

PALLOTTI AND THE THEATRE – SECOND PART

PALLOTTI E IL TEATRO – PARTE SECONDA

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Abstract: This is a follow up to the first part that appeared in the last issue of *Apostolato Universale*. In the first part, the five occasions on which Pallotti had expressed his negative sentiments on theatre were analyzed elaborately. In this section, we try to find the answer for Pallotti's harsh opinions on Theatre and we also look to positively present Pallotti that is Pallotti who endorses theatre. The lack of the link connecting Pallotti's Anti-Demonic Union and theatres is studied. It ends with a conclusion summarizing the points discussed.

Keywords: Pallotti & Theatre, Church & Theatre, Anti-Demonic Union, Alessandro Torlonia, Pallotti & Fathers and Doctors of the Church

Riassunto: Si tratta della seconda parte dell'articolo apparso nel precedente numero di *Apostolato Universale*. Nella prima parte sono state analizzate in modo approfondito le cinque occasioni su cui il Pallotti aveva espresso i suoi sentimenti negativi sul teatro. In questa sezione si cerca di trovare una risposta alle dure opinioni del Pallotti sul teatro e si cerca anche di presentare positivamente il Pallotti che sosteneva il teatro. Si studia la mancanza di un collegamento tra l'Unione antidemonica del Pallotti e i teatri. Si conclude con un riassunto dei punti discussi.

Parole-chiave: Pallotti e teatro, Chiesa e teatro, Unione antidemoniana, Alessandro Tolonia, Pallotti e i Padri e Dottori della Chiesa

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Introduction

Pallotti in all of his writings had made visible his sentiments on theatre in just five occasions. And on all these occasions, the opinions expressed are not that positive towards the theatre. He is very harsh equating the theatre with everything sinful – sinful places, sinful occasions, an instrument of Satan, part of the Reign of Demon². As a lover of Pallotti and an ardent fan of theatre, the researcher wanted to look into the reasons for Pallotti’s not-so-impressive opinions on theatre. Also this researcher wanted to look into possibilities wherein Pallotti can be seen appreciating the theatre. The article is the result of this ardent search/research.

1. Reason for Pallotti’s Hatred for the Theatres

There could be many reasons. But the chief among them must have been the influences of the Church Teachings and the teachings of the well-recognized Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

Pallotti was the child of his time. It was the time when the ‘theatres’ were considered to be leading the faithful away from God. They were supposed to be belonging to the Kingdom of Satan. To turn back to God and to do reparation for the sins, a faithful Christian was expected to renounce the pleasures accorded to him/her in the theatres³. It was a common practice to shut down the theatres in the civil areas belonging to the Papal authority in the season of Lent, the holy time of preparation for the Easter. And the Catholics in the other countries were exhorted to renounce the joys of theatre in the season of Lent⁴. Pallotti

² For elaborate details, please refer the first part of this article. Cf. Maria Dhanaraj THIVYARAJAN, “Pallotti and Theatre: First Part” in *Apostolato Universale*, vol. 21, n. 50 (2020), pp. 143-176.

³ Saverio FRANCHI, *Drammaturgia Romana: 1701 – 1750*, vol. II (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1997), pp. 1, 8, & 14-15.

⁴ J. M. BUCKLEY, *Christians and the Theater* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875), pp. 10-11. The decision not to permit theatrical activities and productions on the Sundays, Feast Days and other Days of Obligation had been taken by the Church already in the year 401 A.D in the Council held at Carthage. Cf. Herbert THURSTON, “The Theatre,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14 (New York:

was a faithful Catholic. Moreover, he was a zealous priest aiming at ‘renewing, propagating and defending the Catholic Faith and its piety’⁵. It was only natural that he worked towards directing people away from the theatres that was contrary to Catholic piety and indicated the way to spiritual treasures.

Pallotti also must have been influenced heavily by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. From his writings we infer that Pallotti was very knowledgeable in the writings of both the Fathers and Doctors of the Church⁶. He had also vast information relating to very many Catholic saints. The writings and the lives of saints, most certainly, had a great sway in the mind and the thinking of Pallotti.

