritatively say that if there is a task that took a great part of Fr. Allamano's time, energy yes, and life, it was formation. Due to his experience in such matters, our Founder, speaking to the young missionaries just before they left for the missions, he always reminded them "the degree of good you will accomplish in the missions depends on your detachment from everyone and everything" (SL 241). In other words, their capacity to remove obstacles that attached them to people and things would form them into authentic tools in the hands of God, for the benefit of the people and for the glory of God. Better put, their capacity to deform their desires would form them into genuine instruments of God's merciful love to the people.

(b) Formation and education

Having been also involved in academic work as a lecturer of Moral theology, Fr. Allamano knew the inseparable character of formation and education. He did not need to be told that educating a person is forming the person since education is one of the key tools of formation. Fr. Allamano's constant reference to intellectual work and capacity pointed to their necessity in genuine and effective formation. It was his understanding of the significance of intellectual capacity that made him to say

always that an ignorant priest does more harm than a wicked one. It was for the same reasons that he reminded the young missionaries the saying of St. Francis de Sales: Protestantism was (a result of) the ignorance of the clergy. That look of things differentiated our Founder from Bishop Perlo who would not have minded collecting people from the streets to make them missionaries immediately. Even today, the prominence of intellectual capacity in the formation journey should not be underestimated. If our Founder was to speak today to us, he would either tell us categorically that “a missionary without knowledge is an extinguished lamp” (SL. 143) or that “for a missionary, holiness is not enough, for there is also need of knowledge” (SL. 142). In other words, in as much as holiness is our main goal in the Institute, if a missionary is to be useful to the world, he must by all means have knowledge. To our Founder the term ‘knowledge’ involved the intellectual capacity of the person and the possibility to learn all that one was supposed to know to be a mature, stable and reliable person. Fr. Allamano was not making up these things. Speaking to the people of Israel, God once told them through the mouth of prophet Hosea, that since they had rejected knowledge, he was also rejecting them from his priesthood (Hos. 4:6). If God can reject a person from priesthood because he lacks knowledge, who would dare rake people in a missionary Institute to prepare them to be missionaries when signs are clear they have low understanding capacity – and especially in this century?

Fr. Allamano wanted knowledgeable missionaries, because their knowledge would help them to understand the world around them and the people they were serving. Only then would they be able to change the world into something better. The Founder did not need to be told that education developed his missionaries’ perspective of looking at life as gift to be donated to others, and in

the light of the gospel. This is why speaking of piety and knowledge he once said, “Piety can make a good hermit; but learning, together with piety, will make a good priest. When I refer to learning, I mean the attainment of all the knowledge necessary to become a good missionary.”

Today, we also know that education in formation helps us to build opinions and to have points of view of things in life. Certainly not all points of views are correct. That is why education in formation has to be directed at discovering the voice of him who speaks in silence: God. Even scientific knowledge should lead us discover the author of reality. The formative process today should ensure that education in seminaries and houses of formation should improve not only formees skills, but also develop their personalities and attitudes, since this is one of the key areas from which conflicts and misunderstanding come in religious life today. Today, Fr. Allamano would easily tell us that we should strive not only to instill skills to our formees through education, but also through it to put foundation of their faith and their moral habits. That is the only way we can affirm that education in formation transforms the person into a better being, giving him both happiness and prosperity in his quest to search God and to do his will. Even the attitudes with which formees study are essential to be evaluated. One who sees studies as a tool through which God points to his vocation studies honestly. Such a formee will avoid the temptation of copying or stealing exams, since he knows that after studying well and praying seriously, the fruits of an exam that is honestly done is the voice of God.

One who sees priesthood as a step to good life or as a step to avoid family responsibilities and pressures of life will do anything to attain it. To such a formee, priesthood is a “must get” goal. He will also view studies as a tool of achieving his intended goal, and in studying, he will use

any means, legitimate and illegitimate to get the required grade. Why? Because for him the outcome of his exams is not an indicator of the voice of God. This means that in formation the candidates must be made to see studies as an instrument through which God speaks, and not just as an instrument of empowerment. It is also important to be attentive not to over-emphasize the academic dimension. At the end, balance is what is needed. That is why Fr. Allamano also said, “Study without piety makes heretics. You should deepen your piety as you increase your knowledge. Piety helps with everything.”

(c) Formation and the sense of existence

The emphasis with which the Founder spoke about formation tells us that he had no doubt that formation was the next higher task after generation (giving birth). Bringing someone in the world is a huge task of parents. Without it, we would not be present. We cannot downplay or undermine such a noble task, especially given that we also acknowledge that human beings alone cannot bring anybody in the world if God does not play a role in it. The task of giving a person existence has by all means to do with cooperation with God, and that is never a mean task. We cannot also ignore that in families, that task of generation is also a fruit of love, and therefore a reflection of the love between the people involved. Given that God is love, bringing one in the world is a complex role of God through the parents. Since no one is born by bad luck, even those who are born in other situation other than the family set up, they are also willed by God for his own reason. However, the task that is even more enormous is the task of putting the sense of existence in the person. That task is almost like giving the person a second life. Given that existence without a sense is nonsense, it means that

life without meaning is useless. That is why bringing up a person is in actual sense another way of giving birth to him or her. The task of bringing up the person could also be called formation.

Formation is the process of giving a person the meaning of life. In other words, showing the person his origin, pointing to the reasons of being in the world, as he manoeuvres his way towards his destiny. Our parents begin that task by laying the foundation of openness to learn. Later, society helps us to discover more as we mature to be able to choose our vocations. Aware of the essentiality of formation in instilling the rationale of being, Fr. Allamano became adamant in ensuring that no one left Turin without proper formation. “If you don’t prepare yourselves here, what will you do in Africa?”, he would ask the young priests. In Swahili there is a saying that says, “kuzaa sio kazi, kulea mwana ndio kazi” which can be roughly be translated as “giving birth is not really a big deal; bringing up the child is the real test”. To Fr. Allamano, the usefulness and utility of his missionaries lay not in them just being missionaries, but in being well formed, enough to be able to bring effective positive change in the lives of the people, and in making Christ known, loved and served. The missionary had to discover first the meaning of his life as a gift of God to others, and second the meaning of his consecration as a tool of God for the sanctification of the world. He who failed in that test failed also the test of being a missionary. This brings us to the other aspect of formation according to Fr. Allamano.

(d) Formation as witnessing

When we talk of witnesses we refer to people who have seen or experienced a given thing, and not those who have just been told something about it. That is why we say the

apostles were witnesses of Christ, his life and his teaching. In fact, Jesus himself told them that they were his witnesses (Lk 24:48). Later, themselves would affirm the same to the world: of these things we are witnesses (Acts 5:32). The gospel of John tells us that John the Baptist was a witness to the light that had come into the world, and not the light itself (Jn. 1:8). Fr. Allamano, talking to his missionaries at the Mother House, made it clear that if they were not holy before going out of that house, to Africa, then they would have nothing to offer to the Africans. He was certainly right. A key element in the lives of the witnesses is the centrality of Christ in their lives. Only Christ's presence gives weak human beings the capacity to be transforming tools in the hands of God. The transformative power takes place due to the power of the Holy Spirit in the person. That power is what made John the Baptist jump for joy in the womb of Elizabeth, when the Virgin Mary visited her.

Fr. Allamano was convinced that formation was not meant to give people technical capacity only. It was not meant to create good professors, technicians and experts in various field, but to prepare witnesses who in turn would go not to offer information and intellectual content to the people of God, but to present Christ. To Fr. Allamano, formation was therefore a way of giving testimony. In truth, this is what formation (and education) should actually be even today! This applies not just to formation houses and seminaries, but also to Catholic schools. Lack of this aspect in our schools today is evident through the lack of discipline that is witnessed every now and then. One time the teaching profession was highly thought of, because teachers were witnesses. They were not meant to prepare professionals for the society, but people who had a sense of identity, sense of direction and sense of belonging. Such people were good people in the simplest

meaning of the term. They respected social norms, including respecting whoever was elder than them, and offered themselves for the community. The teacher themselves were such kind of people, and that is why they were able to instill in the young the same values they lived. In other words, the teachers themselves were witnesses. Today, with education taking more a function of empowerment, the aspect of witness has suffered a great loss. Of course, this does not mean we should blame teachers and educators. The problem is the competitiveness of the world of today and the commercialization of everything we do. Therefore, the issue is deeper than we think. The point here is that just as teachers should be an extension of the parents (and hence witnesses), formators in houses of formation should offer not just academic material, but life of Christ. This is why speaking about superiors, the Founder said “It can happen that the superiors are not well formed themselves. If so, how can they form others in the spirit of the Congregation?” (SL. 56). As if that was not enough, while speaking about sanctity, the Founder once said “If I expect perfection in others, it’s only right that I find it in myself. So that those who come after me can find it in me” (SL. 123). However, Fr. Allamano was aware that the personal defects of a superior or a formator does not disqualify him from telling the truth. In other words, the fact that a superior has personal defects does not prohibit him from correcting others. If things were so, no one would ever correct another since all human beings are limited, weak and sinful (Rom. 3:23-26; Isa. 53:3). That is why for example the fact that a father in a family is a smoker does not mean that he can’t tell his son that cigarettes are dangerous. It is on this understanding that Founder noted that “superiors are to be respected regardless of their personal qualities, simply because they are superiors, i.e. the representative of God” (SL. 62). This did not mean nulli-

fication of the demand of being witness, it only laid bare the fact that the superiors and formators are as human as the formees and the members of the Institute. They too are in a journey to follow the Lord on the road to Calvary where he, the only genuine witness of God's love, cleanses all those who make an effort to be like him by taking their crosses and following him. They too are in their lives fighting to say like St. Paul "follow my example as I follow the example of Christ" (2 Cor. 11:1).

(e) Formation as guidance of Freedom

It is not difficult these days to hear people complain that a candidate for religious life who was a university graduate has been dismissed. Those who give such kinds of complains see the formator as an insensitive creature. "How can he send away a university graduate?" they ask. Surprisingly, those who make such comments are not lay people in the streets, but religious people who should know better. If the issue of vocation was to be measured by the degrees one has, then those who have PhDs would be the most suitable persons to be religious. It is also common to hear people say "we can't just let him go, he has been with us for several years". In other words, for them, what matters is the number of years a person has spent in the formation house that determines if he can continue or not. Today, there is a need to re-look the formative process as a guidance of the gift of freedom in the person and as correction. This would automatically raise issues of the candidates' capacity to respond to correction, before amplifying their academic qualification, and the number of years they have been in the houses of formation.

Such a move is founded on the significance of the second most important aspect in man after life itself: freedom. Basically, formation is meant to enlighten the

person about the great gift in himself: freedom, and help him direct it in the appropriate direction. In other words, formation is supposed to correct a person in as much as it is supposed to empower him. The person is not corrected because he is bad, but because of the presence of the possibility of being swayed from what is appropriate. Fr. Alalamano speaking to seminarians about formation of temperaments said, “It is not our fault that we participate in a malignant and corrupted nature through the original sin”. In other words, we did not choose to be part of a fallen nature caused by Adam and Eve. However, we can choose to ‘control our temperaments in order to prevent them from dominating us’ (SL. 121). The Founder always presented formation as a task of ‘letting oneself be guided’. He was convinced that formation was the work of guiding young people to learn to discern their hearts correctly and to decide for themselves. Or better, the task of helping them to maneuver through many fires in their hearts, and choosing correctly the one to identify themselves with, and to keep alive for the rest of their lives. That is why he insisted “our temperaments are not to be destroyed but corrected through elimination of the evil inherited from the original sin, from relatives, from distorted education, or from our own carelessness and malice” (SL. 122).

Today it is important to open wide our eyes on the fact that formation is actually formation to freedom, which is in effect a wounded freedom. The effects of that wounded nature become evident when candidates join religious life for other reasons than sanctification of themselves and of others. Today, economic reasons continue motivating many young people into religious life; In other words, owing to survival instincts, threats of the harsh situation of life and the desire for a brighter future, many re-direct their lives into religious houses. If formation is taken as a formation of freedom of the person, it becomes

imperative to guide individuals who have been robbed of the freedom to choose other vocations by internal and external pressures, to understand that God calls people in strange ways, and therefore their presence in the houses of formation is not really a mistake. This is why the Founder said “if a person enters the Institute for other intentions, he is supposed to leave, if it is not possible to straighten out his intention” (SL. 45). In other words, Fr. Allamano knew that with the wounded nature, it was not impossible to enter the formation house with other intentions.

Aware of the corrective aspect of formation, he encouraged seminarians to be open to be molded into tools of evangelization and not just to conform with the demands of the formative system. Fr. Allamano’s sentiments reveal essential element of forming one’s freedom: tolerance. Tolerance is the synthesis of firmness and gentleness. It is an indispensable quality that borders love and forgiveness. Fr. Allamano’s sentiments tell us that action on a person should be taken only when it is evident that he is unable to re-direct his freedom to the good. Until then, all have a duty to continue instructing and correcting the person no matter how long it takes. To do that, we have to overcome the biggest challenge that hinders tolerance: self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is defined by the Oxford dictionary as the excessive consciousness and insistence of one’s rectitude. It is the behaviour of thinking that one’s ideas and behaviour are morally better than those of other people. In lay man’s language it is the behaviour of a person of thinking that he or she is holy than others. Of course, it is an annoying tendency. One which involves narrow-minded moralistic conduct which also includes intolerance of opinions and behaviours of others. Given that formation is the direction of people’s freedom, a balanced capacity to give others the space to be themselves and to grow is necessary. That balanced

capacity is what tolerance is all about. Fr. Allamano was a very tolerant person. That is why many people always wondered aloud, “does this man ever get annoyed?”

(f) Formation and Tradition

There is a Swahili saying that says “mwacha mila ni mtumwa” which can be roughly translated as “he who chucks his tradition is a slave”. The saying teaches that either one is rooted in something or sways aimlessly to whatever comes. Fr. Allamano knew that it was a dangerous thing to separate formation and tradition. Even today, tradition represents a critical base of culture. And as such, traditions reinforce values such as freedom, faith, integrity, personal responsibility and industriousness, etc. Talking about the necessity of formation, the Founder told seminarians to avoid little abuses of the spirit, because omissions and commissions would end up changing the spirit of the Institute. He was not wrong. As he noted, we always start well, then

“Little by little you let customs that are not according to the spirit of the Founder seep in. You begin to lengthen the recreation time, change the kinds of food and neglect the punctuality required by the timetable. Soon the community is changed” (SL. 57).

Fr. Allamano, aware that tradition offers a forum to showcase role models and celebrate things that matter, wanted the young missionaries to know that it was not a positive thing to keep changing things in the name of modernity. If anything, such a way of doing things showed lack of stability. Traditions remind us that we are part of a history that defines our past, shapes our today and who we are likely to become in future. That is why the Founder objected to the same claim that we make even today: times have changed. Speaking to the young missionaries, the

Founder said, “you say that times have changed. No! It is the spirit that has changed” (SL. 57). Fr. Allamano knew that ignoring traditions creates the danger of destroying people’s identity, and that is why formation could not be done on the whims of what people thought at a given time. Even today, Fr. Allamano continues to point out how ‘little’ omissions can end up derailing the Institute from its original spirit (or tradition). He was always against such tricks because he knew the importance of tradition.

