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STUDY

Giuseppe Alloati (1857-1933)

An Apostle of Eucharistic Worship

by Luigi Nuovo, C.M.

Province of Turin

Cardinal Angelo Giuseppe Roncali, later Pope John XXIII, during a conversation, in the context of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, with the title “The Catholic Church in Bulgaria and among the Slavs,” which was held on 18 January 1954, said among other things: “I still remember the worries of those ten years (1925-1934), when we were preoccupied with providing to that group of fervent Catholics, the last remains of a happy movement for Union, the foundation of a seminary, and the care for the development of the Eucharistine Sisters, founded by two Piedmontese, brother and sister, Fr. Giuseppe (Vincentian of the Oriental Rite) and Mother Eurosia Alloati.” In the period during which the future Pope John was Apostolic Delegate in Bulgaria, he had the opportunity to appreciate the work developed in the preceding years by Giuseppe and Eurosia Allotti and he was very impressed.

Giuseppe Allotti was born in Villastellone, on the outskirts of Turin, on 20 July 1857, of Pietro and Catarina Chicco; he was the firstborn among six brothers and sisters. His family was of good social standing and solid spiritual tradition, from which he received example in virtue and a good Christian education. In fact, even his brother Melchiorre (1860-1941) became a Vincentian priest and missionary. His sister Eurosia founded the Eucharistine Sisters and his sister Cristina entered the Congregation of the Sacramentines of Turin. Between 1874 and 1877 he was a student of the college which the missionaries ran in Scarnafigi.

He asked to be accepted into the Internal Seminary of the Congregation of the Mission and was welcomed by Blessed

Marcantonio Durando on 27 September 1877. Two years later, on 29 October 1879, he pronounced his perpetual vows.

After having made the regular course of studies he was ordained a priest in Turin on 24 September 1882. During his time as a student he wanted to leave for China, but he was sent to Thessalonica, then under the domination of the Ottomans. From that moment on he dedicated his entire life to the mission among the Catholic Bulgarians, committing himself to evangelizing the Catholic and Orthodox Bulgarians residing in Macedonia.

When he arrived at Thessalonica — the priests of the Mission were present there since 1783 — the superior of the house was Augusto Bonetti (1831-1904), who later became Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople.

Fr. Giuseppe led a life of missionary dedication and zeal, giving himself entirely and without reserve to the Bulgarian mission. He wrote in a letter to the Superior General, Antoine Fiat, three years after beginning his service: "When it comes to sacrifice, I believe that I did not spare anything for the salvation of my dear Bulgarians. Religiously and materially, I have become a Bulgarian and in reality I am so to my fingertips. Our Lord has given me the grace of familiarizing myself, so to speak, with the small and large incommodities of a way of life which is quite new to me."

He dedicated himself, above all, to an in-depth study of the Bulgarian language; he learned it, in a few months, so well that it became for him a second mother tongue. Indeed he knew it "with all the Macedonian particulars" because he lived for a time with an Orthodox priest in a village where it was not possible to converse in another language.

He wanted to know all the customs and traditions to be able to grasp the sensitivity and the feelings of the persons he had to meet.

To be more prepared and efficient in his priestly ministry with the population entrusted to his care, he embraced the Byzantine Rite, conscious of the fact that as he belonged to the Latin Rite this could give rise to certain misgivings and consequently distance him from his people. He learned the Slavic liturgical language, dressed in the clothes and vestments of oriental priests, and no longer celebrated the Mass in the Latin Rite but celebrated the Slavic Mass. He did this for the whole time he remained in the Bulgarian mission.

He quickly became aware of the spiritual and material poverty of the people, especially in the countryside of Macedonia. The situation of the women was even more precarious from all points of view; it was necessary to promote in all ways the instruction of the poor, not only for the boys, but also for the girls, by offering a good basic formation.

From their arrival, the first missionaries in Macedonia were aware that they needed to be concerned with this problem. They opened schools, looked for and prepared teachers who were capable of teaching, but while something had already been done for the boys, nothing or almost nothing had been done for the girls.

Another aspect that really struck Fr. Giuseppe Aloatti was the lack of seemliness of many churches and the manner in which the Eucharistic species was being preserved. Above all he wished very much to increase Eucharistic devotion. In a short time the idea ripened of founding a community of sisters with a double purpose: spreading Eucharistic devotion and also dedicating themselves to teaching poor girls. It was Fr. Bonetti who one day half jokingly and half seriously told him: "You should get Bulgarian sisters for Macedonia, because we need them." Initially, Fr. Giuseppe did not pay too much attention to these words, but the idea developed in his mind.

This was an heroic undertaking: financial means, available persons, and a first-rate collaborator were needed. Alloatti did not lose courage and got his sister Eurosia (1859-1920) involved in the work. She took the name Sr. Cristina of Jesus and became the co-foundress. St. John Bosco, who had received her in May 1887, a few months before he died, encouraged and stimulated her prophetically. The saint had told her: "You prayed to the Blessed Mother so that she might tell you where your vocation lies. Well, she told me that you must do whatever your missionary brother tells you, because that is the will of God."

From their childhood, the two siblings, in addition to their blood relationship, shared strong ideals of the spiritual and missionary life. They were capable of involving many people in this missionary adventure starting with their other brothers and sisters, their uncle Fr. Francesco Chicco, cousins and friends, who contributed offerings and help of various kinds.