Some of the Fathers of the Church and Doctors of the Church had severe criticism of the theatre. It is apt to quote a few of them. Tertullian,⁷ who defined theatres as ‘the devil’s church,’⁸ further states about the theatre: “Stage plays are the pomps of the devil, against which we have renounced in our baptism.”⁹ Tertullian portrayed theatre as ‘a demonic plot to alienate people from God’¹⁰. St. Augustine¹¹ was also very severe against the theatres. He abhorred the theatre. For, theatre was a place of ‘emotional stimulation.’ Such a stimulation of emotions

Robert Appleton Company, 1912). <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14559a.htm> (accessed on 9th May, 2020)

- ⁵ Vincenzo PALLOTTI, *Opere Complete*, vol. I, ed. Francesco Moccia (Roma: Curia Generalizia della Società dell’Apostolato Cattolico, 1964), p. 1. (Hereafter referred to as *OOCC*).
- ⁶ Cf. Francesco MOCCIA, “Introduzione,” in Vincenzo PALLOTTI, *Opere Complete*, vol. XII, ed. Francesco Moccia (Roma: Curia Generalizia della Società dell’Apostolato Cattolico, 1985), pp. vi-vii & x-xii. It is apt to remember that Vincent Pallotti was a teacher/professor of both philosophy and theology. He had a doctoral degree in both the subjects. Cf. AMOROSO, *San Vincenzo Pallotti: Romano* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milano: San Paolo, 2004), pp. 53-54.
- ⁷ Pallotti speaks of Tertullian at least on five occasions in *Opere Complete* (*OOCC*).
- ⁸ Cf. Josiah W. LEEDS, *The Theatre: An Essay upon the Non-Accordancy of Stage-Plays with the Christian Profession* (Philadelphia: Self Published, 1886), p. 11.
- ⁹ Cited in LEEDS, *The Theatre*, p. 11.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Dale SAVIDGE, “A Survey of Christianity and Theatre in History,” in Todd E. Johnson and Dale Savidge, eds. *Performing the Sacred: Theology and Theatre in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), p. 32.
- ¹¹ St. Augustine is cited almost 40 times by Pallotti in *Opere Complete*, second only to St. Gregory, the Great. Cf. MOCCIA, “Introduzione,” in *OOCC*, XII, p. x.

in a closed place was “an insidious form of self indulgence; it relieves us of the need to act, and so feeds our passivity and narcissism”¹². That is, a person in the audience could experience the feelings of the actor on the stage and thus can feel no need to act upon the feelings in the real life. For instance, a person can relieve of his guilt feelings by experiencing it along with the actor on the stage. Theatre cheats. According to St. Augustine, the activities of ‘church going’ and ‘theatre going’ cannot coexist. In simple words, a person cannot be a good Christian (church going Christian) if he/she frequented also the theatres¹³.

Let us now see sentiments of the two Doctors of the Church – St. Bernard of Clairvaux (of the 11th century A.D.) and St. Alphonsus de Liguori (of the 18th century A.D.) - on theatres and on ‘theatre going Christian public.’ St. Bernard¹⁴ was direct in his attack on the theatres. In one of his letters, St Bernard stated that the theatres represented ‘low actions’ and ‘with corrupt gestures they provoked the passions’¹⁵. He instructed the following for true Christians: “The true soldiers of Christ reject and abominate players and stage-plays, as vanities and false frenzies”¹⁶.

St. Alphonsus de Liguori, a saint who was very dear to Pallotti,¹⁷ was also against the pleasures of the theatre. St. Alphonsus had visited the theatres as a young boy and he was particularly attracted to the

¹² Cited in SAVIDGE, “A Survey of Christianity and Theatre in History,” p. 33.

¹³ Cf. LEEDS, *The Theatre*, p. 12.

¹⁴ St. Bernard had a ‘privileged position’ in the writings of Pallotti. Cf. MOCCIA, “Introduzione,” in *OOCC*, XII, p. X.