When Bishop Perlo began doing things hurriedly, overlooking even formation of missionaries in the name of churning out more missionaries in a shorter time, Fr. Allamano told him “this is not my spirit”. Another time, the Founder also said, “I want our Society to go slowly in order to advance we” (SL. 82). In addition, aware that Bishop Perlo was doing all that to have people for more missions, he said to him “Be few! We don’t have a mania for having much land (much mission territory) and we don’t have the hands (personnel) to work it. Better a few missions but well looked after...” (*D. Agasso, pg. 175*). In other words, Fr. Allamano’s spirit was never one of thirsty acquisition of territories (missions) just to have the name of the Institute in many countries when in truth those missions had no impact on people’s lives. Fr. Allamano’s tradition was written in ‘the good must be done well and without noise’. That is, his aim was to develop a tradition that few things be done in an exemplary manner, not many done in a reckless manner. Probably even today if the Founder was to speak to us he would ask the same question: why the hurry to be everywhere when many of the missions where you have been are still crawling like a toddler trying to stand up and walk? The Founder would certainly wonder aloud: why should you have the excitement of new openings when the places you have been working for ‘centuries’ have not felt your impact? With

who are you competing, that you have to fill the globe with empty presences? If Fr. Allamano was to speak to us today, we would probably have no answers to the many questions he would shoot at us.

In as much as the Founder pointed to the importance of tradition, it would be untrue to say that he wanted the Institute to remain the same forever. In other words, the emphasis about tradition did not mean denouncing dynamism. The Catholic Church itself is over two thousand years old, and in as much as it has retained a well-guarded tradition, it has also evolved to be what it is today: a mature Church that does not look at things the way they were seen a thousand years ago. Even Jesus compared a scribe who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom of God with a wise householder who knows to bring out the old and the new (Mt. 13:52).

In the midst of his insistence about remaining true to the spirit (or the tradition) of the Institute, Fr. Allamano demonstrated a great openness to change. This is to say that his firmness about tradition did not make him rigid or inflexible. In the story of Fr. Allamano that we have read so far, it is evident that the Founder's openness to change can be seen in his obedience to his superiors. In as much as he had his own good ideas, appropriate opinions, and clear intentions, Fr. Allamano never got stuck in them stubbornly. Even when he knew he was sure and on the right, if his superior took the opposite decision, Fr. Allamano respectfully shelved his good idea and fully supported his superior's idea. He was always convinced that the leaders in the Church had a wider view of things. Second, in addition to obeying leaders in the Church, Fr. Allamano was ready to identify the will of God in reality and to do it willingly. That is how he ended up seeing the leaders of the Church as tools of God through which he did whatever he wanted. Lastly, Fr. Allamano's

openness was clear in the organization of the Institute. Religious Institutes are given direction through general chapters and elections. Fr. Allamano convoked a general Chapter in 1922, giving the chapter members a chance to change the face of the Institute. Aware that sometimes such meetings are used only to stamp authority and retain the status quo (hence to avoid dynamism), Fr. Allamano encouraged turning to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, if such meetings were to be fruitful. He regretted the fact that Religious Institutes were in decline in many aspects due to such retrogressive moves of trying to be what they had always been. Speaking to his missionaries about that issue he said,

How does this happen? Oh, that chapter! Those elections!... You pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament, you invoke the light of the Holy Spirit, but then instead of following the divine light of the Holy Spirit, you follow the light of your own selfishness, individual tastes, and party spirit. ... and what comes out are such superiors! (SL. 57)

In other words, Fr. Allamano expected that whenever there are elections that are supposed to reveal the direction that God wants the Institute to take (regardless of our wishes) we are supposed to be open to the spirit of God, and without defending traditions that are out of date, vote as the spirit whispers into our ears. This is to say, Fr. Allamano knew that as much as tradition was key in ensuring stability and continuity of the Institute, openness to the power of the Holy Spirit who gives new life and progressivity in all that he does was needed. Today as we reflect on these issues, we discover that even the charism has to be lived dynamically. Even as we ask ourselves “what does the charism expects us to do here”, we have to learn to apply it in our own context. That way we retain it and at the same time live it differently.

Chapter Seventeen

FR. ALLAMANO AND THE INSTITUTE

Fr. Joseph Allamano lived and died as a diocesan priest of Turin. He was always proud to be so. Even as he founded the missionary Institute, he felt obliged to remain true to his identity as a diocesan priest. Interestingly, today we can affirm that since a tree is known by its fruits (Lk. 6:43-45), the characteristics of the Consolata Missionary Institute depict the deep-seated qualities that Fr. Allamano held in silence. Instead of speaking of the characteristics of the Consolata Missionary Institute, I believe it is more appropriate to speak of the six traits of Fr. Allamano, which gave birth to the shape the Institute ended up taking, and which today we call the characteristics of the Institute. The reason for this perspective is that the characteristics of the Consolata Missionary Institute are fruits of Fr. Allamano's life, and a reflection of himself since they are his concretized character projected externally as an institution that today we call IMC.

(a) Fr. Allamano's love of Mary

The Founder's love of Mary was unmatched. True, the devotion to Our Lady is deeply embedded in the Church for centuries, but different people have taken it to different levels. To Fr. Allamano, Mary was not just the universal mother of the Church. On the contrary, she was our mother, refuge and model. In fact, Fr. Allamano did not consider himself the de facto founder of the Institute. He always said that he was just an instrument of Our Lady of

Consolata in disseminating her consolation to the world. That is why he would never say much without mentioning her name. Speaking to his seminarians at the Mother House, the Founder once noted that if he failed to speak to them about Mary and the devotion due to her, he would be failing in his duty' (C.f. SL. 566). In other words, to him it was an obligation to speak about Mary and to sing her praise. The fact that Fr. Allamano named the Institute after her most evident trait (consolation), says how much he considered her to be everything in his ministry. Again, speaking to his seminarians, one time the Founder said, "devotion to the Virgin Mary is necessary for us if we want to be saved" (SL. 567). Today, Fr. Allamano would not only tell us the same, but also add that the devotion to Our Lady is not just advisable but in fact essential for salvation. Speaking to his missionaries before they left for Africa, Fr. Allamano reminded them, "all the souls you will save will be saved through her" (SL. 567). This tells us that Fr. Allamano knew Our Lady of Consolation was not only crucial for personal spiritual growth but also for one's success in the apostolate.

Without a doubt, Fr. Allamano must have been touched by Mary's self-offering character that saw her allow God to 'disrupt' her plans by bringing in a pregnancy she had not premeditated upon. Probably the Founder was touched by Mary's openness to the will of God that led her to accept willingly the consequences of what would have resulted from her 'yes' to the angel. Certainly Fr. Allamano must have been touched by Mary's sense of service that saw her walk kilometers under the scorching sun to the mountainous area where Elizabeth and Zachariah lived to assist her during her pregnancy – making her the first missionary – that is, the first carrier of Christ to others. Without a doubt the Founder was touched by Mary's humility that saw her keep all things in her heart. Whatever

touched him we may never know, but we know that the Founder saw everything he did and achieved as the work of Our Lady. That is why he kept saying:

There is no doubt that everything that has been done is the work of Our Lady of Consolation. She has performed miracles every day for this society. She has made stones shout. She has made money flow to us in abundance. In sorrowful moments she has always intervened in extraordinary ways. I have seen a lot, a lot....and if you are attentive you will see and understand that the good spirit found in the House and the desire you have to be holy – everything, everything is a grace of Our Lady of Consolation (SL. 573).

This conviction of Fr. Allamano was also his expectation of all who would become his sons and daughters. In other words, to Fr. Allamano, his missionaries must also be able to say “we are the servants of the Lord, let his will be done to us”. This is to say, Fr. Allamano’s dream is to see his missionaries being open to the will of God, and being ready to do it regardless of the challenges they may face.

(b) Love of the Eucharist

Naturally, we love that which we understand. To love the Eucharist one has to understand ‘him’ well. Simply put, the Eucharist is Christ, God and man, in a sacramental form. As an activity, the Eucharist is the same sacrifice that Christ offered on the cross, offered on the altar in a sacramental manner. Fr. Allamano’s deep love for the Eucharist was evident in his life and teaching. He, having been brought up in the most Christian way possible, incarnated the love of the Eucharist at a tender age. That is seen through his emphasis on receiving the Holy Communion and going for confession regularly to remain

pure and especially before receiving the Holy Communion. The Founder saw in the Eucharist Christ the son of God who due to his immense love for humanity offered himself as a tool of reconciliation between the father and the fallen human race. Fr. Allamano spent many hours in front of the Blessed Sacrament, because he saw Jesus the son of God, who had chosen to be a “victim, food, and friend” to us. The three have love as their denominator. It was out of his everlasting love that Christ accepted to be the lamb which bore the sin and wickedness of humanity. Aware that it was not easy to understand the depth of such a love, Fr. Allamano encourages us to “meditate more intensely on that mystery love” (*This I want you to be*, Pg. 201). Fr. Allamano sentiments remind us that when we talk about the Eucharist, we do not just speak of a thing but a person. That is why he presents Christ as a victim (the one who saves the life of another by losing his life), food (he who enters us to ensure our continual healthy being) and a friend (a defense in time of adversity and a treasure) [Sirach 6:14].

Fr. Allamano’s observation on how to participate and celebrate the Eucharist depicted his loving devotion to the Eucharist. To his seminarians the Founder encouraged proper and active participation in the Mass. He always said that receiving the Holy Communion, visiting the Blessed Sacrament and adoration were ways of keeping faith alive. Fr. Allamano did not beat about the bush about how and who benefitted from participation in the Mass. To him, it is not enough to be in the chapel. One has to prepare his heart even before arriving in the chapel, since the participation in the Eucharistic celebration is just part of a long process of encountering the Lord. He who just walked into the chapel risked getting out of it as he entered – not touched. Even today, Fr. Allamano would tell us, “to benefit fully from the Mass you should prepare

yourself by doing an examination of the conscience and going for confession if there is an issue to be addressed. At Mass, full and active participation means being aware of what is happening and doing consciously what we are supposed to do at different moments of the Mass, each according to his or her state in the Church. Fr. Allamano held that when we participate in the Mass fully, we come to realize that the Mass is the most beautiful moment of our life. Today, seeing the importance that Fr. Allamano gave to the Eucharist, we understand why love of the Eucharist must be a characteristic of the Institute: precisely because it was a trait of the Founder. As his sons and daughters, the Founder reminds us that the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is better than the physical presence that the Jews enjoyed. Unlike them, we do not have to go through the trouble of climbing a tree that Zacchaeus underwent to see Jesus. Why? Because we have him every day and night in the Tabernacle, as a “father, master and a friend” (SL. 547).

(c) Love of the Church: “Eccleasiality”

Fr. Allamano had a very wide picture of his existence in the world. He did not regard himself to be just an individual living next to, or among other individuals. On the contrary, he saw himself as a knot in a wide network of relationships formed in heaven but lived on earth. As such, when he said that the Institute must be papalino, he was not joking, and neither was he trying to impress the Vatican. He could not see the Institute in a different picture than that in which he saw himself. To Fr. Allamano, the world is made of complex web of intertwined relations, all of which find their centre in the creator. This explains why the Founder would never give even the simplest talk without citing the Church Fathers or the saints. To him

all the people of God were one – the living, the dead and those in heaven - only that different people appeared on the planet at different times. What was important was that even those who had gone before left a trail for their brothers and sisters as they moved in the next world.

Fr. Allamano's understanding of the Church as a communion of Christ's disciples influenced his missionary appetite. While the Italian Church fought for self-preservation, Fr. Allamano's heart was bleeding for the many non-Christians who were living in other continents. For him it was just not right for the European Church to be in a celebration mood due to the abundance of ministers, when the other continents were sinking into the sea of ignorance of Christ. It was not acceptable that a part of the human family was dying in darkness when someone was holding the light. Fr. Allamano could not imagine people dying without baptism, people living without the Eucharist, or people living without the sacrament of reconciliation when in many parishes in Turin, priests strolled around "smoking their pipes".

From the look of things, Fr. Allamano's push for unity as testimony throughout his life retained something of that demanding and heroic character that is evident in the New Testament concept of discipleship. A disciple according to Fr. Allamano had to be like the master. As Christ the Master had manifested that his presence was to do the will of his Father, the disciple had by all means to be ready to do the will of Christ. In other words, one could not claim to be a disciple without the capacity and willingness to obey the master. Given that Christ had left his authority and power in the hands of Church leaders, Fr. Allamano could not see how one could claim to be a disciple of Christ and yet disobey the people that Christ had delegated to continue his mission. This is to tell us that a true disciple of Christ must have respect for the Church

leaders. The Founder himself as we saw in the section of respect to authority, had no equal in this aspect. He was convinced that God acts and speaks through the leaders that he puts in the Church. As an arm of the Church, the Consolata Missionary Institute, had by all means to acquire that trait of the Founder.

Today seeing how Fr. Allamano looked at himself in the Church, we can't but see ourselves in the same light. We must always remember that we are part of the Church and one of its arms of evangelization. As such, we can't afford to enter into antagonism with the leaders of the Church where we work. With times changing and people taking sides on the pronouncements of the Church leaders, we, the sons and daughters of Fr. Allamano must side with the people whom God anointed, and through whom he points the less traveled way (the narrow way), yet the only path that leads to his will. We must be ecclesial. That is the only way we can become authentic tools of God in the community of believers. We must be knots in that vast network or web of divine existence since faith must pass through a network of interpersonal relations for it to be a transforming force for the people of God.

(d) Love of work (Laboriosity)

Looking at the life of Fr. Allamano, we don't need to struggle to see why the love of work ended up becoming a characteristic of the Institute: Fr. Allamano was an industrious man. He understood that man cannot live without work since he himself is a product of God's tireless work. This explains why he saw work as a "duty and an honour" (SL. 156). Fr. Allamano was a silent industrious man. At some point in his life, he had so many responsibilities in the diocese that one wondered how he managed to balance himself to do all of them. Within a

short duration after his ordination, the Founder became a formator, a spiritual director, the Rector of the Consolata Shrine, the Rector of St. Ignatius shrine and the Pastoral Centre all the three together, and yet also a lecturer of Moral theology. As time went by he also became a canon in the Turin Cathedral. At the apex of them all he became the founder of the Consolata Missionary Institute, a responsibility that involved being a formator for life. It was not true that Fr. Allamano just accumulated duties for the sake of pleasing his bishop. On the contrary, the fact that consecutive bishops gave him those responsibilities means that they saw him not only capable, but also willing and available to be of service to the diocese.

Aware that “work is a virtue and hence a means of sanctification (SL. 156), he gave himself fully to each and every duty he was given. Although many people even today see work as a punishment, Fr. Allamano saw work as privilege since it had been sanctified by the Holy Family and since God had created man to work in the first place (Gen. 2:15). To him work was reparation of the sins. Speaking to his seminarians, Fr. Allamano said often that “even the Virgin Mary did not spend her life kneeling in prayer – she worked a great deal to take care of the Holy Family”. Speaking to young priests who were expressing their desire to join the Institute, Fr. Allamano put things straight: if work is a duty for all people, then missionaries in particular must work – even manual work. The founder did not want people who saw religious life as an escape from the struggles of life, or as a route to adventure. He maintained that work is a school: in the process of working we learn a lot, even if it is only cooperation with others. The Founder never forgot to remind his seminarians that work was a means of implementing their talents, so that they do not become dormant.

Presenting work as an essential quality and con-

dition of becoming a missionary, Fr. Allamano one time noted that “whoever was not ready to do menial jobs was not meant to be a missionary. Work, like readiness to obey and capacity to study, was one of the aspects without which according to the firm resolve of Fr. Allamano, one could not become a Consolata Missionary. In fact, the Founder noted that how one did such jobs was a sign of whether or not he was called to a particular life or not. Today, Fr. Allamano would not even change the statement “performing menial jobs carelessly is a sign that one is not called to be a missionary.” True missionaries according to Fr. Allamano do not waste time. They work with a sincere desire to learn, and in the process of working they keep order. They work with energy, diligence and help one another in duties. When some seminarians tried to be choosy in duties, Fr. Allamano rebuked the attitude saying “some people say I am not meant for this. Non sense! You are meant for everything” (SL. 159).