The same Fr. Giuseppe spoke about the beginnings of his mission in a letter to the almsgiver of Leo XIII, Msgr. Francesco di Paola Cassetta (1841-1919), who later became a cardinal. He turned to him in order to get some concrete help and he became a real benefactor: "Divine Providence has thought about them (the girls) by inspiring one of my sisters and calling her to the noble vocation of sacrificing herself for the religious and moral formation of the Bulgarian women. Therefore, she left her own country and all that was dearest to her and came to Thessalonica three years ago, where she found four companions who wished to follow her in this holy purpose. With them, she took on the Oriental Rite and the dress of a Bulgarian religious woman, thus forming a little community of Eucharistines. This community has as its end to make known, love

and serve the most Holy Eucharist among the Bulgarian girls and women, by means of their instruction and the maintenance of poor churches.” It was in 1888 that this began in Thessalonica.

The general situation was very complicated. Difficult relations with the Turkish authorities, delicate relations with the Orthodox Church required moving ahead with much balance, respect and wisdom.

The two siblings decided to put in their personal patrimony. In August 1893 they acquired the village farm of Paliortsi in the interior of Macedonia to guarantee the survival of the newborn community. The growing community was transferred there from Thessalonica.

The community progressed with small steps. Soon an orphanage was opened, dedicated to St. Joseph, for the orphan girls of Macedonia.

Sr. Cristina of Jesus revealed herself as an intelligent and virtuous woman who dedicated herself with admirable abnegation to her mission. But, since the country was in a state of great poverty, it was difficult to proceed with the development of which she and her brother dreamed. Besides, it was said that the transfer to Paliortsi made them lose useful contact with the city, which guaranteed a greater opportunity for formation and useful occasions for contacts. Although the two siblings had acquired a village from which they obtained nothing, all this led the people, nevertheless, to think that they were rich, and so they were envied and became victims of theft.

They did not lack hardships and sufferings, but neither did they lack some satisfaction in obtaining conversions and success in certain initiatives. Their serene and total confidence in divine providence animated and supported the work of the two siblings.

Fr. Alloatti did his utmost for this foundation “which was the greatest preoccupation of his life” and to which he dedicated much of his physical and spiritual energy. He travelled to the places where his community was present, becoming aware of the spiritual and material situations, encouraging, exhorting and hearing confessions.

It was a very demanding and tiring apostolic activity; he walked or rode on horseback. He was a simple and austere missionary, who, for about 15 years, applied himself to preaching and administering the sacraments with care “in order to work at the evangelization of Macedonia.” He accepted to serve in poverty, sharing many situations of extreme discomfort. Very often his food consisted only of a bit of bread and a plate of vegetables, mostly beans. His housing was most uncomfortable, his bed was a sack of straw or a mat on the bare ground.

He got close to the Orthodox priests of the villages, listened to their problems and tried to form them to “a better understanding of

their ministry and to teach and administer the sacraments.” He wrote to Fr. Cazot: “When we founded residences in which the missionary lived with one of the young priests formed by us, life became easier: the missionary could more easily come home after having finished work. But for more than 15 years Fr. Alloatti lived the life in those Macedonian villages and it is necessary to have known this existence to know what kind of suffering and abnegation this meant. I do not know if there has been a more heroic missionary life than his.”

He was a humble, simple, mortified, Priest of the Mission, faithful in the observance of the Rules, and of the numerous and rigorous fasts which are part of the Oriental Rite.

What supported him in this generous apostolic life was a great love for the Eucharist — he began many of his letters with: “The good Jesus of the Eucharist be always with us” — and an intense and lively prayer life. He liked retreats very much and also to engage in conversation with a small number of persons, by way of a conference, to talk about arguments concerning the faith, spiritual life and apostolate.

He had also a deep devotion to the Holy Virgin. He honored her especially with the title, Immaculate, and tried to transmit this way of feeling to those who approached. He united to these spiritual gifts a “good and amiable” character; he willingly and joyfully came to recreation with his confreres who “liked his witty remarks and his plays on words.”

The Balkan wars of 1912-1913 created many difficulties in this little community, as in the whole Catholic mission in Macedonia.

He had to abandon Pailortsi in the spring of 1916 because it had become the front line. He went to Skopje where he remained until the end of July 1920 in a very precarious situation. When World War I finished, they had to confront the Serb authorities who wanted to requisition all that belonged to the Catholic religious communities. The sisters had to transfer to Sofia in Bulgaria and Sr. Cristina Alloatti, who was seriously and gravely ill, returned to Italy where she died in a state of holiness on 26 December 1920 in Turin.

For a few years Fr. Alloatti had begun thinking seriously of founding a priestly community which would take the name of Eucharistines. Like the Vincentian missionaries, they would dedicate themselves in those lands to the preaching of parochial missions and spiritual exercises. He also thought of a priest-cousin of the Diocese of Turin, as the possible rector, but the project, for various reasons, never got off the ground.

He had had good health, put to a hard test by many sacrifices and privations, so that, in the long run, it was seriously compromised already in the last moments of his stay in Macedonia. Somebody wrote about him: “Exhausted by the intense work and tribulations,

by the austere life of an oriental missionary rigorously faithful to the customs of the Rite, tireless preacher, confessor and surprisingly, writer of several theological, pastoral and spiritual works, of much poetry and prose, consumed but not tired (of working for the Kingdom of God), he could now retire to his own Congregation.”

He earned the invitation of the Lord: “Come, good and faithful servant.” He returned to Italy at the end of August 1927, stayed for a couple of years in the Provincial House of Turin and, from July 1931, at the House of Peace in Chieri, edifying everybody through his simplicity. He died there on 27 March 1933. He had been a hardworking man and he left a few writings, some published, others unpublished, among which are: *Living Bread*; *Jesus Victim, Food and Life for the Soul*; *The Month of Mary*; and *The Rule of the Eucharistine Sisters*.

Fr. Giuseppe Alloatti is a beautiful figure of a missionary, which really merits an in-depth study that would make his virtue, his farsightedness and the richness of his missionary and Vincentian spirit stand out.

(Translation: VICTOR BIELER, C.M.)