¹⁵ Saint BERNARD, *Some Letters of Saint Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux*, Selected and Compiled by Francis Aidan Gasquet (London: John Hodges, 1904), p. 107.

¹⁶ Quoted in LEEDS, *The Theatre*, p. 12.

¹⁷ Cf. AMOROSO, *San Vincenzo Pallotti*, p. 143. Pallotti promoted the writings of St. Alphonsus de Liguori. He looked for sponsors who would help in the translations of Alphonsus’ works. Cf. AMOROSO, *San Vincenzo Pallotti*, p. 296. Moreover, besides citing many times from the writings of St. Alphonsus de Liguori, Pallotti also is found recommending the works of St. Alphonsus for spiritual nourishment. Cf. Vincenzo PALLOTTI, *Opere Complete*, vol. II, ed. Francesco Moccia (Roma: Curia Generalizia della Società dell’Apostolato Cattolico, 1965), pp. 193 & 359; Vincenzo PALLOTTI, *Opere Complete*, vol. III, ed. Francesco Moccia (Roma: Roma: Curia Generalizia della Società dell’Apostolato Cattolico, 1966), pp. 254-255, 258, & 295-296.

music played in the theatre. But later he regretted going to the theatres. He admitted this fact in the following manner: “I have frequented the theatres; but thanks be to God, I never committed even a venial sin there, for I went to hear the music, which absorbed all my attention, and hindered me from thinking of any other thing”¹⁸. How did he avoid committing even a venial sin? He says that he used to take off the glasses so as to avoid seeing actors on the stage. Seeing the actors led one to temptation¹⁹. Elsewhere he said of the theatres as ‘part of worldly pleasures’ and expressed his regret for having visited them in the following manner: “Banquets, entertainments, theatres – these are the pleasures of the world, but pleasures which are filled with the bitterness of gall and sharp thorns. Believe me who have experienced it, and now weep over it”²⁰.

We cannot claim that it was the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church that deterred Pallotti enjoying the ‘pleasures of the theatre’. Pallotti knew about the moral degradation in the performances conducted on the stages of the theatres of his time. He knew very specially the abuses that took place during the Carnival period which extended from the Day of Epiphany (6th January) to the Tuesday of the Shrovetide (Tuesday before the Ash Wednesday). Being a holy person seeking to preserve the purity of the body and mind, it might have been natural for Pallotti to abhor such moral aberrations taking place in the theatres. In this conviction, Pallotti must have found the able supports in the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. Pallotti might have been thus convinced that he was on the *right* side – the side of the saints – in his ‘hatred’ against the theatres.

¹⁸ *The Life of St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori: Bishop of St. Agatha of the Goths and Founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1855), p. 26. The author name given in the book is: One of the Redemptorist Fathers.

¹⁹ Harold CASTLE, “St. Alphonsus Liguori,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1913) [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)/St._Alphonsus_Liguori](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/St._Alphonsus_Liguori) (accessed on 21st April, 2020)

²⁰ Quoted in CASTLE, “St. Alphonsus Liguori”.

2. Pallotti's Attitude towards the Theatres: A Positive Evaluation

For a positive evaluation, firstly we will have to look at Pallotti's writings from different perspectives. Secondly, we need to look into different beliefs of Pallotti and connect them to his ideas on theatre.

Firstly, we will look at Pallotti's writings in a different perspective. Let us specially take into account his famous *Month of May* devotions. We will not venture into elaborate analysis. We will take into account just the details needed for this section.

We already knew that Pallotti had written three manuals for the *Month of May* devotions (*Month of May* devotions for the Cloistered, for the Clergy and for the Faithful). Each of these manuals has Mary as the primary character and the person in the cloistered home or a priest or a faithful as the secondary character. Mary's exhortations are given in the form of a dialogue. Mary addresses the secondary character in a personal manner – 'Oh, Ministers of My Son,' 'Beloved Ministers of My Son,' or 'Children or Sons,' or 'Religious Soul'²¹. This is a kind of monologue, that is, only a single character is seen speaking while the other character/s remain/s silent throughout the scene. This is a technique in a play. Pallotti uses this technique usually associated with the theatrical productions in his most famous spiritual writings²². Pallotti knew the effect it created in a reader²³. Pallotti indirectly approved of a theatrical technique in his writings.