Today, we can tell that Fr. Allamano proposed St. Paul as one of the models of the Institute due to the fact that he was a courageous and hardworking man who did not want to be a burden to the Christians, but worked with his own hands to earn a honest living (1 Cor. 4:12). This explains why Fr. Allamano remained adamant to the young priests that a missionary who does not want to work, is not only not a true missionary, but also has something lacking in his vocation (SL. 158). In other words, Fr. Allamano saw work as connected to one’s purpose on earth and his destiny. That explains why even when he spoke about holidays, he considered vacations as change of duty. Speaking to his seminarians the Founder once said, “Our rest is to change occupation... We will have our holidays in heaven: first class holidays!” In a world in which the purpose of work has been manipulated to acquiring exaggerated material benefit, it is important to

re-look again that quality of Fr. Allamano which became also a characteristic of the Institute.

Today, people work for financial freedom, since the more financially stable one becomes, the more comfortable he becomes in his or her life. As a result, work is seen as tool of classification of people in the society. Through it we talk of the poor and the rich, or the “haves and the have nots”. The fruit of that way of seeing things is cut-throat competition which forces many to use any means to get work, or to turn any activity into money-making project. In addition, the over-valuation of work has undone human dignity. Today, people are valued for what they do, what they are capable of doing, and who they are in terms of financial muscle. The result is neglecting of people who are unemployed, those who cannot work due to old age, sicknesses, disabilities, retirement, etc. As sons and daughters of Fr. Allamano, in our evangelization effort, it is our duty to sensitize people of the true value of work. i.e. we have to try to rid the misleading notions that have seen the human dignity turned into commodities of sale through exploitative labour in the world. We too must reach a point in which we do not distinguish ‘pastoral work’ from ‘ordinary work’. In other words, for us missionaries, every work must be pastoral, meaning an effort to reflect our supreme pastor, Jesus Christ, and to express him in every activity we undertake. This is the only way people can see difference between us and them, even when we do the same duties as theirs. Certainly, our aim should not be that “people see”, but that in our effort to do what should be done because it is the right thing, others may acquire an example to follow. May the silent industrious man enable us replicate him in the society today.

(e) Family spirit

Fr. Allamano was very concerned about the kind of Institute he was beginning. Having witnessed religious Institutes whose members lived as if in a college, Fr. Allamano wished to have a congregation whose difference from a family would be almost nil. He saw his effort to start a religious and missionary Institute as a continuation of the mission of the triune God through the Church. As such, just as the one God is a complex family of three persons, and each of them has a specific role in the history of salvation, the Church had been born to propagate that family spirit introduced to it by the second person of the Trinity who is also the son of God. If the Church is a family of God's people, the arms through which the Church's mission is accomplished have to share the same spirit. Seeing his Institute as a tool through which the Church continues her work of evangelization, Fr. Allamano encouraged his missionaries to create an atmosphere which favoured her mission and the wellbeing of its members.

To Fr. Allamano, the Consolata Missionary Institute is a family and not just a social Institution. That is why he encouraged family spirit among the members. To the Founder, nothing demonstrated the family spirit more than trust, order, involvement and love which involves helping one another to achieve holiness. He made it his chorus to say that mutual assistance was paramount if the members of any community of the Congregation had to live a happy life and be effective in the ministry.

Speaking to his seminarians, Fr. Allamano always said "The Society is not a boarding school; it is not even a seminary. It is a family. You are brothers. You must live together and prepare yourselves together in order to be able to work together the rest of your lives" (SL. 340). It was his way of saying that concern for one another was

the foundation of a happy community. To the Founder, it was regrettable that in many religious Institutes, people entered “without knowing one another, lived for years without loving one another and buried each other after death without shedding tears for one another” (SL. 338). His emphasis on the family spirit was therefore aimed at helping the members to see that their presence in the Institute was not something to be undermined. Even today, Fr. Allamano would still tell us that our common presence in the Institute is not similar to a crowd of people in a bus stage, where no one cares where his neighbor is going, where he will alight or whether he will make it to his destination or not. That is why speaking about family spirit, the Founder first prioritized the commandment of love. It is not rocket science even for us to understand what the Founder meant when he spoke of the family spirit: self-giving for others. Today, all of us can attest that the success of our apostolate many times depends on the atmosphere in our communities. The effectiveness of any missionary also depends of the type of the community he lives in. This is why one time Christ said “they will know that you are my disciples by the way you love one another” (Jn. 13:35). As in Fr. Allamano’s time, today the health of a community is measured by how much the members of the community trust and confide in each other, how much they are ready and able to tolerate and forgive each other, how much they are able to involve each other and collaborate in work and community events and how much they actually pray for each other. The health of the community depends on the social health of the members. If Fr. Allamano was to speak to us today, he would warn us against divisive attitudes and language, against gossips and back-biting, against jealousy and competition that fuel hatred and bitterness among members of a given community. Like Christ, the Founder would categorically say that our

unity and love for each other is not only a measure of our witness, but also a means to amicable co-existence. We don't need to be geniuses to understand this! Today, any member of religious life knows that many problems in the world would disappear if we talked to each other instead of talking about each other. The Founder himself demonstrated the family spirit through his effort to live harmoniously with everyone, including those who opposed him.

(f) Love of liturgy

Fr. Allamano's understanding of liturgy was quite unique. If we look in the spiritual life of our Founder, when he speaks about liturgy, he does not give lectures. Instead, he begins by showing that the Holy Trinity is the foundation of our faith, and goes on to speak about different seasons of the liturgical calendar and some key feasts in the Church. From this look of things, it seems that Fr. Allamano understood liturgy not particularly as rituals but as an encounter between God and his people; an encounter which is celebrated according to different moments of the salvation history as concretized in the liturgical calendar. Rather than having an intellectual perspective of liturgy, Fr. Allamano preferred the tangible view of liturgy, in which the participation of the people in meeting their God carried the day. Speaking about the liturgical year for example, the Founder noted that "as children of God and members of Church, we have a duty to appreciate the Church's understanding of the year's feasts but also to take an active part in them" (*This I want you to be*, Pg. 97). The Founder always insisted on proper participation in the liturgical celebrations. He wanted his seminarians to understand that the gestures and words in the liturgy are not empty rhetoric. On the contrary, they carry a meaning and energy that becomes present and operative

each time the given liturgical action is done. Fr. Allamano emphasized all the time that people benefit from that energy of the Holy Spirit if they are well disposed for the liturgical celebration. This explains why he kept reminding the seminarians to concentrate in the celebration at hand, to avoid distractions during the Mass and other liturgical celebrations, and to open their hearts to the Spirit of God who transforms all who are well disposed towards him.

At advent, he called on his audience to prepare for the coming of Jesus in their hearts. In Christmas he asked his audience to emulate the humility of Jesus who left his glory in heaven to be born as a little child. In lent the Founder reminded his listeners to take the 40 days as a moment of grace to work for their reconciliation with God and with other people. During Easter, he encouraged people to resurrect with Christ into new attitudes and behaviours. As such it is easy to see that Fr. Allamano had a very deep sense of the sacred. To him God's people were supposed to be set aside from the common way of doing things. It was another way of affirming the words of Jesus: you are in the world but you are not of the world (Jn. 17:16). In other words, as the term sacred illustrates, the separation of what is holy from what is worldly, anyone who was associated with the sacred had to be chosen, set aside or better consecrated to God. This view of things is seen from the fact that Fr. Allamano's outlook of liturgy involved celebrations. As if to confirm these sentiments, immediately after his analysis (*in the spiritual life*) of how the liturgical seasons are supposed to be lived, the Founder enumerates key liturgical feasts in the liturgical calendar. These include the epiphany, the ascension, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the feast of all saints and that of all the souls. The aim of dwelling much in the festive character of liturgy was to show its separation from the ordinary. This is not difficult to see, because

naturally, a celebration denotes an activity that is a break from the ordinary, and therefore like the term sacred, the word celebration connotes the idea of consecration.

Another aspect of liturgy that can be easily pointed out about Fr. Allamano's view of liturgy is its social aspect. Liturgy evokes a social atmosphere. Every time Fr. Allamano spoke about the liturgy, he spoke in terms of "we", "let us", "our Lord", etc. In other words he always spoke in plural and inclusive language. Fr. Allamano understood the liturgy as an activity of the people of God, an activity that involved the covenant between people and God; an activity in which God was praised and the human family was sanctified. He saw the liturgy as an action of the Church. Having seen how Fr. Allamano valued "ecclesiality", that is "being the Church or part and parcel of the Church", it is easy to see how important he saw the liturgy as an activity of the chosen people. Today, as we reflect on this trait of Fr. Allamano that became also a characteristic of the Institute, we have to evaluate how much we love the liturgy, how well we celebrate the liturgy, and even more important, how much we believe that the liturgy is the action through which Christ acts in our time. This is essential. The way we celebrate the liturgy shows clearly if or not we truly believe that Christ works through the sacraments. A hurried celebration is a sign of lack of appreciation of what liturgy is. Such a celebration depicts that we either have other important things to do or that the liturgy is a necessary burden which we do just because we have no option. Worse still, when sermons are turned into tools of pushing certain agenda, fighting one another in front of the Christians, settling scores or painting one another in negative light, liturgy loses its value. This is why we need Fr. Allamano's understanding of liturgy if we have to benefit from the celebrations we perform each day. Otherwise, we risk celebrating many

beautifully animated ceremonies that are just empty human drama, that is, ceremonies that neither touch us nor touch anyone – but pure self-deception. May our Founder, he who in silence and prayer learned to meditate the marvels of God in the liturgy help us to emulate him in our time.

Chapter Eighteen

FR. ALLAMANO AND MISSION

The world has changed a lot from the time of Fr. Allamano to today. This means also that the way mission is seen has also had a tremendous change. Our charism however demands that we remain as a congregation of mission ad gentes. From the onset, Fr. Allamano did not fumble around regarding the type of mission his missionaries would perform. He knew what he wanted for his missionaries. Certainly, certain things became clear to him with time. However in general, he had a vivid picture of the kind of mission he expected his missionaries to do: one among the non-Christians. His dream from the beginning was to found missionaries who would dedicate themselves for the people who had never met Christ. Later, that kind of missions came to be called mission “ad gentes”. Mission ad gentes entails quite a lot. It touches all those apostolic and evangelical activities which inspire the non Christian to convert, but also to be deeply convinced of the gospel. Fr. Allamano’s idea of mission was exactly founded on Christ’s own mission. Like Christ, missionaries were supposed to go house to house in the villages, meeting people, consoling people, healing people and encouraging people who may have been discouraged. Mission ad gentes touched those people who were more vulnerable in the society; it uplifted their lives, defended their rights and deeply changed their spiritual trajectory forever.

Our Founder’s love for mission ad gentes was evident in the way he followed up the issues of missions where his missionaries were working. He demanded to

know everything in detail, since that was the only way to have a “solid picture” of what his missionaries were going through, what they needed and how he needed to help them. Through letters and diaries, Fr. Allamano followed bit by bit the experiences of his missionaries, developing a “concrete experience” of the life his missionaries were living in the mission while still in his office at the Consolata Shrine. Even when he spoke to the seminarians, he made it clear that whatever they were undergoing as formation was meant to set them up for future missionary tasks. The evident change that has taken place from Fr. Allamano’s time to ours has also changed mission in undeniable ways. While one time mission was “planting” the Church among non Christians, today, mission is less about the Church and more about the kingdom of God. The Church “is not the kingdom of God on earth” (*H. Fries, Fundamental Theology*, pg. 438). It is only a sign and tool of that kingdom. While one time the perspective of conquering the non Christians and converting them was acceptable, today such a view of things would be frowned upon. At the time, the Church was seen as the only pillar of truth, and whoever was not in her was considered heretic at best, and demonic at worst. The Church at that time felt called to conquer, dominate and even replace other religions. Today, dialogue is the way to go even in missionary activity. This change has been amplified by today’s emphasis on communication and respect for people’s freedom of conscience. It is founded on the realization that God has been in dialogue with all people of the earth from the beginning. The change of approach even in the Church is a result of the “discovery” that other religions and cultural traditions contain seeds of the Word (AG 11) or “rays of truth”. In other words, they are not entirely evil or totally wrong. This view of things encouraged respect and dialogue.

In addition, while one time the Church was seen as the source of mission, today the prominence of the Holy Trinity is highly underlined. This change is a product of Vatican II, where mission is seen as the movement from God to the people. As such, the Church becomes just a tool for that mission. As many people would put it, “there is a Church because there is a mission and not the vice versa. In other words, it is not the Church of Christ that has a mission. On the contrary, it is the mission of Christ that has a Church. This view of things has a lot of implications. At its best, it changes the purpose of the mission from the establishment of the Church to the propagation of the divine plan of salvation. This is to say that the purpose of missionary activity is no longer and should no longer be just the establishment of the Church, but the effort of seeing the realization of God’s salvific plan, which is universal, hence embracing the whole human race and the entire creation. If Fr. Allamano was to return today, one of the changes that would make him happy is the reverse trend that missionary apostolate has taken. While one time missionaries came from Europe and North America, today missionaries from Africa, Asia, and Latin America work in Europe and America. Of course that has been necessitated by the decline of vocations in Europe and the explosion of the same in Africa, Asia and Latin America – which is not an accident or mistake of the century, but the will of God. Fr. Allamano would be impressed by the maturity we as his missionaries have attained so far. In addition, with the frenzied flow of immigrants among the continents, mission has received a new face. In Fr. Allamano’s time Africa was predominantly the land of Africans, today Africa is full of Europeans, Americans, Chinese and Arabs. This change of context certainly demands a new way of doing mission, in addition to understanding it.

Even with the changes that have taken place over the years, Fr. Allamano's understanding of mission seems to have outlived his time. For example, today we affirm that our call to mission is actually a call to share God's mission and therefore to collaborate first with him and then with others who are similarly called by the same God. Our affirmation underlines the fact that mission is greater than any individual or congregation. This is what Fr. Allamano meant when speaking to his seminarians, he said, "No one is necessary in the Church, but all well formed priests are useful" (S.L. 82). In other words, Fr. Allamano discouraged the tendency of missionaries working alone as if they were the only ones who could save the world. The many citations of other Congregations by the Founder showed that he believed that other Religious Institutes had as much good to offer in the Church as his own. He also believed in the collaboration of Religious Institutes as was the case when the Cottolengo Sisters who joined his missionaries at the beginning. This tells us that even as Fr. Allamano was founding his Congregation, he never had the illusion that his was better than others, or that he was a better Founder than the rest.

When the Consolata Missionaries arrived in Tuthu, Fr. Allamano insisted that they had to cooperate with the Africans, beginning with the workers who were doing menial jobs in the missions, to the catechists who soon would become the principal assistance of the priests in evangelization. The insistence of Fr. Allamano on this issue made it clear that to him collaboration was more than just a mission strategy. In other words, his missionaries did not need to cooperate among themselves and with the natives just to be effective. To Fr. Allamano, collaboration was a statement on the nature of mission. By working together, they would be witnessing him who had sent them (Christ) and he who through whom they were able to do

all (Holy Spirit). This is not different even for us today. If mission is the task of collaborating with God in his plan, then it is necessary to live and work in harmony among ourselves and the people around us. Our collaborative attitude is itself a testimony that says a lot about what we believe, how we think about what we believe and how we look at others and ourselves.

