



**JOSEPH ALLAMANO**

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# **JOSEPH ALLAMANO**

**FOUNDER OF THE CONSOLATA  
FATHERS, BROTHERS AND SISTER**

**A SHORT BIOGRAPHY**

**Fr. Francesco Pavese IMC**

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*Joseph Allamano, the fourth of five children, was born on January 21, 1851 in Castelnuovo d’Asti the hometown of Sts. Joseph Cafasso and John Bosco. His father died when he was not yet three years old and his mother, Maria Anna Cafasso – the sister of the saint – was the major influence on his life. Allamano followed in the footsteps of his uncle, St. Joseph and devoted himself to clergy training. He was, like his uncle, a man of exceptional piety; it was often said he was “Cafasso returned” and “an almost perfect copy of his great uncle and predecessor.”*

## **DON BOSCO**

Allamano finished elementary school in 1862 and that autumn entered the Salesian Oratory in Valdocco where his regular confessor was Don Bosco himself. After completing four years of middle school studies at the Oratory he felt called to the diocesan priesthood and left Valdocco for the seminary in Turin. Don Bosco may have thought Allamano would enter his own congregation and gently reproved him: “You hurt my feelings – you left without even saying goodbye.” Allamano responded timidly: “I didn’t have the nerve ...” He felt great affection for Don Bosco all his life long and did not want to displease him.

## **THE DIOCESAN SEMINARY**

His decision to enter the diocesan seminary met with unforeseen opposition in his own family. His brothers and not his mother were opposed to this idea. They were not so much against a priestly vocation but they wanted him to attend the liceo pubblico (high school) before going off to the seminary. Young Joseph was firm and told his brothers: “The Lord is calling me now ... I don’t know if he will still be calling me in two or three years.” In 1866 he entered the seminary. From his first year as a seminarian there were signs of the poor health that would afflict him throughout his life – at times his physical frailty was a genuine threat but on the whole his seminary experience was very positive. Msgr. G.B. Ressa, later the Bishop of Mondovì, was a classmate.



Speaking about Allamano he said: “He was the first of our class – and not just alphabetically; he was first in studies, virtue, gentleness and generosity. Every one of us realized that he was closest to the heart of Jesus, he was Jesus’ closest friend – no one of us would have dared to challenge this.”

### **FORMING SEMINARIANS**

On September 20, 1873, Allamano was ordained to the priesthood. He wanted very much to be involved in pastoral ministry but instead was assigned to the seminary first as an assistant (1873-1876) and then as spiritual director (1876-1880). Allamano had very different plans. When the Archbishop, Msgr. Lorenzo Gastaldi, gave him this assignment he objected respectfully: “I had hoped to be an assistant pastor and maybe later a parish priest in some little village...” The Archbishop responded kindly, “You wanted to be a parish priest? If this is all that’s bothering you – I’m giving you the most important parish in the diocese: the seminary!”

As a formator of candidates for the priesthood he was distinguished by the firmness of his principles and the gentleness with which he put these principles into action. Everyone recognized his excellent as an educator: he was a genuine “master of clergy formation.” At this same time he continued his own studies and on July 30, 1876 the Turin Theological Faculty awarded him a doctorate in theology and on June 12, 1877 university teaching credentials. He was later appointed an associate member of the Canon and Civil Law faculty; subsequently he became the president of both of these faculties.



**The Seminarian Allamano: p. 4.**

**Allamano, spiritual Director in the Seminary, at 29: p. 5.**

## RECTOR OF THE CONSOLATA SANCTUARY

In October 1880 he was appointed Rector of the Consolata Sanctuary in Turin and from that time until his death all his work took place at the Archdiocese's Marian sanctuary. This new assignment was not an easy one for the 29-year old priest. He later told of his conversation with the Archbishop: "Bishop, I am too young for this job" he said with filial trust. The Archbishop's response was both fatherly and encouraging: "You'll see – they will like you all the same. Since you are so young if you make any mistakes you will have the time to correct them."

Giacomo Camisassa, a priest Allamano had known and respected when he was the seminary spiritual director, was his first associate at the Sanctuary. He invited Camisassa to the sanctuary and the letter reveals something of Allamano's pastoral plans. "You see, my friend, together we can accomplish some good and honor Mary, our Mother and Consolation, with our sacred worship." Their fraternal and priestly collaboration lasted their entire lives. Each respected the other's work and shared the same ideals. Their work together is a magnificent witness to and example of the two priests' friendship and pastoral collaboration. Shortly after Camisassa's death Allamano said, "He was always ready to sacrifice himself to spare me." "With his death I have lost my two hands." "We were together, acting as one, for 42 years." "Every evening we spent long hours together in my study." "We have promised to tell each other the truth – and we kept this promise."