²¹ In the *Month of May for the Clergy*, Mary addresses the priests as 'Beloved Ministers of My Son' and in *Month of May for the Cloistered*, Mary addresses the cloistered religious as 'Religious Soul.' Finally in the *Month of May for the Faithful*, Mary addresses the faithful as 'Children or Sons'.

²² It is apt to remember that Pallotti used the same technique of making Mary to speak in the form of a monologue in 'The Invitation to the Sanctified Carnival' too.

²³ Even today, there is a possibility to integrate the 'dialogues of Mary' found in the three *Month of May* devotions in a new theatrical production. A creative spirit can easily transform them into a noble spiritual performance. A suggestion of a plot for a future Pallottine playwright: A performance where Mary as the main character encounters three characters (a priest, a nun, and a married person) and three are instructed alternatively by Mary on various themes. Everything can be skillfully extracted from three manuals and can be expertly arranged.

A word of caution: Pallotti's 'approval' of a theatrical technique need not necessarily mean that he approved of the theatre. This is our presumption. Nowhere in his writings, has Pallotti explicitly approved of the theatre.

Secondly, we can get a kind of clue from Pallotti's writings on the other art forms, such as, sculpture, painting and literature. Pallotti when speaking about these art forms uses two opposing adjectives. For instance, when speaking about the novels, poetry and other pieces of literature, Pallotti qualifies them *either as* 'lascivious novels and poetry,'²⁴ 'obscene books or songs,'²⁵ *or as* 'devout literature,'²⁶ 'ascetical writings,'²⁷ 'spiritual books,'²⁸ 'instructive books,'²⁹ and 'good books'³⁰. In the same way, when Pallotti speaks about the statues, paintings, images, pictures, he uses adjectives either in the positive sense or in the negative sense. For instance, he qualifies them *either as* 'dishonest statues and pictures,'³¹ 'dangerous objects in paintings or statues,'³² 'perilous objects [like] immodest images and statues,'³³ 'scandalous images and statues'³⁴ *or as* 'devout statue,'³⁵ 'sacred/holy images and

²⁴ Vincenzo PALLOTTI, *Opere Complete*, vol. VI, ed. Francesco Moccia (Rome: Curia G Generalizia della Società dell'Apostolato Cattolico, 1969), p. 219.

²⁵ Vincenzo PALLOTTI, *Opere Complete*, vol. XI, ed. Francesco Moccia (Roma: Roma: Curia Generalizia della Società dell'Apostolato Cattolico, 1980) p. 266; also Cf. Vincenzo PALLOTTI, *Opere Complete: Lettere*, vol. I, letter no. 16, ed. Bruno Bayer (Roma: Roma: Curia Generalizia della Società dell'Apostolato Cattolico, 1995), p. 45. (Hereafter referred to as *OCL*)

²⁶ *OOCC*, I, p. 38.

²⁷ *OOCC*, I, p. 219.

²⁸ Vincenzo PALLOTTI, *Opere Complete*, vol. X, ed. Francesco Moccia (Roma: Roma: Curia Generalizia della Società dell'Apostolato Cattolico, 1977), p. 72.

²⁹ *OOCC*, III, p. 298.

³⁰ Vincenzo PALLOTTI, *Opere Complete*, vol. V, ed. Francesco Moccia (Roma: Roma: Curia Generalizia della Società dell'Apostolato Cattolico, 1968), p. 219.

³¹ *OCL*, I, letters no. 9 & 16, pp. 19 & 45; also Cf. *OOCC*, VI, p. 219.

³² *OOCC*, VI, pp. 394 & 564.

³³ *OOCC*, XI, p. 271.

³⁴ Cf. *OCL*, I, letter no. 16, p. 45.