Another impressive attitude of Fr. Allamano that defied his time is the disposition with which he demanded his missionaries to work. The Founder was aware that coming from Europe, there was a risk of the missionaries considering themselves superior to the Africans. The fact that they were the ones who carried the gospel message and the fact that they were from economically developed country would have easily made them to present the gospel as “theirs”, that is, as if it was an integral part of their European heritage and identity. Fr. Allamano knew that if his missionaries fell in that trap, they would think that their alleged superiority gave them the right to impose the Christian gospel on the people who were considered culturally primitive, religiously pagan, economically poor and technologically backward. That understanding of Fr. Allamano was what made him insist on the issue of humility and collaborative capacity. To him, the missionary was never a master or owner of the gospel of Christ. The missionary was always a collaborator with God and a servant. Today, we can learn a lot from this attitude of Fr. Allamano. We do not have to impose the gospel to others. We do not own the gospel. Our attitude and approach should be one of sharing the faith as a gift received from God through other people, aware that we are only collaborators and servants of God who does his will the way he wishes, to those he wishes, and when he wishes. That view of things makes us realize that we are not the only ones evangelizing others. On the contrary, while we

evangelize others, we are evangelized too. In other words, unlike in the past when the missionary was seen as the carrier of the good news to be poured into the “empty” non Christians’ lives, today we must have the humility of knowing that God has been before us in the places we go for mission. That assertion should make us go slowly into the way we relate with others. That way, we will not stand in the way of the dialogue between people and God through imposition of our own opinions and agenda. Instead, we should promote dialogue between God and his people, and discover the opinion and agenda of God for the given people through prayer and meditation of his word. That way, our participation in the mission confirms us as God’s tools among his people.

Chapter Nineteen

FR. ALLAMANO THE WITNESS

Every time we speak of witnesses in the Church the thing that comes into our minds immediately is martyrdom. For centuries, martyrs were referred to as witnesses of Christ, because they demonstrated through and by their lives their conviction of being true followers of Christ. From this understanding of witnesses, it is evident that witnessing was connected to suffering and dying for what one stood for. In this light, Christ is the first witness of God the Father, the Church is a witness of Christ, and as such all the members of the Church are called to be witnesses of not just the Church, but also of Christ whom the Church represents and proclaims. Certainly, you may ask: “then how is Fr. Allamano a witness when he did not die a martyr?” It is undoubtedly a valid question. Fr. Allamano may not have died a martyr, but the suffering that he endured all throughout his life made him participant in the passion and death of Christ in a special way. In other words, Fr. Allamano participated in what is traditionally called ‘white martyrdom’. While there are martyrs who by dying physically witness the faith they profess, there are also those who die ‘symbolically’ by silently, patiently and courageously carrying on their daily lives in deep pain. The former are the blood martyrs, while the latter are the white martyrs. It is unquestionably true that we are all called participate the death of Jesus Christ in baptism, but that does not make all of us white martyrs. White martyrs are people who in their lives endure terrible suffering, yet in silence and prayer carry all with Christ. They are people who smile and laugh when in fact they are sup-

posed to be crying. They are not people who accept suffering as a gift of fate or people who resign their fate to a God who is just to some and unfair to others. They are people who in spite of their daily struggle still keep faith, remain hopeful and focus ahead believing that God is still in control of things.

From an early age Fr. Allamano's journey of life seemed bent to be difficult. Not only did his parents die while he was still young, but also his health remained precarious all through. Many times he was forced to leave school, return home to recuperate before returning to school. The seriousness of his health problem is seen in the fact that even with the strong will that he had as he grew, he was unable to become a missionary in spite of his burning desire for it and several attempts. His determination to be a missionary must have met obstacles so great that he had to see the will of God in remaining a diocesan priest of Turin. In other words, a person who was able to struggle for his goals including waiting for 10 years to found a missionary Institute, could not have just given up on being a missionary if the obstacles were not indomitable. We can therefore see that if the 'obstacle' that prohibited Fr. Allamano to be a missionary was so invincible, then his becoming a diocesan priest of Turin was a real achievement. His success could not be attained were it not for his deep faith in God, and an unforgiving capacity to sacrifice himself for what he believed. That fact was certainly demonstrated by his decision to start the missionary Institute in order to continue disseminating the consolation of God to all people. Naturally, having been ordained a priest, we would have expected that the Founder should have said 'at last all powerful master... now that I am a priest I don't wish anything more than to say the Mass and celebrate the sacrament of penance'.

To our surprise, Fr. Allamano ‘hit the road running’: he was assigned to the seminary, then the Rector of Consolata Shrine, then a lecturer of moral theology, then a Founder. That was not an attitude of a man who expected pity from people, or who had self pity. That was an attitude of a person who left everything in the hands of God and went about his business. That affirmation of things was evident in the fact that many times Fr. Allamano would have chosen to travel here and there, but it was Fr. Camisassa who always advised against such ventures. The concern about Fr. Allamano’s health was so serious that Fr. Camisassa always kept tabs of it. In 1911 while Fr. Camisassa was visiting Kenya, the Founder visited Rome. The news that Fr. Allamano had had terrible fever prompted Fr. Camisassa to write “For heaven’s sake look after yourself properly, especially during the winter months, which are always bad for you...” (*D. Agasso, 129*). This tells us that Fr. Allamano had health issues not only when he was a seminarian, but even when he was a priest. It seems that Fr. Camisassa had noticed that the Founder had problems whenever it was cold. A similar episode took place in the spring of 1919 when Fr. Allamano visited Rome for the beatification cause of Fr. Cafasso. Fr. Camisassa immediately wrote to Fr. Domenico Ferrero in Rome a ‘secret’ letter about Fr. Allamano’s diet, indicating also what the Founder liked best.

In the letter, Fr. Camisassa decisively said “Be firm and insist that he eats his food, and keep me informed” (*D. Agasso, 160*). Such was how Fr. Camisassa followed up faithfully our Founder’s health and eating habits. Certainly, these episodes tell us that although Fr. Allamano went along with his duties, he had a great threat lurking behind him in the name of health weakness. The founder was not oblivious about the fact. He knew that his health was a real threat. Speaking of their sanctification as

his main preoccupation, Fr. Allamano told the seminarians at the Mother House: “even when I am sick, I can’t remain in peace – thinking about you”. In other words, sickness could not stop him from thinking about them and about their sanctification. Later in life, speaking to his missionaries, Fr. Allamano remembered how he always beseeched the seminarians not to ‘hasten his death’, when he was appointed the Spiritual Director in the seminary. His sentiments were meant to tell them that they could prolong his life too, by allowing themselves to be formed and not stressing him. The Founder wrote:

When I was Spiritual Director in the seminary, I used to beg the seminarians, being of weak constitution myself, not to hasten my death. Now I tell you that if you want to lengthen my life (if it is the will of God), you should be docile in allowing yourselves to be formed and willing to sanctify yourselves. (SL. 83)

Today, as we re-look the life of Fr. Allamano, his teachings and the implications all these have in our lives as his sons and daughters and in the mission, we can’t but admire the determination of an apostle which resided in him. In him we see the importance of suffering as an authenticating factor of all that is done. We are not making this up! Suffering and dying for something has been the best and may be the only way of proving one’s honesty and authenticity of what he or she says and does. Even in the Traditional African Societies, a young lady married only the young man who had suffered enough to prove his love for her. She would never marry a coward who threatened or beaten once by her father, would be cowed away immediately. The insults, threats and beatings of her father filtered away suitors who would have otherwise been ‘wolves’ ready to devour his daughter. Only he who persevered and suffered enough to touch the heart of the lady would be finally rewarded by the same ‘harsh’ par-

ent. Suffering has not only been an authenticating factor, but also a purifying one. The people of Israel were taken to the Babylonian exile to be purified. Their suffering and struggle were meant to open their eyes to see that God had not chosen them because they were better than other nations, neither had he not chosen the other nations because they were worse than Israel. God had done all out of grace. Their exilic struggle was meant to help them see that God's choice of them was meant to make them a light for other nations. In other words, their suffering was supposed to be productive. It was intended to help them to see God in a new light, to see other nations a new light, and even to look at themselves in a new light: like a seed, they had to die if they were to produce anything worthwhile.

Undoubtedly therefore, God expected the people of Israel to live in way that other nations would be envious of their success, unity, prosperity, worship, etc. By so doing, other nations would have wished to be like the people of Israel, and that would make them leave their idols. That way the people of Israel would have been a light to the nations. Unfortunately, the people of Israel mistook the intention of God and thought that God hated other nations. The exile and their freedom from exile by a foreign king (Cyrus king of Persia) proved the people of Israel wrong. Their suffering was therefore a purifying factor to know God better. Probably, acknowledging that God purifies those whom he chooses before authenticating them, today we can say the same of Fr. Allamano's suffering. God purified him to be a great father of missionaries, and only through the 'cup of Christ' could he be authenticated. After all, even for Jesus, it was his death that proved he was a good man to the unbelieving soldiers. They had been with him all along, tortured him for hours, and yet remained adamant. It was only after his death that a cen-

turion confessed, “In truth this man was the son of God” (Lk. 23:47). Not only that, with the death of Jesus, the people who had been standing at Calvary cheering the crucifixion, went home beating their breasts (Lk. 23:48). In other words, their joy and perceived victory of having killed him turned into mourning and regret. It is therefore now easy to see why we should call Fr. Allamano a witness: he courageously embraced silent suffering in his life. With all that pain he went through since his youth, God purified him only to authenticate his fatherhood to us his sons and daughters – the Consolata Missionaries. May we, who are continuing his dream today never lose sight of his wisdom: the first condition of immortality is that one must die.

Chapter Twenty

FR. ALLAMANO AND HOLINESS

If there is something that is difficult to speak about in our world today, it is holiness. It seems quite absurd for a person to talk about holiness today. May be this is because the world does not seem to support such an endeavor, may be because we no longer understand what holiness is all about, or may be because we no longer believe holiness is possible. When we speak about holiness several things come in the minds of our listeners. Many think of it in terms of remaining in worshipping places for many hours, others think of praying long touching prayers, others think of the attitude of being quiet and reserved. As such, holiness is associated with places of worship and having a timid personality, making “isolation and loneliness to be its evident signs” (Cf. *The Fire in these ashes*, pg. 119). Worse still, many people equate holiness to perfection, and hence living a sinless life. With that kind of perspective, we don’t need to be told why holiness is a dream in our world today. Of course, we would be wrong to say that holiness does not exist or that there are no longer holy people. The point is that holiness has lost the lustre it once enjoyed.

To Fr. Allamano, holiness was a second nature. If there was a word that the Founder uttered frequently, it was the term holiness. Fr. Allamano made it clear that the first goal of the Institute was sanctification of the members, and only then would it be a tool of sanctifying others. The Founder in fact put it categorically that the Institute was an instrument of sanctifying those who entered it, so that they too could pass on the same gift of holiness to the

people they were serving. This way, Fr. Allamano made it evident that if the Institute did not make its members holy, then it would be failing in its duties. Since the Institute is its members, Fr. Allamano was actually saying, that if we don't work towards our sanctification, then we do not merit to be tools of God in his mission of evangelization. This is why Fr. Allamano always said to his seminarians that if there was anything that gave him preoccupation constantly, it was their sanctification. The question "do all these young people who have entered the Society have the good will to sanctify themselves?" always appeared in his mind. (SL. 83).

But what was it that Fr. Allamano wished for his missionaries? This question is important from the background that we have seen: holiness seems to be misunderstood. As a matter of fact, the Founder never expected to make angels out of men. He knew perfection is not holiness, and that only in God are perfection and holiness one. He was aware that perfection is about lack of defects or imperfections and no human being is perfect. As a matter of fact, even today, trying to be perfect is "attempting to be what we should never be if human life with all its learnings is really to be human" (*The Fire in these ashes*, pg. 116). This is why we are saying that Fr. Allamano was wise enough to know that if holiness was to be equated to perfection, no one would ever be holy. His deep love for the saints must have shown him that if the Church could consider St. Augustine a saint after all that he had done as a young man, then holiness could never be equated to perfection. In fact, Fr. Allamano must have been aware that if holiness was to be likened to perfection then not a single person among the apostles could be called a saint. With all these in mind, Fr. Allamano could not have been asking the seminarians to be perfect, when he spoke about holiness every now and then. He must have been telling

them to be good people, who did everything well for the right reason. Now that is holiness. That is what characterized Fr. Allamano's life.

The Founder's ill health was a clear human imperfection, but not obstacles to holiness. The trust that he earned from the leaders in the Church and especially from the numerous bishops of Turin was a sign that he was a good-hearted man, who did everything the best way he could, and for the right intention (in other words without hidden agenda). He was a holy man precisely because he saw the will of God in everything, and hence did everything with a clear conscience, a clean heart, and the right motive. When a person is like that, no matter how many imperfections he may have, and no matter what mistakes his imperfections cause him to do, he can still be a holy man. The attitude of humility and total trust in God that the imperfections instill in us make the foundation of holiness. Fr. Allamano taught that trust in God was the secret of the saints. With humility and deep trust in God, we avoid the false and misleading voice of the ego, we become good hearted persons who try their best to do everything well for the glory of God and the well-being of our neighbor. That way, we become holy. Those sentiments of Fr. Allamano meant that our imperfections should make us humble and trusting in God. They should not kill our self-confidence or discourage us. When our imperfections discourage us and destroy our self-esteem and our self-confidence, then they easily become obstacles on our path to holiness.

Fr. Allamano's emphasis on trust in God was a warning that it would be futile to think that we could attain holiness by ourselves. That is why the Founder said "it would be presumptuous to imagine that we can achieve holiness without the help of God" (Cf. *This I want you to be*, Pg. 49). Today, we don't need anyone to tell us

that such a thought would be an obvious self-deception. Fr. Allamano made it clear that holiness depends on our courage to take the first step on the path of renunciation, after which Christ immediately intervenes with his grace to make easy what may have seemed difficult at the beginning, and desirable what was disgusting to nature” (SL. 91). To him, that first step involved training one’s character and learning virtue. Even today, we can tell that such an achievement demands constant effort and a generous good will. To Fr. Allamano anyone who developed such a good will would not have much difficulty becoming a saint. This explains why the Founder did not see why his missionaries could not become saints.

To him the path to holiness was clear and simple: have clean thoughts, which will in turn become good words and good actions. Repeat the good actions indefinitely, allowing them to turn into good habits. Repeat those virtues until they become your character, without forgetting that it takes time and prayer to achieve genuine virtue. Practice the virtue as the only thing you know, and there, you will be already living holiness, and undoubtedly, on the road towards sainthood regardless of your personality (Cf. *This I want you to be*, 51). Fr. Allamano was quick to note the issue of personality because he had heard people claiming that their personality was their obstacle to holiness. The Founder immediately debunked that way of thinking saying that the saints in the Church are of all sorts of personalities, so there was no way one could hide behind his personality to defend his imperfections. What was needed, the Founder noted, was shaping, but not destroying one’s personality, something which presupposed one’s effort to discern his tendencies and weakness, and overcoming a few defects which are the root cause of his key imperfections. Rightly put by our Founder, shaping one’s personality helps him to be socially acceptable,

thus developing the basis on which sanctity is created and lived: fruitful human relationships which are the foundation of genuine relationship with God.

As we reflect on our Founder's take on holiness, we cannot forget that his enduring statement: Holiness is your first obligation, the first goal of your vocation, but also the first means of your apostolic work. (Cf. SL. 91). May our Founder help us in our effort to attain holiness.

