

## BLESSED JOSEPH ALLAMANO AS A FORMATOR

Sources: Fr. L. Sales, IMC: Biography of Canon J. Allamano, in Italian  
Fr. I. Tubaldo, IMC: Talk given to an International Meeting of IMC Formators  
of Novitiates and Major Seminaries (1983), in Italian  
Fr. F. Pavese, IMC: "Formazione al Carisma dell'Istituto"  
in "Quaderni di Formazione", No. 2 (1990).

### 1. FOR DIOCESAN CLERGY

a) As "ASSISTENTE" [First Prefect/Assistant Rector]:

He was appointed in Nov. 1873, 2 months after his Ordination, 1 month after beginning attendance at the Pastoral Institute ["Convitto Ecclesiastico"].

Two rules were given him by Archbishop Gastaldi:

i) Have great charity and never use harsh words which might offend a young man or make him think that the superior does not respect him. To correct a person does not mean to reprove or chastise...

ii) Never allow any fault to go uncorrected (in so far as human prudence permits) in the same way as a music teacher does not allow a false note to pass unnoticed on the pretext that it is of little importance. By no means! You are called to do good in a part of the Church that is very much alive. See that you give it all the attention its importance demands. Above all pray for your seminarians...  
He remained in office for 3 years.

Both superiors and seminarians were happy with him because of the dedication with which he followed the seminarians and of his kind manners...

b) As SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR (which meant more than now: a kind of formator, too):

He was appointed in Nov. 1876 ("No" to his desire for parish work!). He remained in office for 4 years. JUSTITIA AND PAX OSCULATAE SUNT [Justice and Peace have kissed one another]; this is what the seminarians used to say about Can. Soldati (the Rector) and Fr. Allamano; or a father (Can. Soldati) and a mother (Fr. Allamano).

FORTITER IN PRINCIPIIS ET SUAVITER IN MODIS [Firm in principles and gentle in manners].

He noticed everything and everybody, but he always intervened with fatherly loving care..., like "another Christ who was preparing his disciples for their apostolate" (Bishop Ressa of Mondovì).

c) At the PASTORAL INSTITUTE ["Convitto Ecclesiastico"]:

Having gone to the Consolata Shrine in 1880, he reopened the "Convitto" in 1882 and remained in charge of it till his death (1926). He followed up the newly-ordained priests and tried to be with them as much as possible (especially before he got involved in the founding of our Missionary Institute).

He provided a formation (to complete the one of the Seminary) that was practical and suitable to the needs of the time: not only Moral (that included Pastoral), Ascetical and Mystical Theology, but also Social Studies, Catholic Action (Lay Apostolate), etc. (open to the new developments in society...).

Same method as in the Seminary:

Never allow a fault to go uncorrected, but correct it with great charity.

Testimonies: "Great goodness, but not weakness!"

"We had to be faithful to our duties; otherwise he could make himself heard..."

"He wanted sincerity; then he was ready to forgive many things..."

Appreciations by young priests:

"The best educator of young priests who could be desired."

"He had all the qualities of a good educator of the clergy, and these qualities captivated our hearts."

"He truly was the VIR SAPIENS, the Wise Man who attentively observed everything and everybody and came to know deeply each one of us."

## **2. For the I.M.C. (his Missionaries)**

### **a) CONVICTIONS**

i) Awareness and conviction that it was up to him and nobody else to form his missionaries. He took this as a responsibility he could not avoid, because given him by the Lord...

"I am the one you must listen to, I and the ones I assign to guide you; nobody else can or should interfere or give advice..."

"The form you should take in this Institute is the one Our Lord inspired and continues to inspire in me..." (Conference of 2/3/1902).

He carried on this responsibility of his throughout his life.

ii) Value of the person: people are more important than anything else (material possessions, organization, etc.).

Consequence: person-to-person relationship he established with each and all the members...

In 24 years he directly and personally admitted 360 people (Fathers and Brothers); 239 (2/3rds) of these became members of the Institute (with promises or vows); of these 239, later 35 left and 7 died.