³⁵ Vincenzo PALLOTTI, *Opere Complete*, vol. IV, ed. Francesco Moccia (Rome: Curia Generalizia della Società dell'Apostolato Cattolico, 1967), p. 60.

statues,³⁶ ‘statues and images that keep to the rules of Christian modesty’³⁷.

We can apply the same logic to the theatrical pieces. We can qualify them as sacred and vulgar, moral and immoral, profane and spiritual. The performances with plots taken from the Sacred Scripture or from the lives of saints can be classified as ‘sacred’ or ‘spiritual’ theatre³⁸. The performances with plots to excite the cheap emotions may be classified as ‘vulgar’ or ‘immoral’ theatre. Pallotti might approve of the ‘spiritual theatre’ and would certainly abhor the ‘vulgar/immoral theatre.’

A word of caution: Once again, this is our presumption. Pallotti had not made any explicit statement regarding the ‘spiritual theatre’³⁹. He had never qualified ‘theatre’ in both the negative and positive colours. He defined or described the theatres only with the negative connotations.

There is another possibility to present Pallotti on the positive side – in support of the theatre. That is to look for Pallotti’s association with people who have a strong bond with the theatres, like the actors, directors, composers, the theatre owners, etc. The present researcher was able to find such an associate of Pallotti. Among Pallotti’s close associates and lay benefactors, we find the name of Alessandro Torlonia⁴⁰.

³⁶ *OOCC*, III, p. 227; also Cf. *OOCC*, VI, p. 564.

³⁷ *OOCC*, VI, pp. 394 & 564.

³⁸ The term ‘liturgical drama’ and its subsequent tributaries in the form of Mystery Plays (the life sketches of Jesus), Miracle Plays (plays on the lives of saints), and Morality Plays (emphasis on Christian virtues) are specially identified with ‘spiritual theatre.’ They were especially popular in the medieval period. Cf. SAVIDGE, “A Survey of Christianity and Theatre in History,” pp. 35-40.

³⁹ Pallotti certainly must have had knowledge about the ‘spiritual theatre’. We have evidence for a play on the life of Saul performed in the Hospice of St. Michael in Trastevere (where Fr. Bernardino Fazzini, the spiritual director of Pallotti was a chaplain for many years) in 1848. Cf. J. S. NORTHCOTE, “The Roman Carnival,” in *The Rambler*, n. 13 (March 25, 1848), p. 253.

⁴⁰ In fact, all the members of the Torlonia family were close associates with Pallotti and they were mostly present in the circle of pious benefactors listed by Pallotti. Cf. Bruno BAYER, “TORLONIA Carlo (1798-1847),” in *OCL*, III, pp. 421-422. Carlo Torlonia was the elder brother of Alessandro Torlonia. Carlo Torlonia was very close to Pallotti. He was also a generous contributor towards the maintenance of the Pia Casa. Cf. AMOROSO, *San Vincenzo Pallotti*, p. 124.

It was, in fact, the same Prince Alessandro Torlonia who had sponsored the big beautiful statue of the Child Jesus for the crib established in the church of San Andrea della Valle (St. Andrew of the Valley) for the celebration of the Epiphany Octave in 1846⁴¹. Alessandro Torlonia was obviously a rich man. In fact, he was very rich that he could even finance Pope Gregory XVI when the Papal States were in financial difficulty and needed financial assistance. Thus, he was fondly called as ‘The Pope’s Banker’⁴².

What is more important for the research is that this Alessandro Torlonia was also the proprietor of many of the theatres in Rome. He inherited *Teatro di Apollo* from his father, Giovanni Torlonia⁴³. He was also the owner of a number of famous theatres in Rome, like *Teatro Argentina* and *Teatro Alibert*⁴⁴. Alessandro Torlonia was a ‘patron of arts,’⁴⁵ with a special attraction for the theatres⁴⁶. Pallotti was closely associated with him. Pallotti received gifts and had listed him as one of the pious benefactors especially for the celebration of the Epiphany Octave⁴⁷. Thus, we can conclude that Pallotti approved of a person who was a promoter of theatrical activities. The inference that flows from such affirmation is that Pallotti indirectly approved of the theatre.