Chapter Twenty-One

COMMUNICATION LESSONS FROM FR. ALLAMANO

As we approach the conclusion of our reflection on Fr. Allamano's life, it is crucial to admit that having said and insisted that Fr. Allamano was a silent man, there is a risk of having presented him as having been an anti-social and passive person. It is appropriate to see that Fr. Allamano's silent character did not mean that he was cold to human relationship, but on the contrary, he was very interactive. Of course, as a human being he made blunders in this issue, and they are for us points of learning – as from a father. Given that we are in the era of communication, it would be appropriate to see how communicative the Founder was, since as evangelizers, that would help us to know how to convey the message of Christ in our time. The human person is created to be social, and all mature and integral persons readily relate with others fairly well. Relationship with others is a wide issue, which has many aspects, one of which is communication. Although communication is just one of the many aspects of human relationship, it is critically a fundamental one. In fact, it is so essential that if it fails, human relationship fails too. Being in the era of communication, it is easy to take for granted that all of us know to communicate, because after all we communicate each day. However, it is not an exaggeration to say that in spite of being in the communication era, many of the conflicts in the world are as a result of either lack of communication, or due to poor communication. Most of the time when disagreements

arise, it is because a person did not communicate what was expected of him, or he did, but the message either did not reach, or reached already distorted, or that the receiver did not understand the message. This is probably a nice reason why we need to relook Fr. Allamano's involvement in communication and his communication skills and learn from his experience.

Essentially, we talk of communication having taken place when a person sends a message through a certain medium, the message travels unhindered and without distortion, and finally the receiver receives the message and understands it. Fr. Allamano seems to have learnt the power of communication from an early age. From the onset, Fr. Allamano knew that communication requires firmness and clarity. This is why he was cordial and categorical with his brothers when they tried to advise him not to join the seminary. He told them plainly that having heard the voice of God, he could not sit and hope that God would continue calling him. With that kind of a stand there was no need of more persuasion. His determination paid off handsomely, but not before a thorough process of molding in the hands of God. Aware that communication is more than verbal transmission of content, the young Allamano once in the seminary offered himself bone and blood to his formation. That was the only way he could "communicate" to his formators concretely that regardless of his health challenges, God had not only called him, but also that he was preparing him for greater tasks ahead. The approval by his formators to be ordained in 1873 was a clear sign that his "tangible communication" in the seminary had actually worked.

Fr. Allamano the young priest seems to have known that good relationship with people depends on affable communication. As a result, he always did his best to create friendly relationship with people. He was actu-

ally right. We too know that good relationship between people depends on healthy communication, yet healthy communication between people is the fruit of warm relationships. For Fr. Allamano, immediately after his ordination he was appointed to the seminary, a very sensitive pastoral area especially if one has no experience. Soon after, he was appointed a lecturer in the Pastoral Institute. As if to show how good communication between him and his bishop worked, the bishop told him “I trust you”, when Fr. Allamano requested to use his own notes in the lectures, instead of the notes of the Archbishop. In other words, the encouraging response of the Archbishop was as a result of the good relationship that had developed between him and Fr. Allamano.

Fr. Allamano’s experience can also tell us communication is not as obvious as we think. Why? Because communication is not just the use of words – whether spoken or written. The people we communicate with are not empty slates. They are bundles of attitudes, values, prejudices, experiences, feelings, thoughts, sensations, and aspiration, etc. As such, to communicate well, we must take into account the non-verbal accompaniments of communication. For example, in addition to the words of a person, there are facial expressions, body movements, low and high pitch of the voice, sensitivity of the speaker to certain issues, etc. Even in written communication, there are things like line spacing, paragraph organization, handwriting, margins of what is written, etc. These are important things to be looked into if the content of the communicated message is to be well received and understood. Fr. Allamano learnt this the hard way twice. First, having written to the Propaganda Fide about his idea to start a missionary Institute, it seems his bishop did not take nicely the fact that Vatican had been informed about issues that he was not aware of. The result was a delay to

approve the idea when it was finally brought to him. Of course, Fr. Allamano being a nice man excused the Archbishop saying that he could not blame him given that he had been sick. Although it was true that the Archbishop had been sick, Fr. Camisassa saw things differently, and that is why he requested Rome to convince the Archbishop about the issue.

The point is that maybe if Fr. Allamano could have just whispered to his Bishop before communicating with Rome, things could have ended up different. In other words, the Founder should have sensed that the issue of communicating with Rome first would have been easily misunderstood. The second episode in which Fr. Allamano was made to learn the hard way was when he together with his five colleagues wrote to Pope Pius X requesting him to institute the mission Sunday. Again, Fr. Allamano, who was the initiator of the idea of writing to the Pope, should have thought deeper about bypassing the bishops in the effort to communicate with the Pope. The fact that even Propaganda Fide refused to support Fr. Allamano's letter of requests to the pope says openly the picture that the whole thing painted. This tells us that the success or failure rate of our communication with people depends on our relationship with them at the point when the communication is done. This means that part of mastering the art of communication depends on mastering the art of being aware of our relations with those we need to communicate with, or the people through whom we must pass to reach the intended receiver of the message.

After the death of Cardinal Alimonda, Fr. Allamano easily found a good working relationship with the new Archbishop - Riccardi. This was precisely because the new Archbishop loved the Mass media, but he was having problems with the Catholic Press. As a matter of fact, the Archbishop appointed Fr. Allamano as the chairman of

the board of *Italia Reale*, a paper that was meant to complement the *Corriere Nazionale* which was doing quite poorly, in spite of being the only paper that remained after three others had collapsed. At the same time, Fr. Allamano was helping Domenico Giraud the spokesman of *La voce dell'Operaio*, another paper which was struggling to survive and which ended up taking the name *Voce del Popolo* certainly in the effort to save it from collapsing. Even as he did this, Fr. Allamano kept *La Consolata* newsletter alive, since it was through it his Christians in the Consolata Shrine shared about their spiritual life. Unknown to him, all what he was doing was preparation for greater things. Already aware of the significance of communication in evangelization and social cohesion, after his missionaries arrived in Kenya, among things that were set up after some time was a printing press. Through it, Fr. Allamano's missionaries, the Consolata Missionaries, gave Kenya the first monthly newspaper, which was called "*Wathiomu Mukinyu*" – a Kikuyu name which meant "the true friend". After October 1909 when the Mother House was inaugurated, Fr. Allamano through his students began writing the *Da Casa Madre* (which means "From the Mother House"), a newsletter which helped his missionaries in Africa to know what was happening in the Mother House. There is no doubt therefore that Fr. Allamano was deeply involved in communication efforts in the diocese.

Fr. Allamano's pastoral wisdom (through which he suggested the Murang'a Conference in 1904, the Consolata Method and the Respect of the Kikuyu Culture as we saw before) demonstrated the close link between one's capacity to communicate and his frame of mind and competencies. Undoubtedly, effective communication is a blend between internal disposition of a person (his psychological and moral self) and his capacity to communicate, in addition to knowing what to communicate. Fr.

Allamano's advice to his missionaries in Kenya on how to handle belief in the spirits by the Kikuyu people, for example, showed his openness to realities of new environment. This tells us that as communicators of the gospel, we must be learners. Precisely this means that we must be ready to unlearn things when it is necessary to do so, but also ready to learn and re-learn others. This is exactly what inculturation is all about. Just as he told the first missionaries not to fight belief in spirit using their European mentality, today, if Fr. Allamano was to speak to us about openness in communication, he would certainly tell us, "When you send a message, don't just give the facts. Think of how the receiver of the message will receive it. Try to see it from his or her perspective. You have to appeal to listeners or readers. Remember, a message that is expressed in your own terms and stated from your point of view is not likely to be effective". This kind of message is powerful. It reminds us that we can express ourselves with great clarity and still fail to communicate. In other words, being clear is not necessarily communicating effectively. We should not cheat ourselves by thinking that those who speak fluently or write poetically are automatically good communicators. It is not necessarily true. It is the one who engages people's interest who is effective, that is, the one who speaks (or writes) about things that people are interested in or those that touch their lives. At the end of the day the essence of communication is shared meaning. We need to get into the world of the other person to pass a message that touches and transforms them.

The difference in the relationship between Fr. Allamano and Camisassa on the one hand, and Fr. Allamano and Bishop Perlo on the other tells us how communication can be complex even for people with good intentions. Certainly, the former relationship demonstrates how effective communication can transform

friends into brothers. The 42 years that Fr. Allamano and Fr. Camisassa lived together are evidence that cordial and candid communication is necessary for harmonious coexistence and effective apostolate. The later relationship teaches us too. At least given that we are aware that Fr. Allamano never undermined, expressed displeasure or gave up on Bishop Perlo, we can tell without a doubt that Fr. Allamano demonstrated that effective communication skills serve a key role in resolving conflicts successfully. This is clear from the fact that even though in November 1921 Bishop Perlo left Italy without even talking to Fr. Allamano, the Founder's humble letter of correction to him touched him so deeply that immediately after his arrival, Bishop Perlo wrote back saying that he was open for correction and guidance. This what the bishop wrote:

I beg Your Paternity to feel entirely free to give me definite orders in this respect; which, serving to lighten the responsibility from the exercise of which I neither can nor should exempt myself, will come to imprint on the work of my fellow-workers and myself in the mission field that uniformity to your wishes which perfectly represents my own most lively desire.' (D. Agasso, Pg. 157)

Those words of the hyper-charged Bishop Perlo shows how the words of the soft-spoken Rector of the Consolata Shrine had made an impact on him. Fr. Allamano was a unique man. He knew how to separate people from their problems, to address the problems without incriminating the persons. The loving heart of the Founder was even more revealed when Fr. Barlassina from his prefecture of Kaffa (Ethiopia) kept complaining and lamenting about Bishop Perlo's behaviour. Surprisingly, contrary to what everyone would have expected (especially given that Bishop Perlo had just snubbed the Founder), the Founder

rebuked Fr. Barlassina and told him that he was supposed to be grateful to Kenya, since the help that the Institute was giving him in Ethiopia was actually the fruit of the missionaries in Kenya (from the funds accrued from the huge coffee farm at Mathari). The Founder wrote:

If a stop were put to the antipathy and complaining that exist in certain quarters against Kenya, things would go a great deal better... And consider: you ought to be grateful to Kenya, if you are now being helped by us in your needs... Let us have no more of these troubles; shake hands like brothers.” (D. Agasso, Pg. 157)

From these words of Fr. Allamano, it is evident that he was a good communicator not just because of his mastery of the functional skills of communication, but also from the fact that he had extremely good personal qualities. Even after being offended terribly by Bishop Perlo, Fr. Allamano could not be dragged into mud-smearing campaign against him. That was how pure hearted the Founder was. He was totally convinced that successful communication transmits values, better attitudes, and caring feelings through proper chosen words and that was why his final words were reconciliatory. This is important for us. It teaches us that to communicate well, we need to be also people of virtues. Of course, this is easier said than done. Nevertheless, saying it is difficult does not mean it is impossible.

So far, it may appear as if communication is always about sending, disseminating or giving others certain messages. In truth, as communicators, we will always fall in two sides: the senders of the message (hence speakers or writers) on the one hand, or the receivers of the message (listeners or readers) on the other. As senders of messages, our Founder will expect us (a) to be totally involved: open minded and focused, hence avoiding un-

necessary details (b) to have a purpose: ready to achieve a new level of attention by disciplining ourselves to reserve our opinions, evaluations and judgments (c) to be concise (that is, to the point); (d) to be very courteous with people; (e) to have completeness (that is, to avoid biasness); (f) to ensure concreteness (that is, to avoid abstract language);(g) to maintain clarity by avoiding ambiguity; (h) to have correctness (by being ethical), etc.

On the other hand, as receivers of the messages, Fr. Allamano will expect us to learn the art of listening or reading. This involves understanding that (i) listening with the ears to the story and its meaning (through ears we receive the word of God, advice, encouragement, etc (ii) listening with the heart to the emotions of people, their feelings, their likes and dislikes. (iii) listening with the eyes by being keen to the body language of speakers, being perceptive of their posture, not taking for granted their appearance and facial expression, as these help us to enter into the situation or the story that is presented. As far as listening is concerned, our Founder will categorically tell us that (iv) listening requires courage, since we may have to change our ideas after deep and honest introspection and soul searching. (v) listening requires generosity because it requires us to give our whole attention to the person – not just being there or staring at the speaker. (vi) listening requires patience since we have to be non-judgmental about what other people are likely to say - we have to wait until we have heard everything; we have to stop thinking ahead of what the speaker is likely to say (or what a given book is likely to give as a conclusion). From these requirements of being good receivers of messages, it is clear that listening requires perseverance since what is said could be too sharp (critical) against us, yet when we know that we grow through what we are able to accommodate patiently, we go on listening because the

sharp edges of the message become the first issues to deal with if a positive change has to take place.

The Founder having been a veteran formator all along, prepared a lot of material in form of guiding notes, about Christian life and missionary life. The *Spiritual Life* is an extremely valuable source of the thoughts of the Founder. Although his thoughts were compiled and organized later by other people (Fr. Lorenzo Sales), it is evident that by emphasizing them to his audience, he wished them to be practised and communicated to all generations of the Consolata Missionaries. This is another way of saying that Fr. Allamano had a deep sense of the generative character of communication. This is why he ensured that the conferences he gave to the seminarians were as rich as possible with the fruits of his meditation, the teachings of the Church, the examples of the fathers of the Church and of the saints and his own example of life. Fr. Allamano's thoughts touched all aspects of Christian life, meaning that they were as rich as possible. Today, aware that communication is only said to have been achieved when a message is received by the receiver without distortions and he understands it, we can show that Fr. Allamano still communicates with us by reading and re-reading the *Spiritual Life* with devotion and dedication and responding accordingly.

Given the multiplicity of the communication avenues there are in this communication era, it is important to know how to use the God-given gift in an appropriate manner, if the many ways of communication we have, have to be a blessing and not a curse. If used well, the means of communication in the world could be very transformative. In fact, in addition to informing, entertaining, cautioning and instructing, the means of communication could be very evangelical. True, they are already being used in evangelization, however many people are

still to benefit from them due to poor coverage. Today, the increased utilization of internet has brought deeper connectivity of people, becoming a tool that can enhance community life through harmonious coexistence. However, if not utilised well, this important tool could be very divisive and conflict creating, especially when used maliciously to malign people, leading to destruction of people's reputations and character.

Chapter Twenty-Two

SILENT LESSONS

Having seen the lessons that Fr. Allamano's communicative capacity can teach us, it is appropriate to note that the Founder showed that capacity also through his meditative silence. As they say, music is the interlude between beats. It is the silent intervals between notes. Whether you believe this or not, the point of these assertions is the emphasis of the importance of the silent moments between beats and notes as the ones that produce a tune or a melody. Basically, this means that while we consider music to be the beautiful words and the well-organized beats that we hear, the truth is that if there were no silent interludes between them everything would be noise. This applies to speech. The power of speech is silence, since silence has power. As a matter of fact, we discover the importance of our voices when we are silenced. And it is the silence of God that makes him mysterious. It is also the silence of great leaders that makes them revered and sometimes even feared. Of course, this is when silence is used as a weapon. This happens when silence is used to oppress people, to frustrate them by leaving them in suspense, or to hide the truth and that way suppress people's voices and rights. Silence is therefore essentially a language, and a powerful one at that. If silence is a powerful language, then it is part of communication strategies. When used well, silence empowers speech. This explains why we pay attention when a usually silent man speaks. His silence makes his words (whether spoken or written) valuable. When silence is used inappropriately (e.g. when it lacks), it destroys speech. This is seen every day when

a person keeps yapping nonsense, sooner or later people get used to it and no longer listen to what he or she says nor pay attention to him or her. It is due to negligence of silence that good things have to have noise (publicity) made over them to be appreciated.

The bombardment of people with information today (meaning the lack of silence) is the reason we are no longer interested with what is advertised, preached or sang. This is why the assertion that “negligence of silence has made speech sterile, impotent and useless” is true. Fr. Allamano’s silent character was a result of awareness of this fact: noise destroys our relevance. His silence was communicative especially because it was accompanied by industriousness and prayer. In other words, it was a noiseless application of his meditations; a noiseless implementation of his encounter with God. That is exactly what made his advice powerful to people’s lives: everything was a fruit of his encounter with Christ. On 20th September 1923, Fr. Allamano was celebrating 50th anniversary of his priesthood. At the Consolata, a solemn celebration for those who had been ordained in 1873 was held. Among those who were to attend the ceremony was Cardinal Richelmy who also had been ordained in the same year. Unfortunately, on 10th August the Cardinal died, a month to the day he was to celebrate 50 years of his priesthood, and 25 years of his episcopate. Fr. Allamano was once again touched by that tragedy. This was the 2nd time he was losing someone so dear after the death of Fr. Camisassa. At the time Fr. Allamano was 72 years old and therefore he took everything in silence and prayer as the wisdom of all those years dictated.

