Architectural Instructions in Italy between the 16th and 18th Centuries

Carlo Borromeo’s Instructions represent the only practical application of the Tridentine decrees in architecture. However, historians over time have given little weight to the work, which is mostly considered a simple parish handbook due to its practical-functional nature used to treat the sacred space. New research conducted on the literary work has focused on the massive diffusion of this treatise in the undergrowth of the ecclesiastical literature of the time, testifying to how much the Instructions are linked to the historical context and the spiritual needs of the post-Tridentine Church. The great novelty of the work lies in the fact that it completely overcame the way of writing about architecture. In the writings of Carlo Borromeo, a continuous interweaving between the doctrine of the soul and the sacred building is outlined to give the Church the image of an institution organically constituted in its material and spiritual reality. The influence of this work outside the Milanese context in which Carlo Borromeo worked is still to be clarified, especially in the South of Italy, which experienced the peak of its Counter-Reformation season between the seventeenth and eighteen centuries. Here, Instructions will be analyzed along with the Antica Basilicografia of Pompeo Sarnelli (1686) and Il Rettore ecclesiastico of Marcello Cavalieri (1688), two writings born in the diocese of Benevento under the wing of the bishop Vincenzo Maria Orsini, a native of Gravina di Puglia.

Keywords: Carlo Borromeo, Architectural Instructions, Counter-Reformation.

Introduction

Since Paola Barocchi included the first book of Carlo Borromeo’s Instructionum Fabricae et Supellectilis ecclesiasticae in her edition of the sixteenth-century Treatises on Art in 1962, the work has experienced a new flowering.1 Critics, moving away from the habit of reading the text as a mere manual of practical use, have begun to investigate the deeper reasons that link Borromeo’s work to the historical context and the spiritual needs of the post-Tridentine Church.2 To date, the influence of the work outside the Milanese

1P. Barocchi, Trattati d’arte del Cinquecento fra Manierismo e Controriforma (Bari: Laterza, 1962), III, 3-113.

2The most important studies include the invaluable writings of Maria Luisa Gatti Perer. Here I would like to mention the most significant contributions that will be cited in the article several times: M.L. Gatti Perer, “Prospettive nuove aperte da S. Carlo nelle sue Norme per l’Arte Sacra”, in Atti dell’Accademia di S. Carlo, inaugurazione del III anno accademico (Milan 1980), 15-33; M.L. Gatti Perer, “La manutenzione ordinaria degli edifici sacri e delle loro suppellettili secondo Carlo Borromeo”, in Atti dell’Accademia di S. Carlo. Inaugurazione del V anno accademico (Milan 1982), 121-147; M.L. Gatti Perer, “Progetto e destino dell’edificio
context remains to be clarified, especially in the South of Italy, which experienced the peak of its Counter-Reformation season between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Here the Instructiones will be analyzed along with some writings born in the diocese of Benevento under the wing of the bishop Vincenzo Maria Orsini, a native of Gravina di Puglia. It was precisely the future Pope Benedict XIII who, about a century after the death of Saint Charles, was able to actualize the image of Borromeo’s loving and zealous bishop that had given way to the seventeenth-century vision of the prelate, which spread with his early sanctification.

**Saint Charles Borromeo, Model of Every Virtue**

The canonization of Carlo Borromeo is the event that in the Catholic world inaugurates the seventeenth century, becoming the most effective manifestation of the renewal drive of the Counter-Reformation. The year 1610, when the bull of sanctification was issued, was only the last step in a process that had begun in 1601 when the Oblates of Milan proposed to the vicar general of the diocese that their archbishop, who had died in 1584, be made a saint. The citizens of Milan immediately began to frequent Borromeo’s sepulchre in constant pilgrimage, shaping the public cult of the prelate. This devotion, originally of the popular matrix, was nourished by daily graces and miracles, meticulously noted down by the Hosts of the Cathedral who had the task of collecting every useful testimony to shape the figure of the new saint. Furthermore, at a time of great crisis in Catholic doctrine, the birth of a strong devotion around one of the most important cardinals of the Council was seen by the ecclesiastical leadership as a precious opportunity for the post-Tridentine sacro dopo S. Carlo”, in *San Carlo e il suo tempo. Atti del convegno internazionale nel IV centenario dalla morte* - Milano, 21-26 maggio 1984 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1986), I, 611-631. See also: J.S. Ackermann, 1986. “Pellegrino Tibaldi, San Carlo Borromeo e l’architettura ecclesiastica del loro tempo”, in *San Carlo e il suo tempo. Atti del convegno internazionale nel IV centenario dalla morte* - Milano, 21-26 maggio 1984 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1986), 573–586; A. Scotti, “Architettura e riforma cattolica nella Milano di Carlo Borromeo”. *L’Arte*, 1972, 18/19: 24 sgg.; D. Frascarelli, “Arte e Controriforma: l’altare maggiore nelle Instructiones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae di Carlo Borromeo”, in *I cardinali di Santa Romana Chiesa, collezionisti e mecennati* (Rome: Shakespeare and Company, 2001), 24–37.