A word of caution: Approval of a person need not necessarily mean approval of the activities of the person. A good Christian is supposed to hate the sins of a person and love the sinner at the same time.

⁴¹ BAYER, “TORLONIA Carlo (1798-1847),” p. 422.

⁴² Daniela FELISINI, *Alessandro Torlonia: The Pope’s Banker* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 10. The Italian title of the book is “*Qual Capitalista per Ricchezza Principalissimo: Alessandro Torlonia: Principe, Banchiere, Imprenditore nell’Ottocento Romano* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 2004).

⁴³ Antonio NIBBY, *Roma nell’Anno MDCCCXXXVIII*, Parte Seconda Moderna, vol. 4 (Roma: Tipografia delle Belle Arti, 1841), p. 977.

⁴⁴ Daniela FELISINI, “*Qual Capitalista per Ricchezza Principalissimo: Alessandro Torlonia: Principe, Banchiere, Imprenditore nell’Ottocento Romano* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 2004), pp. 210-211. *Teatro Alibert* was also known as *Teatro delle Dame*. Cf. NIBBY, *Roma nell’Anno MDCCCXXXVIII*, p. 976.

⁴⁵ NIBBY, *Roma nell’Anno MDCCCXXXVIII*, p. 977; FELISINI, *Alessandro Torlonia*, p. 11.

⁴⁶ FELISINI, “*Qual Capitalista per Ricchezza Principalissimo: Alessandro Torlonia*, p. 210.

⁴⁷ *OCC*, VI, p. 95.

The bottom line is that Pallotti's acquaintance with a theatre owner need not necessarily mean Pallotti's approval of the theatre.

There is another reason (a roundabout reason) to presume that Pallotti would have approved of the 'sacred theatre' had he lived today. Pallotti was a devout son of the Catholic Church. His faith in the Catholic Church and in her teachings was unmistakable and unshakable. Pallotti insisted that every Christian should pray diligently that he/she had 'the spirit of submission and faith in the teachings of the Ministers of the True Church [Catholic Church].' The words of these ministers are the 'secure guides' that lead the faithful to salvation⁴⁸.

The 'True Church' in her official teaching, in the recent times, had positively made a comment on theatre. The Second Vatican Council in the Decree on the Means of Social Communication *Inter mirifica* recognized theatre as 'the noble and ancient art'⁴⁹. Pope Paul VI approved of the great English playwright William Shakespeare and appreciated many of the scenes and recitations from his plays. He called Shakespeare the 'supreme writer' and his plays helped in the 'religious understanding of the world'⁵⁰. Pope John Paul II, approved of 'sacred theatre' when he appreciated the theatrical piece on the life of St. Therese of Child Jesus in 1998.⁵¹ Very recently, in the year 2016, we witnessed the screening of the Hollywood film *Silence* (a film adaptation of Shusaku Endo's novel about the early Jesuit missionaries to Japan) directed by Martin Scorsese in Vatican. It was attended by many priests and the film director had a special audience with the Pope after the premiere⁵². So, we may assume that Pallotti being a faithful servant

⁴⁸ Cf. *OCCC*, VI, pp. 211-212.

⁴⁹ VATICAN II, Decree on the Means of Social Communication *Inter mirifica* (4th December, 1963), no. 14.

⁵⁰ PAUL VI, Address of Paul VI for the Fourth Centenary of the Birth of William Shakespeare (12th November, 1964). http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641112_shakespeare.html (accessed on 14th May, 2020)

⁵¹ JOHN PAUL II, Address of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II to the Performers and Audience at a Play about the Life of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus (23rd August, 1998). http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/august/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19980823_teresa-lisieux.html (accessed on 14th May, 2020)

⁵² Elise HARRIS, "Pope Francis meets Martin Scorsese, Director of 'Silence,' at Vatican," in *Catholic News Agency* (30th November, 2016). <https://www.catholic->

of the Church and its Teachings would have approved of theatre and films with good Christian themes.