It was in the same wisdom of silence that he refused to accept the expansion of the Institute to Somalia in 1923. As usual, his reasons were genuine: he already had Kenya, Kaffa and Iringa to take care of, with the few

missionaries that he had. In addition to that, he was not willing to enter into conflict with the Trinitarian Fathers who were working in the particular territory where Cesare De Vecchi wished the Consolata Institute to go. To Fr. Allamano's surprise, in 1924, the Institute was heading to Mogadishu. The issue was that Propaganda Fide had found someone who was willing to take the Institute to Somalia: Bishop Perlo. On 22 October 1924, Msg. Gabriel Perlo, Fr. Giovanni Ciravegna, Fr. Vittorio Varetto, Fr. Giuseppe Prima, and Fr. Giacomo Cavallo landed in Mogadishu. Again, on 9th December, two months after, another group was heading to Mogadishu. They included Fr. Giuseppe Ferraris, Br. Guido Grosso, Br. Carlino Damiani, Sr. Angelica Ascheri, Sr. Silvia Coriasco, Sr. Flavia Boeri and Sr. Battistina Alessio. With them was seminarian Giovanni Bisio who at twenty-two was to assist in the construction of the cathedral of Mogadishu. As usual, when Fr. Allamano came to learn about it he did his typical thing: remained silent in prayer, leaving everything in the hands of God.

Today we know that things did not go as the missionaries expected, and as a result, after six years they had to leave Somalia, probably a confirmation that Fr. Allamano had been right in demanding postponement of that mission when Propaganda Fide requested it. Maybe also a confirmation that God had not willed it, especially given that it was done without Fr. Allamano's blessings. Certainly, a sure confirmation that while humility pays, pride comes before a fall. In any case, with their departure, Propaganda Fide had to pass everything into the hands of the Franciscan Friars Minor of the Province of Milam. Nevertheless, Consolata Missionaries effort had not been a useless. They had managed to build the Cathedral of Mogadishu, Fr. Gabriele Perlo had been chosen as the Prefect Apostolic of Benadir (and later Vicar Apostol-

ic of Mogadishu), and a lot of witnessing through charity had been done. Immediately after the entrance to Somalia, in 1925 the Institute was heading to Mozambique. Fr. Allamano was at the time no longer playing active role in sending expeditions. In reality, Bishop Perlo was running the show. Fr. Allamano watched quietly as a new way of doing things was being done.

Bishop Perlo's return to Italy revealed how he had achieved all that he had done in Africa: a spirit of urgency that gave no room for preparation. Even with those glaring mistakes, Fr. Allamano never lost esteem for Bishop Perlo. In 1925 for example, speaking to a group of seminarians he said, "Always obey Bishop Perlo; love him; he is younger than I am and has more experience than I have in what the missions need. He will be able to develop the Institute further and make it livelier yet". In his heart, the Founder knew that he had to become an intercessor of many people who through the hurried style of Bishop Perlo had suffered. The Founder chose to remain silent and pray. First of all, out of respect for the new leader in the Institute, but also so that he may leave everything to the one who sees and acts through silence: God.

With the beatification of Fr. Cafasso, Fr. Allamano must have been relieved. Most of the big resolutions that he had made from the beginning had come to pass. The Institute was not only up and running, but also there were people who were sustaining the momentum of its activities. In addition, Fr. Cafasso was now a model of holiness in the Church. True, Bishop Perlo's manner of doing things was an issue of concern for Allamano as far as the future of the Institute was concerned, but Fr. Allamano was convinced that God could not start a project that he could not sustain even with weak human beings. With that consolation, the Founder retired to silence and prayer. It was another way of teaching humility, obedi-

ence and respect for the leaders in the Institute. What a lesson to many of us who would have grumbled for years!

On Saturday 31st January 1926, our Founder appeared tired. His voice had faded and his legs were swollen. His difficulty in breathing pointed to the approaching end. The following day he managed to celebrate Mass, which would be his last. His health deteriorated in a matter of days and on 16th February 1926 at 4 am he left for heaven, joining his assistant, Fr. Camisassa, who four years before had gone there. On 26th September 1971, Seraphine Nyambura, a Kikuyu woman was miraculously healed as she lay dying at the Consolata Hospital in Nyeri after praying through the intercession of Fr. Allamano. Twelve years after his death, in 1938, his remains were transferred to the Mother House. In 1989 Fr. Joseph Allamano was declared venerable, and on 7th Oct. 1990 in a beautiful ceremony he was declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II.

Fr. Allamano's life, apostolate and his teachings are a valuable lessons for us. Amid many struggles, he achieved what could have been unimaginable to many people given his frailty from the beginning. Today, through his missionaries, he continues to be a beacon of hope and faith to many people, where his missionaries are working. To us his sons and daughters, Fr. Allamano is a firm sign of deep trust in God, determination and encouragement. Having overcome and achieved a lot in his life, today from heaven he must be encouraging us. I would not be surprised to know that given the Institute is rapidly becoming African, Fr. Allamano's message is coded in an African proverbs: the same boiling water that softens the potato hardens the egg. In other words, what matters in life is what we are made of, not the circumstances around us. As the Institute gradually takes a more African shape, we are bound to meet a lot of challenges – financial, lead-

ership, relationships, etc, due to the diversity of cultures in the Continent. Those challenges should be lessons through which we can take it (Institute) to higher heights. Having learned from him, our strength should not therefore come from what we think we can do, but from overcoming the things we once thought we could not. That will be the clearest sign that we have learned from our Father. As far as the goal of the Institute is concerned, we should try our best never to lose focus of his dream: consolation of humanity. That is, evangelizing the non-Christian through transformation of the environment in them and around. That is the only way we can be sure of hearing him one day telling us, “I am not interested in whether you stood with the great. I am interested in whether you sat with the broken”. May our Founder Fr. Joseph Allamano, through the intercession of Our Lady Consolata, help us to love the common people of God as he did. Amen.

Chapter Twenty-Three

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF FR. ALLAMANO

FIRST COMMANDMENT

**Go beyond the narrow-minded ideas
that dominate the environment you are in**

There are so many issues that portray narrow mindedness attitude in the world. Sometimes traditions and cultures are involved, other times a general ignorance and lack of information is the cause of such narrow mindedness. In the time of Fr. Allamano, the fear of diocesan priests that the diocese would lack ministers if many young priests were taken up by the missionary calling was unfounded. Fr. Allamano knew that such a fear was just an obstacle in the minds of the clergy. In other words, it did not have basis in reality. Today, we know that that kind of fear is usually the beginning of racism, tribalism and all sorts of discriminative groupings in the society. The first commandment of Fr. Allamano is an invitation to acquire a universal dimension of life, to feel the duty or responsibility of learning, understanding and caring for humanity today, more than ever before. We must abandon the old mentality that is still present among many people: that of rejecting other people who we do not know or who we perceive differently. We must open ourselves to the universal language of love - which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit to the whole world. It is natural to fear, to suspect and sometimes to dislike that which is different. For a missionary however, to be a real tool in the hands of

God, one must overlook petty created narrow mindedness of his surroundings.

Causes of the fear of the unknown

(a) Bad experiences

Usually it is understandable when we meet people who fear strangers, not just because they are strangers (after all we are all strangers until we meet and start relating), but because they have had bad experiences with strangers, and especially with that given category of strangers. (This is the reason we hear people saying that I would not like to live or work with Italians, the Russians, Nigerians, Congolese, etc).

(b) Bad notions and prejudices

Many time we fear others and avoid them because of what we have heard about them. Sometimes even the hearsays are not founded or confirmed, yet because we have heard that Nigerians are conmen, Germans and Italians are racists, Muslims are terrorists, and Americans are proud, etc, we end up looking at them in the same light. Sometimes we even go to the extent of not just looking at them like that, but also treating them as if we have confirmed the rumours. These kind of notions are exaggerated generalization. This is what Allamano said that we should go beyond the narrow minded vision of the world. We cannot evangelize a person whom we are prejudiced against.

(c) Lack of being informed

The fear of the unknown is most of the time a sign of lack of being informed. We fear, suspect and dislike what we don't understand until we understand it. The ancient people worshiped the sun and the moon because

they believed that they were gods. Today we know better and that is why it will be folly for anyone to worship the sun or the moon. Fr. Allamano aware of this, always encouraged his missionaries to prepare thoroughly. Many times he said that an ignorant priest was a recipe for disaster. It was better for the people of God to have no priest than to have an ignorant one.

SOLUTION TO FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN AND NARROW-MINDEDNESS

(i) Being open

Relating with people is like learning to cook or driving. Regardless of all the theories one may have, at the end of the day such things are learned by doing. That applies to relating to other people. To overcome the fear of strangers one must by all means try to meet as many different people as possible, because that reveals gradually that after all people are the same. We may be different here and there, but essentially all people strive for happiness, try to avoid pain, are ready to cooperate with the one who is ready to cooperate with them, etc. Since a smile is contagious, one should be ready to share a smile, then a handshake, then some sharing about the environment, then some sharing about oneself, then a hug, and that way we learn to trust others just as they have to learn to trust us. As much as this is something that touches all human beings and everywhere, it is particularly crucial in religious life where people have to live in communities. It is fundamentally important in formation, whereby the formators can only know the candidates and how to assist them if they are open. When candidates see formation as an invasion of their privacy they tend to hide things by ensuring that dialogues are vague, abstract and general. Others just

become evasive when asked about their motivations or when inconsistencies in their lives are pointed out. Openness helps the foricator to know which aspects a candidate needs to improve, change or maintain.

(ii) Endurance

The fact that it is possible to learn to trust others or even to tolerate them does not mean that things will always work out in the first attempt. Even though different people have different personalities and some people are more receptive than others, in truth, learning to be open and to accept others is never automatic. It is always a difficult task in the beginning, but gradually it becomes easier as time goes on. There is therefore the need to be patient and persevering, because our fears will always be on the look out to identify the things we have always heard or believed about others. Furthermore, the fact that one is trying does not mean that he always makes progress. Some people will misunderstand the effort to be near them, others will reject any nearness, reinforcing our fear more, and worse still some will hurt us in the process and leave us regretting why we made the first move in the first place. That is why endurance is a key quality here - especially because we are not the only ones having fear of the unknown, others have it too. Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but also to turn it into glory. This is why I never stop telling anyone who cares to listen that “endurance is nobler than strength, and patience than beauty”. Without patient endurance, even the smallest thing becomes unbearable. Endurance is therefore paramount in missionary communities where many times people will be from all sorts of backgrounds, something which can easily turn out to be a source of many conflicts. As disciples of Christ, we must have trust in God and in the goodness that exists

in each person. That trust is the one which makes endurance possible and meaningful.

(iii) Be informed

To avoid accumulating fears that have no basis, and which only exist in our minds, it is important to be informed. Being informed means being aware of what is going around us. It also means having a wide general knowledge about many issues. That does not mean one has to be a genius, but that one is not totally ignorant on important issues affecting humanity. It is that knowledge that makes us not to “worship the sun or the moon”. Such knowledge helps one to come out of the ignorance that enslaves many people in the name of tradition and culture. Being informed helps us to reject prejudices whose aim is only to cause suspicion and fear about others and about certain situations. It is not a surprise that Fr. Allamano was always saying that an ignorant priests is an idol of sadness and bitterness.

SECOND COMMANDMENT

**Love a religion that offers the promise
of the other life and that makes you happier
in the world**

As in the times of Fr. Allamano, we live in a period in which the dichotomy between spiritualism and materialism is very evident. Fr. Allamano, I believe, did not just come up with such a commandment if it was not out of what he was seeing in the society. Many people must have been living “inside the bible”, ending up cheating themselves. True, God created us for himself, and we can only live well if we cooperate with him. Our faith should not be a kind of escape when things don’t work,

even those which need our human effort. Our faith should project our lives to the life after this life, but it must also enable us to live fairly well and especially serenely even here in the world. A faith that makes man inactive, indecisive and fearful of the future is not worth believing. We must realize that if the promise of another life is true, then happiness must begin in this world for all.

In other words, on one hand, this means that our faith should be balanced. It is not true that the world is a bad place to be. The fact that God created this material world, created man as a material creature in spite of creating him in his own image and likeness, and finally send the messiah in a bodily form, shows that the material world is not evil - as the Manicheans used to believe. We should not therefore live as if we are in prison in the world. Some Greek Philosophers used to teach that the human soul is imprisoned in the body, and that the aim of existence is to escape from the body to the spirit world. As Christians we have no doubt that God created us to search for him, to know him, to love him and serve him, so that at the end of time we may be with him. We are therefore to serve God through his people here on earth, take care of his creation and wait for our union with him at the end of time. Our being in the world is not a punishment - we can find a good degree of happiness here in the world, but only if we live as our heavenly Father expects.

On the other hand, this means that a faith that only focuses on this world is not only short sighted, but also dangerous and false, because it is not different from cheating oneself. Christ taught us that everything will pass away, only his word will not pass away (Mt. 24:35). We should not spiritualize everything.

THIRD COMMANDMENT

Choose meekness as the way of transformation

Every day and every minute we find ourselves before a dilemma: a path that is called violence, use of force and competition, and another called meekness, humility and honesty. As the saying goes, change is not naturally accepted – hence a degree of coercion is inevitable. Fr. Allamano's style of operation proves his words. He never used crude ways to achieve something. He knew that dialogue, discussion, and sharing were the best ways of letting the other person see not only the point we are talking about, but also our genuineness. The third commandment of Fr. Allamano therefore discourages us from:

a. Aggressiveness

The aggressiveness that we are called to avoid is not just the physical one, but also the indirect or cunning one, like indifference and competition against others. It is told of a dream of Don Bosco when he was a young man. In the dream he was playing with other boys, but they were using very foul language that he began beating them to change. At that moment an old man appeared and told him that he could convert them not with blows but with patience and love. Naturally, we tend to get agitated when we try to correct a person, but the person either doesn't change, or takes longer time than we had anticipated. Even for ourselves, we get agitated when we find ourselves not achieving the resolutions that we set for ourselves. That anger is not the best thing because it doesn't change anything - instead, it only makes us to feel frustrated and hopeless, leading to giving up in the name of having failed. Change can be achieved through aggres-

sive means but also through peaceful means.