The sanctuary was physically run-down and in spiritual decline; Allamano's leadership initiated a revival. With Camisassa's active assistance the sanctuary became the artistic, marble and gold jewel we see today. Allamano took charge of the sanctuary's pastoral, liturgical and social activity; gradually it became a center of Marian spirituality and Christian renewal in the city and the region. Allamano's special gift for counsel and comfort contributed to this rebirth. People of all classes benefited from his insight and heartfelt concern. Cardinal Jean-Marie Villot remarked, "Allamano was an exemplar of what a genuine priest should be; his was a providential mission for a diocese like Turin. It was a mission of counsel, direction, encouragement, admonition and reviving souls through the sacrament of reconciliation. He brought the joy and peace of God's friendship to many and encouraged them to work in the apostolate."





**The Glory of Consolata in the Shrine of Turin.**

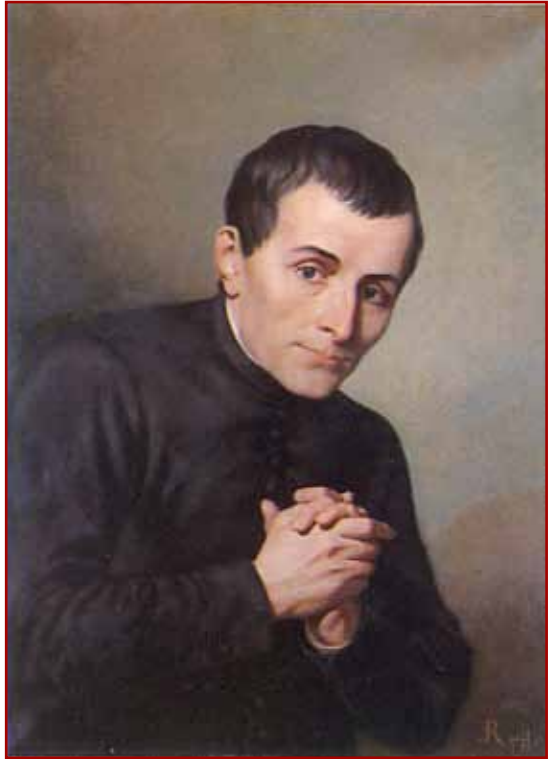
### **RETREAT DIRECTOR**

Along with his work as Rector of the Consolata Sanctuary Allamano was also the Rector of the Sanctuary of St. Ignatius in the hills near Lanzo Torinese. This sanctuary had a retreat house attached to it that was well known as a spirituality center: St. Joseph Cafasso had preached there for many years. Allamano saw it as a special place for the formation of priests and laypeople. A close co-worker, Canon G. Capella, said “he was always eager to direct retreats personally; he did not just direct a retreat – he made it himself. He used to say ‘I am not just a channel of retreat grace for others but a basin that gathers

grace for himself as well' [...] While he was its director the St. Ignatius House became a first-class retreat house – there was never an empty room.”

**FOLLOWING IN THE  
FOOTSTEPS OF HIS UNCLE:  
JOSEPH CAFASSO**

To construct a model of priesthood Allamano collected memories of Cafasso and published his biography and writings and he promoted his cause of beatification which he saw fulfilled on May 3, 1925. He candidly admitted: “I led this process not out of affection or family bonds but because of the positive effect this man’s example could produce: those who learn of his virtues will become better priests, Christians and missionaries.” Canon N. Baravalle agreed with this affirmation: “He was



never smug about his family connection with the Blessed and during our discussions often remarked, ‘As a relative I really should not be involved in this affair and this is certainly not the reason why I am involved. I am engaged in this process as the Rector of the Retreat House, a position he held before me. I teach and direct and feel it my duty to hold him up as an exemplar of virtue and holiness for priests.’”

After his uncle’s beatification he wrote a circular letter overflowing with joy and emotion to the Consolata Missionaries. “Blessed Joseph Cafasso is the patron and co-founder of the “Convitto” (a residence and school for newly ordained priests). He is a light and example



for devout souls – especially ecclesiastics. But he is also our special protector – ‘your uncle’ – honor him and imitate his virtues. I believe that with his beatification I have provided you with a means to reach holiness; the beatification has been part of my mission on your behalf.”