A word of caution: This is one again an assumption, a preposterous one. Even then, we need to be cautious in accepting it. When it comes to opinion on theatre, the Church had always been reluctant to give either approval or disapproval in explicit terms. The severest criticisms had always been laid upon it not by the official Church but by ‘the saintly individuals’⁵³. Pallotti being a ‘saintly individual’ can be placed in the same pantheon. For we know for sure that even in the time of Pallotti, the official Church approved of theatres with sacred/moral themes⁵⁴. Pallotti could have easily approved of such theatrical productions, just by mentioning them, in his writings, especially in his writings about the sanctified carnival. He mentions in many places the reading of the Lives of Saints for spiritual nourishment but nowhere does he approve of a Stage-play on the Life of a Holy Person.

Finally, we can say that though there are possibilities to present Pallotti with a positive attitude towards the theatres/theatrical productions, they are - in contrast to his open and sharp criticisms on the theatre that are recorded in the writings – more our efforts/assumptions than the real words of Pallotti. They weigh very less on the scale against the real words of recorded words of Pallotti.

3. Pallotti’s Anti-Demonic Union and the Theatres

Those who are well acquainted with Pallotti will know for certain about the Anti-Demonic Union (*unione antidemoniaca*) formulated by Pallotti in the initial period immediately after his ordination in the year 1818. This was a group with a secretary and interested clergy. The objective of this Union was to destroy all the scandalous objects, the objects that which led people away from God. Mainly the immodest statues, pictures, paintings and literature found in the families, churches, and the public squares were targeted. They were collected and were

newsagency.com/news/pope-francis-meets-martin-scorsese-director-of-silence-at-vatican-82277 (accessed on 14th May, 2020).

⁵³ BUCKLEY, *Christians and the Theater*, pp. 9-11.

⁵⁴ NORTHCOTE, “Roman Carnival,” p. 253.

destroyed. If that was not possible, the particular scandalous spots in the painting or the statue were covered or corrected by Christian artists⁵⁵. It was the desire to renew the faith and spirituality of the people that inspired the founding of the Anti-Demonic Union. Pallotti saw scandalous and immoral art works and pieces of literature as belonging to the ‘Reign of Satan.’ Pallotti imagined the Anti-Demonic Union as a kind of special force in the army of God that waged war against some particular forms of the Reign of the Satan⁵⁶.

It is only natural that Pallotti also wanted the Anti-Demonic Union to fight against the theatres. After all, Pallotti considered the time spent in theatre as an ‘act of surrendering the souls to Demon’⁵⁷. Moreover, the theatres in Rome, and most specially the popular theatre – *Teatro Valle* - in the time of Pallotti hosted mostly the Comic Operas (*Opera Buffa*)⁵⁸. But interestingly the theatres do not appear in the list of ‘scandalous objects’ that needed to be destroyed by the Anti-Demonic Union. This is an obvious anomaly.

The reason for such an anomaly can be traced in the fact that theatres might have been patronized by powerful people of the time. We already saw the example of Alessandro Torlonia, a person from the noble family, a rich man, a close associate of the Pope patronizing the theatres. To wage war against theatre might have been a high risk for Pallotti in the year 1818 when Anti-Demonic Union was established. For by then, Pallotti was just a newly ordained priest. The hypothesis that theatres might have had powerful patrons is once again corroborated by the fact that the Anti-Demonic Union had approval from the Holy Father, Pius VII. That which meant here is that when the Pope gave approval, he could have easily added the activities disapproving the theatres as well. The exclusion of theatres makes us suspicious that they had powerful patrons. Even the sculptures and paintings had powerful patrons. May be that explains the reason why the Anti-Demonic Union had a very short period of its existence. It was established in May

⁵⁵ AMOROSO, *San Vincenzo Pallotti*, pp. 46-47.

⁵⁶ AMOROSO, *San Vincenzo Pallotti*, p. 45.

⁵⁷ *OCC*, XI, p. 231.

⁵⁸ Francesco IZZO, *Laughter between Two Revolutions: Opere Buffa in Italy, 1831-1848* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013), p. 13.