At the end of 1925, the professed members were 197. He personally followed each one of them (even if, since 1910, he had also all the Sisters to look after... )

In this ongoing, hidden and personal work he gave the best of himself (see testimonies below).

### **b) MEANS OF FORMATION**

i) Personal interviews and admission of Aspirants

He cordially spoke to the young people and their parents, who remained quite impressed by his personality and manners.

Many testimonies available, e. g.:

Br. B. Falda: "The Founder wrapped me in that smile of his..."

Fr. V. Merlo Pick: "I was profoundly impressed by his venerable aspect, his smile and the kindness with which he came towards us and greeted us"

ii) Personal encounters (meetings) at the Consolata Shrine or in the Mother House.

Fr. L. Sales: "It never happened... that one would not be received by him... A few words from him settled everything. The way he pronounced them, his gestures, his look penetrated the depths of our hearts".

It was easy to approach him. The encounters were spontaneous; no bureaucracy. The young men in formation received hope and courage, and renewed good will to persevere.

Fr. L. Sales (again): "His hand on our shoulder and the words, "AVANTI (in Domino)", i.e., Keep going, or COURAGE produced marvels..."

Fr. V. Sandrone (Vice Superior General for some years): "With short sentences, mostly taken from Scripture, but pronounced in his resolute way, he summarized our dialogues with him, stimulating

and encouraging us: e.g., “NUNC COEPI” [I begin now – again]; I want to become a saint; “AGE QUOD AGIS” [Do well what you do]; See God in everything and everybody; etc.

iii) Confidential letters and written resolutions of Annual Retreats

Each Seminarian, at any level of formation, was free to write to the Founder any time he wished to do so. The Founder would answer orally, or at the bottom of the letter itself. Also here, a few words only, but always very meaningful. He used these letters as a means of personal formation.

Everybody was supposed to write to him on the occasion of St. Joseph's Solemnity (his Feast-day, or name-day!). At any other time it was free. And he would answer all the letters!

Written resolutions of Annual Retreats: He would collect them at the end of the retreat and take them to the Consolata Shrine. Then he would give them back with comments, approval, and also "amendments" (at times...): another means of formation! He would then recall the resolutions (that he wanted PRACTICAL) along the year, and encourage to persevere (NUNC COEPI!).

iv) Sunday Conferences

Fr. Allamano had the ability to affect the individual people even when speaking to the community. This was possible because of his deep interpersonal relationship with each one of his listeners, and also because his talks were based on experience, facts, events, etc. They were a communication of life more than just truths, notions, or news... Everyone felt as if he were considered and challenged personally and individually.

On Sunday those who lived in the Mother-House were eagerly awaiting for him, more than for what he would say! Some testimonies:

"His presence for us was a joy..."

"As children around a loving and loved father, we listened to the words that were flowing from his heart, without any effort..."

"We were enchanted by his words."

"How much did we long for those moments that, unfortunately, were always too short for us!"

Fr. Alfredo Ponti, IMC, on 29 January 1976, wrote as follows:

“There was nothing severe in him unless it was demanded by very serious reasons, nothing rigid either. Indeed, on the contrary, he was capable of softening everything. He was able to render pleasant and lovable even those things that apparently ought to have been harsh and unpleasant. Above all, he was able to understand the hearts of his children... None of us who every Sunday listened to his words has ever found his talks hard, or his theories narrow-minded, because we were witnesses to the fact that, in his life, everything he did was done kindly and lovingly, so much so that even the most unpleasant truths were told us in that affable and paternal tone which he habitually used” (from Candido Bona, Fr. Joseph Allamano, a master of missionary life and a father of missionaries, pp. 65-66).

v) Missionaries in the field (plus those in the army during World War I)

Diaries and letters: When considering Fr. Allamano as a formator, people usually focus only on what he did in Turin. But his care and concern went out also to those sons of his who were far away, in the mission lands (or in the army...).