### **RECTOR OF THE “CONVITTO” (COMMUNITY OF PRIESTS)**

Allamano worked hard to heal the breach caused by the closing of the Convitto Ecclesiastico where young priests were trained. The Archbishop ordered this closing because of controversy about the teaching of moral theology. Allamano brought about the re-opening of this institution in 1882 and was its director until his death. He was very much concerned with the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation of young priests and made sure that his program was up-to-date. He emphasized the ultimate goal of a priestly vocation: to save one’s brothers. He emphasized the missionary ideal to Convitto residents. For him the missionary dimension was an essential part of the priestly vocation: “essentially every priest has a missionary vocation. This vocation is that great love of the Lord that compels us to do all we can to make Our Lord Jesus Christ known and loved by those who have not yet encountered Him.” Convincing the Archbishop to move the Convitto to the Consolata Sanctuary was one of Allamano’s greatest accomplishments.

### **APOSTLE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

Along with everything reported above Allamano was directly or indirectly involved in a host of other apostolic works. He was a canon of the Cathedral, a member of various commissions and committees, the religious superior of the Visitation nuns and the Sisters of St. Joseph. He was very much involved in anniversary celebrations and worked hard helping refugees, drafted priests and seminarians in the army during the First World War. Allamano showed an aptitude for working in all sorts of apostolates. Canon N. Baravalle lived with him at the Sanctuary and tells us: “The most modern forms of Catholic apostolate – the press, the media – were not just something he admired but to which he made what were for those times substantial financial contributions.” Msgr. G.B. Pinardi, the Auxiliary Bishop of Turin writes: “During Allamano’s life there was no single apostolic project that escaped the influence of the Consolata residence.”

Allamano was a fervent supporter of Catholic journalism – not just in his youth or at the height of his powers but even in old age and up to the time of his death. Msgr. B. Caselli, editor of the Turin Catholic newspaper, wrote that “our Catholic paper always enjoyed his authoritative, heartfelt and moral support.” Canon A. Cantono has this to say: “He was a valid critic of our journalism work – he wanted it to be clean and precise. He told me we should not be afraid of modern forms or technology.”

### **FATHER OF MISSIONARIES**

Fired by his intense apostolic zeal and a lively understanding of the Church’s mission Allamano’s concerns involved the whole world. He felt the urgency of Christ’s command to carry the Gospel to the ends the earth. He thought it unnatural that the Church that sponsored so many institutions devoted to charity should not have an organization solely dedicated to the missions. He sought to remedy this situation - helping those who felt the missionary call to carry out their vocation and encouraging this call in others. Establishing a missionary congregation was not a spur-of-the-moment impulse; Allamano conceived this idea after prolonged spiritual preparation and in the face of noteworthy obstacles and contradictions. Undoubtedly the work of establishing the congregation was one of trial and fatigue for Allamano. He was already deeply involved in Cafasso’s cause, work at the Convitto and Sanctuary as well as administrator of Sant’Ignazio.

In 1891 he believed the right moment had arrived to launch his missionary Congregation of priests and brothers but he was only able to carry out this project when his friend and classmate Cardinal Agostino Richelmy became the Archbishop. In Richelmy Allamano found someone who supported him and shared his ideals. Delay came to an abrupt end through the intervention of Divine Providence. In January 1900 he was close to death; he had contracted a disease from an old woman he was assisting in an icy attic. He always believed that his recovery was a miracle of Our Lady, the Consolata. He never doubted that this was a sign that the Congregation was to be established. The following year, January 29, 1901, the Congregation of the Consolata Missionaries was born.

Allamano’s indomitable spirit was the underlying motivation for this missionary enterprise. Fr L. Sales, his loving disciple and first



biographer, claims that the root cause of this missionary endeavor is Allamano's sanctity – he himself said, “Since I couldn't be a missionary myself I wanted to make it possible for those with this vocation to follow their heart.” There were other circumstantial reasons for launching this work – a desire to continue Cardinal Massaia's work, the missionary spirit and urgings of the priests living in the Residence (Convitto). Allamano says as much in a letter to Cardinal Richelmy on April 6, 1900: “During my many years training clergy I must confess that I have often encountered genuine missionary vocations.” The final decision to found a congregation of missionaries was taken only at the explicit command of the Archbishop. Allamano responded to this command with Peter's words to Jesus on the night of the miraculous catch: “In your name I will cast out my nets.”