Given that naturally people will always object, reject and even resist change, it may be understandable when the aggressive means are used as the last option. Even then, the aggressivity here does not mean literary the use of force and violence, but being assertive, insistent and uncompromising in what needs to be done. That is what differentiates people who are aggressive (dominant) and passive (compliant). Assertiveness is flexible firmness. This is evident from Jesus' action of removing people from the temple (Jn. 2:13-16). When it is possible to achieve change through peaceful means, it is highly recommendable that that route be used. This is because, when change is brought about through violence, hostility and force most of the time the change is usually superficial, and sometimes short lived. When change is achieved through peaceful means however, usually it is profound and long-lasting. This is why it is always advisable that if it is possible to insist, persuade and convince people to see the importance of a given change, then it is better to choose this route. This is because when people are convinced of the importance of something, even if it requires sacrifice and unfathomable personal commitment, they will still do it. On the contrary, when violence is used to achieve change, people are most likely to sabotage the achievement of the intended change. This therefore explains why Fr. Allamano demanded that his missionaries should favour the use of meekness or humility in bringing change wherever they were: he expected deep genuine transformation of people, and that could only be achieved peacefully and through development of trust.

b. Competition

In a world in which people are valued for what they

do and not for what they are, it is obvious that everyone will struggle to get what they can by whatever means. It is not a surprise that many people will use force or dishonest means because we live in a competitive world where the mighty is believed to be right. The world today tries to show us that nothing comes easily and therefore if we just sit, we will not only die poor or become irrelevant but also we will end up in oblivion of being forgotten. As a result of this kind of thinking, we see push and shove in all sectors of human existence - each person trying to outdo the other. Businesses are competing for profits, students are competing for better grades, and citizens are competing for employment just like trees in a thick forest compete for space and sunlight. Competition hindered the apostles from understanding what Jesus was teaching them when he spoke for the second time about his death. They had been engulfed in useless arguments of who among them was the greatest (Mk. 9:30-37). Even today, competition continues to ruin lives of many people. In the work place it creates animosity, hostility, hatred, malice, and even tragedy. In families it leads to bitter fights over property and inheritance among siblings.

Among religious people, competition continues to wreak havoc in communities, disrupting their daily activities and ruining their apostolate. One thing that is always clear is that such competition is never about battle in becoming better persons. It is always competition for money and other resources, more power and authority, or recognition and popularity. As a result, the religious lose their testimony and end up becoming similar to the people they are supposed to correct. This trend of things in the world is killing two important virtues: honesty and humility. The “cut-throat” competition for this and that forces many people to use any means so as to get at the top. Any means of course means also crooked means, which

could include cheating, stealing, bribing in all manner of ways, slandering others in order to appear better, corrupting those in power, humiliating and oppressing the weak, etc. Such “cut-throat” competition also is a fruit of the “mighty is right” attitude. As such, it is a product of pride and chest-thumping. Fr. Allamano’s naturally calm temperament and respect for authority teaches us that in order to counter the aggressivity and inhuman competition in the world, we need to know the following:

(i) Patience pays

It is not the rain that pours all at once that makes the crops to grow, but the one which drizzles gradually for a long time. In fact, the rain that pours all at once only destroys the crops and causes terrible soil erosion. Similarly, change in our hearts needs time, serenity and unforced effort. If we want to change from a bad habit, we should begin leaving it slowly and give ourselves time. In the process, we should be patient with ourselves because being human we will likely fail here and there, but that should not be the end of the story. We should be strong enough to start anew. This is even more important when dealing with other people, because different people have different paces of thinking and acting. We should be patient with the persons, in humility offer them advice, and avoid getting worked up when they fail (because that is bound to happen in the process of learning to live differently).

(ii) Humility as medicine

The successes that Fr. Allamano got in his life probably show us that humility and honesty are the pillars of true, genuine and authentic achievement. His respect for authority for example could be seen as letting himself be de-

pendent on others, something which many people would easily see as a weakness. Fr. Allamano however knew the secret power of humility. The importance of this virtue is made clear by Jesus when he puts it as a condition of entering heaven: I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of God (Mt. 18:3).

- Humility makes us to be loved by all. Everybody loves people who do not uplift themselves, and especially at the expense of others. Nobody likes people who make others feel as if they are not important or as if they don't belong in a given forum. The humble are loved by people of all categories, because humble people do not discriminate, or emphasize a given aspect that alienates others. Those who are humble are accepted by all.
- Humility raises what we do to an extra-ordinary level. It is the virtue of the saints. If a person does a good thing but he lacks humility, all the good done returns to waste. Humility raises ordinary activities to holiness, and lack of it makes even the good done to be seen as vice, because it becomes a show.
- Humility reveals the depth of the heart. It is the virtue which reveals the true intention of a person, and that way reveals his inner self.
- Humility makes us to be listened to. Even the most tough leader/superior will be disarmed by a humble request. If however one goes to the other asking for something as if demanding, even the most loving leader will think twice before granting the request. Humility makes us not only to be listened to but also to be understood even if we make mistakes.

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Aim at the transformation of the environment not only of the people

Fr. Allamano, aware that the environment influences or affects people positively or negatively, encouraged his missionaries to put effort in changing not only the people, but also the environment around them, or better, their situation. The catechism of the Catholic Church concurs with this in that in evaluating the morality of an action one has to look not only at the object (act done) and the intention for the action, but also the circumstances around it. In the gospel, there is an incident in which Jesus healed a man and thus touched him deeply. Although the man begged Jesus to allow him to join in his mission, Jesus refused, choosing to send the man at home to proclaim what the Lord had done for him (Lk. 8:26-40 [39]). Jesus knew that by doing so, the fellow would become a carrier of good news, create curiosity in the hearts of people to meet him (Jesus), and that way be a catalyst of change in his society. This shows that person can influence the surroundings, just as the surroundings can affect a person. Fr. Allamano in the fourth commandment expects us to see the wider picture. Although evangelization is the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, sometimes it demands improving the situations of the people if they are to benefit from the preaching. In other words, in addition to preaching to a person, sometimes it will be necessary to change the circumstances around which the person finds himself or herself.

For example, instead of just preaching to a hungry person, it is necessary to offer the person something to eat. This has three important benefits. First, by offering the person what he needs, we improve his disposition

to the preaching. That means the person becomes more attentive now that what was disturbing him is eliminated. He no longer just hears us speaking, but listens to us talking. Second, the person sees the hand of God through the people offering the help. In other words, through the generosity of those offering him help, the person sees God in action. For missionaries who are genuine, this must be the goal. The person should not be left seeing the giver of the food, clothes, money, etc. If that happens, especially intentionally, the missionary is just building a monument of pride and not evangelizing, since his goal is praise, recognition and popularity. That is what happens when missionaries build schools, Churches, and hospitals as a way of being noted. Even when building of schools, hospitals and other social amenities is done with a “good” motive, if that motive is not the reflection or announcement of Christ the pastor, then the propagators of that kind of human promotion are not different from Red Cross or other Non-Governmental Organization that offer humanitarian services. This means that when human promotion becomes or takes the place of evangelization, the alleged evangelization loses its goal. The goal of the missionary when doing human promotion should always be letting Christ shine through him. As such, human promotion is supposed to be a means through which evangelization is done. It should never be the goal of evangelization. Lastly, the other reason why it is necessary to improve the situation of a person whom we wish to preach to is that sometimes it heals the person spiritually. For example, a person who is stealing due to poverty, when he is helped to start a small business and trained how to run it profitably, he stops stealing. He is no longer a thief.

Furthermore, although to change the environment of a person is crucial for his conversion, it is also important to realize that sometimes changing the “environment

of the person” means changing the “environment in the person”. Certainly, eliminating poverty that causes people to steal, to do prostitution, to defraud others, etc., is important. However, sometimes it is more necessary to change the attitude of the people. By so doing, we change “the environment in” them. Many young people continue living in sin and crime because they are born and brought up in informal settlement (slums), but especially because they have not been helped to realize that they can too rise above their situation by first believing in themselves. This means that to convert such people one needs to go beyond seeing the sins and crimes they commit. One should also go beyond the fact that they are born in a milieu that is corrupting. The remedy in such situations usually is to free the person from himself, for example by making him believe that being born in a slum is not the end of the road. When this is done, the person’s eyes are opened to see possibilities he never saw before, helping him to relinquish a previously dormant energy to achieve goals he previously thought to have been impossible.

This commandment of Fr. Allamano therefore touches these two aspects: changing the environment in which people live and also changing the environment in them. The first aspect was implemented by the Missionaries through what came to be called the Consolata Method. It involved going in the villages to live with the people, educating them to read and write by building schools, and taking care of their health by building health centres. The second aspect was implemented by the missionaries through psychological and moral support. Today, it is normal for missionaries to evangelize through human promotion. At the beginning it was not that easy. The method that Consolata missionaries were using looked queer to many people, gradually however, it was accepted in the whole Church. Today, all people accept that it could be

waste of time to preach to a hungry or sick man, if you don't do anything to alleviate his suffering. It is through seeing the needs of the person and "sorting them out" that we make the man to realize that God acts through the people around him.

FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Be strong, manly and energetic in your apostolate

In the missionary apostolate, like life in general, great spiritual gifts only are not enough to confront and solve difficulties; there is the need to add to ourselves that energy and that fantasy that come directly from the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. This does not mean that the spiritual gifts are useless. On the contrary, even the goal of becoming spiritually upright means a certain degree of struggle and effort. The commandment only reminds us that it is not enough to be prayerful, or meditative if that's the far we can go. The Virgin Mary demonstrated this by not just praying for Elizabeth, but by going to visit her. Most of the time, it is easy to sit down and pray without doing much. The true authenticity of those prayers appears when we are able to do concrete deeds that take our time, energy and sometimes even money.

The fruit of that prayerfulness and holiness should be clear in the day to day life, in the choices we make, in our relationship with others and with God. This is another way of saying that faith without action is dead (Jas. 2:14-26). Even Jesus demonstrated that by not only teaching, but also healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and raising the dead. This is another way of saying, good intentions, good will and good resolutions may be good, but if they are not concretely put into action through service, sacrifice and self-giving, they only remain as such - good

intentions. Of course, this is the most difficult part of being a Christian, yet it is the standard through which the genuineness of our religiosity is measured. Fr. Allamano, knowing the kind of environment his missionaries were to work, he demanded that even the Sisters were supposed ‘to be manly’. In other words, Fr. Allamano knew that missionary life was never meant for weaklings. Even today, missionary life requires people to be strong, because the challenges of language, cultural shock, food, different climatic conditions, situations of war and scarcity of basic needs, etc., are not theoretical realities. These are real life situations that need a strong will to confront them and to remain focused on achieving the intended goal. This is where being strong is a real treasure.

SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Be reservoirs and not canals of spiritual gifts, canals and not reservoirs of material gifts

Fr. Allamano says we should be reservoirs as far as spiritual gifts are concerned, but canals as far as material things are concerned. Reservoirs are containers, which accumulate something, while canals are conduits through which something passes. Fr. Allamano wants us to be pools, sources, or fountains of spiritual gifts. In other words, we are supposed to be full of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: love, peace, kindness... because “the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” (Lk. 6:45). That way we can be able to offer them to others. Being spiritual reservoirs means having the capacity to edify the people of God with what we possess. It means being spiritually rich and therefore having much of what the third person of the Trinity offers. Fr. Allamano does not wish us to be canals of spiritual gifts, because that would mean passing them to others while remaining untouched. In addition, a canal is tiny thing com-

pared to a reservoir. As such, the canal has nothing much to offer. It only communicates its contents, ending up dry when nothing flows from the reservoir. The problem of not being a reservoir is that soon we become dry. And woe to us if we have nothing to offer as missionaries! Our identity remains just the name. The biggest problem with being just canals of spiritual gifts is that the risk of drying up raises the possibility of turning into reservoirs of other things. The space that should have spiritual gifts is easily taken by other competing things, turning what was a canal into reservoirs of other things.

Our founder warns us about being reservoirs of material things, because that means being low or empty of spiritual gifts. The problem of material things is that they are like salty water: the more we drink the thirstier we become. As a result, existence turns into a cyclic event of consuming without getting satisfied. Consequently, one falls into consumerism; in the accumulation and assimilation of worldly goods without limit and without filling the human emptiness, but instead creating larger space and hunger for more things, for apparently better things, for deceptively greater things, for seemingly more sweet things, for more sleek goods, etc.

This is the reason Bd. Allamano always said that as Consolata Missionaries, we should be reservoirs of spiritual goods. In other words, we should be pools of such goods. It is another way of saying that we should be rich in spiritual gifts. The world today seems to have a great deficiency of spiritual gifts. Pope John Paul II used to say that the world has wars because of wars in our beings. He also said that desertification is increasing in the world because of the spiritual desertification in the hearts of people. It may appear as if the pope was just giving a poetic lecture to the world, but experience has shown that before battles begin anywhere, the relationship of people

in that area goes bad. Before a man raises his hand to slap another, everything begins inside him as anger. That is exactly why Jesus said “it is that which comes out of the heart of a person that makes him unclean” (Mt. 15:10-20). So, spiritual dryness has adverse effects.

Instead of being reservoirs of material goods, our Founder said that we should be canals of material things. In other words, no matter how much money or property that passes our hands, we should not be pools but only conduits that pass them to the right use. This is another way of reminding us to be detached from material things that “dirtify” people’s names and reputations, eventually ruining their character and destiny. Becoming reservoirs of material goods is a recipe for down fall - not because money is bad, but because money opens rivers of temptations that few can withstand.

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Do good well without noise

Doing good means helping others using not just the heart (in which it is not about an emotion of the moment), but also with intelligence, fantasy, intuition and critical sense. It is useless to limit oneself to feeding the hungry without denouncing the economic system that provokes the situation that oppresses them. In this commandment, there are 3 important things to note.

(a) Do good

In the heart of every man there is a voice that says “do good and avoid evil”. That is the voice of conscience. It is the voice of God in each person. It is a voice which guides us before we do any action, and judges us after we have done it. For that voice to be able to guide us well

however, we need to form our consciences so that they may alert us when we are about to do a bad thing. Only a well-formed conscience can guide a person well. Not forming one's conscience when he has the possibility is a sin, because that is the beginning of spiritual blindness, and all the consequences that follow.

All the effort of the Church in the world is aimed at forming the hearts (conscience) of the people, so that they may make informed choices - because only that way can people become transformative agents in the society they live in. We form our consciences through the word of God, the sacraments, spiritual reading, spiritual direction, Christian formation and catechesis, etc. with the aim of making them points of departure in doing good. We can only do good if we are good inside. Jesus said a bad tree cannot produce good fruits (Mt. 7:15-20). We have to begin being good inside and doing good will become natural to us.

(b) Well

It is one thing to do good, and another to do it well. Doing good is ordinary to every person - but doing it well depicts goodness in the doer. In other words, it is common place for people to do good because they don't want to be blamed, criticized or punished for doing bad. Only truly good people do good well. In fact, doing good well is a revelation of who a person is. Doing good well is therefore a window into the mind and heart of a person. It is a pointer to the serenity of the person, the gratitude of the person to God and to others and the self-acceptance and appreciation that one has for himself. It is another way of saying "I am not that rotten inside to produce bad things; I know God created me good so I can't let him down by producing what is evil; I know that I am what I

am because somebody somewhere has done well what he was supposed to do,...”. Doing good well is the vocation of Christians, for when God was creating in the beginning, he saw that “all was good”.

If we believe strongly in that fact of having been created good, then we can affirm that it would be inappropriate to claim or even think that people choose deliberately to do what is not good. The goodness in us would help us to see the good in others and in what they do – for people see in others what is in themselves. Even as insist on doing good, we should not forget that the human being is a complicated creature. In truth, no one wakes up in the morning and decides to be a drunkard, rapist, killer, liar, etc. Even those who end up so start life with blessed dreams of greatness and holiness. St. Paul gives us a glimpse of how complicated we are when he says that the things that he didn’t want to do were the ones he found himself doing, and the things he would have wanted to do were the ones he was finding difficult to do. In other words, he had discovered the inward struggle that many of us never admit. This is what he wrote to the Roman:

¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.^[a] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me (Rom. 7:15-22)

This assertion tells us that first, if it is not automatic to do the good, it is even more difficult to do it well. Second, it tells us that we should not be quick to judge those who are not able to do the good well. Probably, if we understood the struggle within them to get things right (a struggle that we would have readily admitted if we were honest) we would pray for them and help them instead of condemning them. It is certainly that kind of understanding that saw Jesus embrace people that the society had already give up about them and most probably even written them off. Fr. Allamano's call is to use the basic goodness in us to do what is good well.