He kept in touch with them by means of the personal diaries they were supposed to write, and by means of letters. He could thus follow step by step the missionary life of each one of his sons. In the letters he wrote in reply to those received from his missionaries far away, he appears as the loving father and the experienced spiritual director he was: he encouraged and guided them, felt free also to correct them (at times...), but always as the human and understanding father he was.

He loved them and they knew and felt it; so, they would accept everything from him.

Here are some examples from his letters:

i) To Br. Benedetto Falda (who was in Kenya) on 3 February 1904:

“It often seems to me that I see you entering my office and we have a friendly chat ... Do I wish I could see you!... But I see you and talk to you in the Lord and at the Altar of our Consolata, to whom I pray that you may persevere in the great grace [the vocation] you have received. Remember that this is a sad world, and that there is suffering everywhere [...]. Have courage always, and be joyful in the Lord: play [your mandolin] and sing when attacked by melancholy.

I imagine that the Rev. Fr. F. Perlo has already passed on to you my congratulations for your good work at the sawmill; now I congratulate you personally. With this work you will be of great usefulness to our missions; and Our Lord has sent you there specifically for this purpose: to cooperate in the conversion of those poor people.

I liked your diaries, especially your candour and frankness. Keep going always like this, remembering that you are speaking to a father who loves you tenderly in Jesus, and does not read them to anybody else, except what is not confidential...

Your family is well and they remember you, especially your mother who comes to see me [at times]”. (from Giuseppe Allamano, “Lettere ai Missionari e alle Missionarie della Consolata”, pp. 53-54)

ii) To some other missionaries:

“Don’t be sad and discouraged: do the good you can, even if you would like to do more”.

“Take care of yourself, and don’t try to do too much, taking unwise risks. Don’t do so much as to spoil your health”.

“Your health is necessary for the good of the missions; so, I beg you to take good care of it, not exposing yourself to too much fatigue and hardships; be content with doing what you can”.

### c) FATHERLY LOVE

This was the foundation, the source, the roots of all that has been said above.

Fr. Allamano began to experience a sense of fatherhood towards his missionaries even before they were founded. It began in 1891 (as he started working for the foundation) and continued to grow with time. At the end of a letter to Bishop Perlo (27/1/1904), he wrote: "Many best wishes to all my dear missionaries for whom alone I now live here on earth."

Fr. Alfredo Ponti, IMC, wrote: “I remember one evening at Tosamaganga (Tanzania), when a dreadful thunder-storm was raging over us and I sought refuge in the room of Fr. Nazareno Prina to wait for the storm to subside. I remember that almost spontaneously our talk turned to the happy years of our youth when we were studying together at the Motherhouse, when our religious family was still small and we all formed a single united family. It was natural that our conversation should turn towards him who had been the bond, the support and the guide of our family, our beloved father, our Founder. We talked about every aspect of him, his life, his kindness towards us, his great understanding and our happiness at being able to live with him. We did not forget our little adventures of those years, and apparent difficulties, and our long ascent, always supported by his comforting words, inexhaustible patience and charity, and by his constant encouragement. In the end, as if by tacit agreement, we fell into a lengthy and prolonged silence. We noticed that both of us had tears in our eyes. The vivid memory of our beloved father had touched both of us, and it was my fellow-priest who, while dismissing me, said, ‘He was truly a father. He was our father, and we never had another one like him’”. (from Candido Bona, Fr. Joseph Allamano, a master of missionary life and a father of missionaries, pp. 64-65).

The highest expression of his fatherly love is found in his testament where he could write: "... for you I have lived many years and I have consumed my possessions, my health and my life...!"

What Fr. Allamano did as a "formator" was a manifestation of his fatherhood, and in this sense is unique and unrepeatable. In his work of formation he was giving not only notions, theories, but he

was giving himself. It was his way of being and behaving that inspired trust in the young men he was forming. Bd. Allamano formed them in a loving and serene way by being a father and a guide who aimed at a very high degree of spiritual intensity, of holiness, in view of MISSION!

(compiled by Fr. John Bonanomi, IMC)