On May 8, 1902 the first four missionaries left for Kenya: two priests and two laymen. Others followed shortly afterwards. Quickly becoming aware of the need of female collaborators Allamano got permission

from the superiors at Cottolengo to send Vincentian Sisters to Kenya to work alongside the Consolata Missionaries. This collaboration began in 1903 and lasted more than twenty-two years. Difficulties arose between the newly elected Vicar Apostolic, Msgr. Filippo Perlo and the Cottolengo superiors and sisters ceased being sent in 1909. Gradually those sisters working in Kenya returned to Italy.

Allamano witnessed this crisis but was unable to forestall its consequences. He felt forced to intervene to assure the necessary presence of sisters in the missions. At the urging of Msgr. F. Perlo, with the permission of his archbishop and on the advice of Cardinal Girolamo Gotti, Prefect of Propaganda Fide and Pope St. Pius X's support Allamano founded the Congregation of Consolata Missionary Sisters on January 29, 1910. He told the sisters how their congregation came to be founded. He was asking them to pray for Cardinal Gotti who was very sick at the time and he said "He (Gotti) it was who encouraged me to establish the sisters. He said to me, 'It is God's will that there be sisters.' – And I responded 'But there are already so many sisters' – 'Yes,' he said' many sisters but few missionaries."



**Allamano with  
the first four  
Missionaries  
leaving for Kenya:  
p. 12.**

**Allamano with  
Camisassa  
Co-Founder  
of the Institues:  
p. 13.**



Allamano also revealed the Pope's involvement: "It was Pope Pius X who wanted you; he it was who gave me the vocation of creating women missionaries." He would continue with pleasure and recount his conversation with Pius X to whom he had spoken of his problems finding female personnel for the missions. The Pope said, "You yourself must establish a congregation of missionary sisters – like the one you have founded for men missionaries." "But, Your Holiness," Allamano objected, "there are already so many congregations of sisters." "But none," the Pope responded, "that are exclusively missionary." "But Holy Father," Allamano continued, "I don't feel I have a vocation to found a congregation of sisters!" "If you don't have it," the Pope said, "I will give it to you." Logically Allamano would say to the sisters, "You see, it was the Pope, not me, who is responsible for your existence. In a sense you are "Papal."



In later years other mission territories were entrusted to the men and women Consolata Missionaries in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Somalia and Mozambique. Today the Consolata Missionaries are working in twenty-four countries on the continents of Africa, America, Europe and Asia.

Through personal contact, letters and formation meetings Allamano lavished attention on his sons and daughters. He believed that the missions deserved the best we had to offer; he was more concerned with quality than quantity. He looked for well-prepared, genuinely holy evangelists who were willing to give their lives for

the missions. He had as a motto: First saints and then missionaries. For him this “first” was not a question of time but of priority.

### **HE ENCOURAGES AND BLESSES US FROM HEAVEN**

Allamano died on February 16, 1926 at the Consolata Sanctuary. Today his remains are preserved at the motherhouse in Corso Ferrucci in Turin. Missionaries, friends of the missions and pilgrims have come to visit his resting place. Allamano’s sarcophagus is not just a tomb – it is an altar on which Mass is celebrated. Allamano’s sons and daughters have placed the remains of his close collaborator and co-founder, Camisassa next to his body.

Allamano was beatified on October 7, 1990 by John Paul II. The Pope confirmed the tributes the new Blessed had received during his life and after his death: “the Consolata Saint,” “Provident Father,” “Formator and Teacher of the Clergy,” “a Priest for the whole world.” During the homily he delivered at the beatification the Pope said: “From



the moment his name was added to the list of the blessed Joseph Allamano reminds us that being faithful to our Christian vocation involves knowing how to share the gifts we have received from God with brothers from every race and background. It involves proclaiming Christ with courage and coherence to everyone we encounter – and especially those who do not yet know Him.”

Allamano left a written last will and testament to his missionaries. It included words of encouragement that are valid for all who embrace the missionary vocation. “I have lived my many years for your sake; I have given my possessions, my health and my life for you and I hope that after my death I will be your protector in heaven.”



**Memorial Tomb with Allamano’s rests in the Shrine dedicated to Him in the IMC Mother House.**

**PRAYER**  
**BY THE INTERCESSION OF**  
**BLESSED JOSEPH ALLAMANO**

We thank you, Lord,  
for having given your Church  
Blessed Joseph Allamano.  
You made him a witness to your love,  
an educator of priests  
and father of missionaries  
for the evangelization of all peoples.  
Grant us, Lord, what we ask  
through the intercession  
of this your faithful servant,  
steward on earth of Mary's Consolation.  
May his example challenge us  
to seek you above all else and to work for the  
good of all.  
Amen