(c) *Without noise*

People can do good well, but it is only the righteous man who does it silently. It is the upright man who does not need to sound a trumpet of his good deeds. It is the virtuous man who knows that God is a father “who sees all that is done in secret” (Mt. 6:5,6). Bd. Allamano added this part to tell us that we should not be showy, because it destroys all the good done. Doing good with a lot of noise is a pointer to pride. Fr. Allamano was categorical about this: it was not his style to announce, publicize, and advertise every good act. If the Founder resurrected today, probably he would be shocked back to death. We, his missionaries are advertising even the basic duties we do. Lay people produce children and educate them silently, but we announce every little act we do in the missionary field throughout the web. Certainly, we are in the era of communication, and it is appropriate to disseminate information. However, when the informing becomes too loud, it is no longer Christ who is proclaimed but ourselves. The noise is a bad sign. The fact that we announce and advertise everything we do in the internet raise fundamental

questions. Could it be a sign that we have grown a very low self-esteem to an extent that we have to be affirmed by others through what we do? Could it be a sign that we know what we do is below standard, and that is why we try to pamper it up to increase its fake quality? Could it also be an insult to others in the sense that we do not believe they are wise enough to know what is of value or quality, until noise is made over it? In other words, these questions could go on and on, but the truth is that when noise is made even after a good piece of work, the authenticity of the work is destroyed.

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

Search for God only and his holy will

Whatever does not begin from or does not lead us to God soon or later falls. Fr. Allamano founded 2 missionary institutes and did great work because he always tried to look for the will of God and not his own. Jesus taught many times that he did not come to do his own will, but the will of his Father (Jn. 6:38). The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that God created us to search him, know him, love him and serve him, so that at the end of time we may live with him. It is the will of God that at the end of time we may reign with him. Although we have already said something about the will of God, it is important to note that Fr. Allamano was very choosy in wording these commandments. This commandment speaks of “searching” God and his will. People do not search for something that is self-evident. We search for things that are hidden, obscure or shrouded by a mystery.

Even naturally, when we talk about the will of a person we imply also his plans, intentions, desires, consent, etc. These are not things that are open to us at the moment we meet a person. The intentions as well as the

desires of a person are hidden in his heart. In other words, the will of a person and all it entails is an interior thing. That means that it is not easy to know the will of a person unless the person reveals it to us or the will gets revealed to us in some way. If knowing the will of a human person is difficult, imagine knowing the will of God! We are not therefore mistaken to say that the will of God is a very complex issue, no wonder Fr. Allamano uses the word “search”. There are many reasons that make the issue of the will of God to be complex. First, we never meet God in person as we meet one another in the streets. This means that knowing the will of such an “elusive” person, who exists in a realm we have no experience of is not easy.

The second reason why knowing the will of God is hard is that it requires believing that first of all God exists and secondly that he continues acting and relating with creation. The entrance of the aspect of faith complicates the whole matter more, because faith matters defy our celebrated rational view of reality and our scientific experimentations. Third, the complexity about the will of God is also due to the fact that even when we think about it we use our criteria to discern it and therefore we risk seeing our plans, intentions and decisions as the will of God. Simply put, it is possible to attribute our own plans, decisions and intentions to the will of God, especially because God never appears to dismiss or affirm our claims. This also means that it is possible to take advantage of the silence of God to promote our agenda as the will of God. It is also possible to believe in fate in the name of believing in the will of God. For example, when things go on well we say that it is the will of God. But also when tragedies strike whether due to natural disasters, human error or technical breakdown, etc, we say it is the will of God, because if it was not the will of God the tragedy would not

have taken place.

In other words, it is possible also to attribute whatever happens in life to the will of God as a way of bringing the fears of the uncertainties of life into perspective and calming ourselves. In as much as this works is consoling us and giving us hope, it is important to be aware that if our attribution is only an ascription it amounts to self-deception. Lastly, knowing the will of God is difficult because since God does not appear in person to us, he speaks to us through mediums. We believe for example that God speaks to us through the people around us, through histories of our lives, through daily events, through his word, through his chosen people in the Church, etc. These are means through which God speaks to us. To be able to speak about the will of God, we must first of all *believe* and be convinced that they represent God, or better that he, God, acts in and through them. Only then can we start speaking of and looking for his will. If that confidence and certainty is not there, the mediums become sterile and the idea of the will of God becomes futile. The problem becomes murkier when we imagine that our belief in those mediums may be mistaken, and that at the end of it all there is no measure of how true our convictions in the mediums can be guaranteed with certitude. That leaves us even more lost in the maze of confusion than ever.

Aware of the difficulty that knowing the will of God entails, Fr. Allamano chose the shortest route: surrendering before the divine being. According to him, simple faith is enough (SL. 175): the belief in the divine good, its personal concern for us and its ability to intervene for the good regardless of our situation. The Founder does not beat about the bush. He knows that “intellectualization” of the will of God and in fact of God himself leads to confusion and skepticism. This is why the Founder said, “those who begin to doubt everything, little by little

come to doubt even matters of faith... This tendency to doubt things may lead to heresy” (SL. 176). Even today from heaven, Fr. Allamano tells us categorically that “the will of God for us is that we become saints” (SL. 173), and simplicity is needed to believe that. The tendency of our time to question everything is destructive. It creates cracks in serious things by destroying the demanded disposition of man before the supreme being: humility. Our inquisitive nature which doubts even the existence of the creator makes us proud and arrogant even to an extent of questioning the obvious: the existence of the world as a caused entity. The Consolata Missionary according to Fr. Allamano should not therefore struggle with the obvious. While others engage in those never-ending debates, our faith should be simple: God created us out of love, he wishes us well, and he is ready to help us to achieve it. On our part, we should trust that he knows what he is doing, put ourselves in his hands and live trustingly that he will lead us to that which he created us for.

Even then, the search of the will of God does not become easy. This is because, it means trusting fully, completely and totally that God will act in our life. It means not manipulating or maneuvering our way to achieve anything. A student who searches the will of God will study and pray and then go to the exam believing that whatever results come out, will be the will of God. He will not cheat in the exam in order to get a certain grade. A woman who believes and searches the will of God will not trick a man into marriage, nor use crooked ways to end up in a happy marriage. A man who is looking for a job will not bribe to be given the chance if he is searching that which God wishes for him (i.e. his will). He will prepare for the interview and pray then go for the interview believing that if it is the will of God to get the job, he will definitely get it.

Unfortunately, as human beings, many of the good

outcomes of our efforts that we call the will of God are a result of our manipulation and maneuvering of the system and the people involved. People cheat in exams, get good grade that promote them to higher learning and say it is through the will of God that they have achieved that chance of higher learning when they actually know the trick they used. Many do the same to get job promotions, happy marriages, valuable properties, etc., and once they have achieved their dream, they proclaim everywhere that their achievements are the results of the will of God. This explains why searching the will of God is not a walk in the park. It means doing everything honestly from the means to the intentions, and doing so everywhere and always. The difficulty of this is what makes us realize that we cannot just walk into the kingdom of God. In other words, we need the grace of God to achieve anything worthwhile because by ourselves we cannot make it. This was why Fr. Allamano said in this commandment that we have to keep searching for God and his will. Our existence is a life-long search for God and his will amid many things that present themselves. It is in finding God and his will that one can be sure of having found a treasure. This is also easier said than done, but the struggle is worth it.

NINTH COMMANDMENT

Give holiness priority in everything

Every time we talk of holiness the words that come in our minds include purity, integrity of moral character, freedom from sin, sanctity. But what is Holiness? Holiness is the fact of being set apart from what is common. It is to be different or unique from the world or from the rest. Although most of the time holiness is associated with moral uprightness, in truth it is not much about doing right or wrong but being set apart. Per se, holiness be-

longs to God (Isa 6:3), because he is the only one who is set apart from creation. In other words, he is the one who is separated from all that is human and earthly. However, holiness can also apply to people, things and even places. For example, Aaron was set apart (1 Chron. 23:13) and so were all the priests, kings and prophets. The room in which the ark of the tabernacle was kept was holy (Lev. 16:1-2) and so was the whole temple as a place of worship. Similarly, the ground on which Moses stood on the mountain when God appeared to him as a burning bush was holy (Ex. 3:1-6). In other words, holiness applies also to earthly things, but always in so far as they are associated with God. That is to say, that all these become holy when God who is set apart from creation sets them apart. For us religious, holiness expresses a relation which consists negatively in separation from the common use, and positively in dedication to the service of God. God wishes us to be as holy as himself. This is why he says “be holy for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44; 19:2).

Fr. Allamano spoke about holiness all the time. In fact, if there is something that our Founder repeated all his life was the fact that we are called to be holy. Our Founder’s call that we should be holy is not a misguided impossible demand for his missionaries. In truth, his call is scriptural. St. Paul tells us the same: it is the will of God that you grow in holiness (1 Thes 4:3). It is on this ground that our Founder hooks his desire to have holy missionaries. Although Fr. Allamano says that actual holiness is not a requirement for entrance to the religious life, (SL. 90), he points out that once in the institute, the first goal is to look for holiness. In fact, according to Fr. Allamano, holiness is our first obligation, the first goal our vocation, and the first means of apostolic work. (SL. 91). This means that first, it is a duty to be holy in the Institute, second, it is the aim of our vocation to be holy, and lastly, the

acquired holiness becomes a tool through which we can perform our missionary apostolate effectively. As such, Fr. Allamano presents the second goal of our Institute as working for the holiness of other people, through our own holiness (SL. 85).

Even with the duty of working for other people's holiness, Fr. Allamano was categorical that our holiness takes precedence in everything we do. That is why he advised us that we should not sacrifice our own holiness in order to save others. If as a missionary in the process of helping others one falls in the danger of losing his own holiness, then he should pull back (SL. 87). This explains this ninth commandment of Fr. Allamano. Our holiness should be the priority in all we do – not saving others, making their lives to be comfortable or even worse making ourselves mediocre missionaries. To the Founder, the way to attain holiness was as clear as ABC. Aware that holiness cannot be separated from relationship with God, Fr. Allamano noted that to be we need three things: having a constant will, trusting God and training one's character. In other words, the Founder knew that holiness is not something for the fainthearted. It is a crown obtained through consistent struggling. Second, he was also aware that we cannot make ourselves holy, because as limited and weak being we need God's help if we are to make any headway. That is why the founder said we must trust in God to attain holiness. Lastly, our founder also knew that holiness cannot be separated from one's character. In other words, holiness is not a fruit of "turning chapels into bedrooms".

Certainly, prayer as communication with God is indispensable to attain holiness, but one's character is similarly essential. Prayer no matter how honest it is cannot take the place of a person's character. The character of a person is the totality of what he is inside. It is what

we are in the eyes of God. Note that we are not talking about reputation, which is what people think we are (and which could be very different from what we really are!). Here we emphasize about the character. When the inside is fine the outside radiates the goodness from the inside of the person. The inside of a person is always hidden in his conscience where all intentions reside. A good person inside is one who does all things for the right reason. Such a person does not fear the opinions of others, because he is a person of integrity. In other words, a person who knows no duplicity. One who will still remain true to his character even in private. Such a person is honest, transparent and genuine in everything even when no one is watching him. That type of a person can be said to be holy. This is why Fr. Allamano insisted that holiness consisted in two things: to do nothing bad and to do much good possible (SL. 95). When it is attained, holiness keeps the wrong at a distance, produces the good, and inclines us to what is right.

TENTH COMMANDMENT

Never say that it is not my duty

Naturally, different people are gifted differently, and there is a tendency that people are comfortable working where they feel inclined to. It is of course understandable that when one works in what happens to be his inclination there is a natural force not only to give the best of himself, but also to do the given duty well. Aware of this, and the fact that in the missions missionaries are not likely to find only what they love, Fr. Allamano insisted that missionaries should not be choosy or indifferent to certain responsibilities. Obviously, the superior must uphold our Founder's idea, but they must also be aware the opposite fact: if one works where he does not fit there is a danger of

killing the person's self-giving capacity, his effectiveness in the mission, the expected outcome of the task he is doing, and the expected harmonious coexistence of the person with his confreres and the people he serves. This does not however give any missionary the right to be choosy.

Although Fr. Allamano lived in a different time from ours, many of his exhortations are as valid as ever. Sure, we live in a time that emphasizes privacy and separation of powers, but Fr. Allamano's well-intentioned advice remains crucial. Speaking to seminarians, the Founder once said, "Don't say I am not made for this. Nonsense, you are made for everything. If one despises nothing, in the end he will be a good missionary" (SL. 159). It is therefore not difficult to see what Fr. Allamano demands in his tenth commandment.

First, the Founder wants us to see that no one should despise a responsibility because it appears lowly. To the seminarians he in fact added "everything is useful, from sweeping the floor to reading St. Thomas". We may say that the Founder is cautioning us against despising some duties in the community. Of course, that has its effect: if we despise a given duty, the possibility that we also despise the people who do that duty is very high. And how would a community or Region go on well if some people feel despised due to the duties they do? Certainly, that becomes the beginning of discrimination. It is also the source of a negative attitude of missionaries towards certain responsibilities. It is the foundation of constant lamentations by the affected missionaries.

Second, our Founder calls for openness for duties, or simply availability. The possibility that the Institute will always have people for everything is very slim. As such, some duties will require not expertise but good will and readiness to try one's best. That attitude is very positive. The availability of persons in given duties, not only

show a good will for the common good, but also the spirit of learning. That is why the Founder told the seminarians that everything is useful for the missions. He was sure that if availability is coupled with adaptability, anyone can learn anything and end up performing exceptionally well. This explains why Fr. Allamano ensured that before the missionaries left Turin, they had a myriad of technical skills for practical purposes. They were of course not experts in all the fields, but the simple preparation in everything gave them the capacity to adapt anywhere, to improvise when it was necessary, and to be able to live fairly comfortable amidst scarcity of essential things.

Lastly, Fr. Allamano in the tenth commandment hits especially on indifference: the attitude of not caring for something because it is not directly under one's call of duty. To Fr. Allamano, such a mindset is not only wrong but it also amounts to sin. This is because, saying something is not one's duty means that even if he has the capacity, time and energy to do it he is not ready to offer the same. Fr. Allamano's sentiments were not just his own. They were evangelical. One time, Jesus told his disciples that there was a lot of harvest, but that there were a few labourers. He went on to say, "pray then that the owner of the vineyard may send people in his own farm" (Mt. 9:35-38). If a farm belongs to someone else it is usually his business to decide what to do and when to do it. For Jesus to tell the disciples to pray so that the owner of the vineyard may send workers in his vineyard, it meant that they could not just fold their hands indifferently when things were not working. They too had to do something even if it meant only to pray.

Essentially, Jesus meant that having called them and made them partakers of his mission, they were now sons of the owner of the vineyard. As such, the vineyard was theirs too, because what is God's belongs also to his

sons (Lk. 15:31). This is why Jesus insisted that they had all the rights to get concerned that there were no labourers in the vineyard when the harvest was already ready. The tenth commandment of Fr. Allamano reminds us that if we have a strong sense of belonging in the congregation, we will not ignore things that are not working just because they are not directly under us. Instead, we will feel pain when money and other resources that are painfully earned by the benefactors and given to us are getting wasted in lights that are not turned off, in water that is running for no apparent reason, in useless trips and holidays, in unnecessary projects whose viability is not guaranteed, etc. May the Founder inspire us to be alert to all that needs to be done.

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Many are the new interesting insights, expressed with live images, intelligent considerations and philosophical support.



Fr. Jonah M. Makau is a Consolata Missionary from Kenya. He was born in 1978 in Machakos. He studied Philosophy in the Consolata Institute, affiliated to the Urbaniana University (Roma). He studied theology

in Tangaza College of Catholic University of Eastern Africa. He got a masters in pastoral theology in Salesian University, Turin (Italy). Currently he is in charge of the initial stage of the Consolata Missionaries formation in Tanzania.