There is a vast amount of literature on Carlo Borromeo, his canonization and the importance of his doctrine in the Counter-Reformation world. I will limit myself to pointing out the most recent contributions that have outlined an updated framework of the research carried out so far: A. Turchini, *La fabbrica di un santo. Il processo di canonizzazione di Carlo Borromeo e la Controriforma* (Casale Monferrato: Marietti. 1984); J.M. Headley, J.B. Tomaro (eds.). *San Carlo Borromeo. Catholic Reform and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century* (Washington: Folger Books - Associated University Presses, 1988); D. Zardin, *Carlo Borromeo. Cultura, santità, governo* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2010); M.L. Frosio, D. Zardin (eds.), *Carlo Borromeo e il cattolicesimo dell’età moderna. Nascita e fortuna di un modello di santità* (Milan: Bulzoni, 2011).
church. Within a few years, Borromeo underwent sudden depersonalization. As the process of sanctification unfolded, the memory of the prelate settled down in a well-codified form: Charles Borromeo was no longer a simple archbishop but a model who had to appear “as an ornament to the triumphant church and useful to the militant one”. His sanctity is dispersed in a long list of virtues, of which commemorative panegyrics were composed beginning in 1601. The production of votive images and the flourishing trade of relics constitute indispensable support for the widespread diffusion of the cult (see Figure 1).

During the canonization of 1610, the formal purity of Caroline’s doctrine gave way to a bubbling of metaphors, linguistic games and theatrical constructions that highlighted, above all, the propagandistic and self-celebratory power of the counter-reformed church.

Figure 1. The heart is a recurring and almost obsessive theme linked to the canonization of Carlo Borromeo. In this image the saint is represented as a man with a window in his chest ‘where it is possible to see the heart’

Source: P. Fattorio, Ampla et diligente relatione de gli onori fatti al cuore di San Carlo, Roma, 1614.

The ‘Sapiens Architectus’

Parallel to the image of the new saint who invites to ‘guard one’s own heart’ in the sign of sincere devotion, the Jesuit Achille Gagliardi (1537–1607) focuses on the reform aspect intrinsic to Borromeo’s pastoral action. He is the Sapiens Architectus. From his words, we understand why the Milanese bishop was proposed as a model of life not only for the faithful but also for the clergy. It was necessary to look at Borromeo’s ‘holy flesh’ by drawing inspiration from the key principles of his pastoral action: the priest who embodies the image of the Good Shepherd must rediscover the bond with his flock. The man of the church must appear as an architect capable of working on several fronts. On the one hand, based on the Tridentine decrees, he must carry out a monumental

4A. Turchini, op. cit., 21.
work of the rebuilding of the ecclesiastical organs, ordering the Church
according to a ramified structure of government, where the bishops are the
cardines and the priests the desired nerves of the spiritual life of the people; on the other hand, he must promote a true and proper restoration of Catholic
worship, inventing suitable solutions to accompany the people on the path of
faith. To this end, the Good Shepherd must not be concerned only with
doctrine but also focus on sacred space, which, in its rational and ordered
structure, creates the necessary conditions for man’s encounter with God. The
deep sense of Carlo Borromeo’s idea of architecture is based on this necessity,
translated in the Instructionum Fabricae et Supellectilis ecclesiasticae, printed
in Milan in 1577 (Borromeo, 1577) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Saint Charles and the main sacred buildings built in the years of his episcopate
Source: Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana

From the ‘Good Shepherd’ to the ‘Good Visitor’

The impressive diffusion of the whole ‘corpus’ of St. Charles’ works
between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries should be seen in the