1818 and it was closed down in October 1818⁵⁹. Interestingly, the reason for its closure was due to the intervention of some powerful people in the hierarchy⁶⁰.

That is a reason enough for Pallotti not to recommend, for the members of the Anti-Demonic Union, any action against the theatres.

Conclusion

In the search for Pallotti's artistic interests – the human side of a saint – especially his interest in the theatre resulted in revealing more of the spiritual side of the saint than the human side. It is in relation to the spiritual thirst and nourishment, we see Pallotti abhorring the theatre. For, he perceived theatre as one of the instruments of demon. In this belief, Pallotti was a descendent of many Fathers and Doctors of the Church who had severe criticisms of the theatre. Pallotti, like any angelic and enthusiastic minister of Jesus Christ, had an unshakable conviction that whatever stood in contrast to the Reign of Jesus Christ was to be shunned and whatever stood in favour of spiritual nourishment of oneself and one's neighbor was to be encouraged and promoted. His conviction was not passive. It moved him to action. It was evident in his 'war against the Kingdom of Satan.'

Theatre was considered by Pallotti to be part of the Kingdom of Satan. But then, he did not come heavily on it as he came heavily on the other 'instruments of Satan' – immodest paintings, obscene pictures, indecent statues and lascivious literature. For instance, nowhere in his writings does Pallotti call people to bring down the theatre buildings.

There are various possibilities to present Pallotti in a positive colour supporting the theatre. The possibilities are derived from looking into his writings from different perspectives. For instance, Pallotti uses a theatre technique – monologue – in some of his popular writings. He uses this technique in the famous *Month of May* devotion manuals. Using the other extra information derived not from Pallotti's writings, but from the historical facts, we can positively assume that Pallotti approved of theatre. The extra information is that Alessandro Torlonia

⁵⁹ AMOROSO, *San Vincenzo Pallotti*, pp. 46-47.

⁶⁰ OCL, I, letter no. 18, p. 55. Also Cf. AMOROSO, *San Vincenzo Pallotti*, p. 47.

who was a pious benefactor for Pallotti was a patron of theatres and he owned many popular theatres in Rome already in the time of Pallotti. Pallotti can be read as endorsing theatre by his close acquaintance with Alessandro Torlonia. These remain *mere* possibilities to interpret Pallotti's opinions on theatre in an appreciable manner.

There is also possibility to believe that Pallotti would have approved of the 'Spiritual Theatre,' the theatre with religious themes. Pallotti certainly must have been aware of such theatres. For, they were present in his times. Pallotti however does not even make a mention of them anywhere in his writings. Pallotti qualifies theatre only with a negative adjective unlike his style of qualifying the other arts in both positive and negative adjectives (decent statue and indecent statue & devout literature and obscene books).

The Catholic Church which was for most of the times ambivalent regarding its opinion on theatre, in the recent times had defined it in an official document (Vatican II document on Social Communications *Inter mirifica*) as a 'noble and ancient art.' In the recent times, the Popes are very open to appreciating the 'spiritual theatres' and films with religious themes. Pallotti was a staunch believer in the Teachings of the Church. Being in line with these recent happenings, Pallotti would have recommended theatres with spiritual/scriptural/religious themes.

I am very much certain that Pallottines today make use of this 'noble and ancient art' to convey the Good News and to catechize the faithful under their care. I still remember vividly acting out an episode from Pallotti's life in my novitiate life (1998-1999) in Bangalore. In that amateur private theatrical activity, we the novices were generously encouraged by the Novice Master, Fr. Jacob Nampudakam, who is the present Rector General. Later when I was doing my Licentiate in Rome, I remember being part of a documentary film on the life of St. Vincent Pallotti. The film was titled as *Vinzenz Pallotti: Ein Heiliger* (2013). It was directed by Andreas Arntz and the Pallottine behind such an effort was Fr. Alexander Holzbach.

Is it not ironic that Pallotti who had 'not-so pleasant opinions' on theatre (by extension film) ended up in theatre and film? It is an acceptable irony. Pallotti would have smiled at it too.

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