5A. Paredi, 1963 (eds.). Sancti Caroli Borromaei Orationes XII: ad usum episcoporum in
Concilium Oecum. Vaticanum II convenientium Pauli VI Pont. Max. iussu denuo editae
(Milan: Tip. U. Allegretti di Campi, 1963), II, 122. The reference to bishops as “cardines” is
taken from the homily of 21 July 1583 at S. Prassede in Milan (II, 122); the reference to priests
as “desired nerves” is taken from the homily of 3 January 1584 (III, 300).
6E. Cattaneo, “Il restauro del culto cattolico”, in San Carlo e il suo tempo, Atti del convegno
internazionale nel IV centenario dalla morte - Milano, 21-26 maggio 1984 (Rome: Edizioni di
7C. Borromeo, Instructionum fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae: libri II (1577) Trans. By
M. Marinelli (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000)
context of the new post-Tridentine spirituality. The Acta ecclesiae mediolanensis, in addition to dealing with the institutional part (Provincial Councils and Synods), pay particular attention to the devotional aspect of the Catholic Reform, which must be based on ‘instructions’, homilies and pastoral letters to recover the relationship with the faithful. It is precisely on the moral behaviour of Vincenzo Maria Orsini that biographers insist when they describe him as the most worthy heir, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of the Carolinian pastoral model. Elected cardinal in 1672, Orsini arrived in the diocese of Benevento in 1686 where he remained until his election to the papal throne.\(^8\) If Carlo Borromeo became a pastoral model immediately after his death, Orsini’s reformist zeal was already exemplary during the years of his government, so much so that Pope Innocent XII himself wished that the organization of his diocese be followed by his contemporaries.\(^9\) He spent much of his days approaching the people in the parishes, insisting on frequent and direct preaching. As such, starting from Caroline’s teaching, Orsini transformed the model of the Good Shepherd into that of the Good Visitor, making his own the precept according to which ‘the office and exercise of the Bishop is nothing but a continual visitation: for it is necessary for him always to be vigilant and to toil in everything with apostolic zeal’.\(^10\) This is an enrichment of the model of the post-Tridentine bishop using a pastorality which, precisely in carrying out the Visits, moves carefully through the first phase of detection of critical situations, followed by intervention and provision. To give an idea of the extent of his pastoral action, it is sufficient to recall that in the 44 years of his episcopate in Benevento, the prelate was able to make, personally or through his collaborators, about two thousand pastoral visits.

The ‘Treatise of the Pastoral Visit’ by Giuseppe Crispino (1682)

It is not surprising, given his spiritual zeal, that under the influence of Orsini, writings such as the Trattato della Visita pastorale, printed in Naples for the first time in 1682, came to light (Crispino, 1682; De Rosa, 1978: 105–110).\(^11\) The work became a veritable vademecum for bishops scattered throughout the provinces of Italy. The author Monsignor Giuseppe Crispino had already been the secretary of Archbishop Innico Caracciolo who, for the first time, had introduced in the South of Italy the type of pastorality directly

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\(^8\)For more on Vincenzo Maria Orsini see A. De Spirito, Culto e cultura nelle visite orsiniiane e L’osservazione partecipante di un vescovo del Mezzogiorno (Rome: Studium edizioni, 2003).
\(^10\)A. De Spirito, op. cit., 103.
\(^11\)G. Crispino, Trattato della visita pastorale (Roma 1695). The first printing was dedicated by Crispino to Innico Caracciolo, whose secretary he was. The version taken as reference here is the reprint of 1695, in whose preface Crispino explains to the reader the genesis of the work, linked to Orsini’s advices. The work was enormously successful and was printed regularly until the end of the nineteenth century (the ninth edition was published in 1895). About the book see G. De Rosa, Chiesa e religione popolare nel Mezzogiorno (Laterza, Bari 1978), 105-110.
inspired by the reformist practice of Carlo Borromeo. Having found a road paved by Caracciolo’s policy in the nearby Neapolitan diocese, it was easy to impose the Ursinian method in the management of the Visitation. With the subdivision into phases (preparatory, local, real and personal), the event took the form of a real spiritual rite that helped the provincial parish priests to make the sacred building worthy of celebrating the glory of God and, at the same time, to form a clergy adequate to the care of souls. The author’s use of terms such as ‘building/edifying’, ‘raising’ or ‘plant’ in his literary endeavour does not appear obvious. The Treatise is the result of a studied edification of the parts, constructed iure architectonico based on the ‘precious stones’ of the doctrine imparted by Orsini. The analogy with architecture is evident not only in the use of terms proper to the discipline but also in the metaphorical reference to that art of building, which must fuse, in a single whole, the internal itinerary of the soul to the sacred space. This substantial identity between moral and material construction induces Orsini to guide Crispino in the writing of the Treatise. The author describes the model of the Pastoral Visit focusing on a single objective: to regulate the liturgy and the practice of worship by highlighting problems of action, movement and function of space. Therefore, in the part dedicated to the ‘real visitation’, the text only takes up the practical indications on the sacred building set out in the Instructiones of Carlo Borromeo. The only ‘unit of measure’ to be considered in the composition of the sacred space is faithful in their condition of user. If the church is a spiritual building that exists only in function of the devotees who animate it, man must identify himself with the house of God, becoming himself a ‘church of living stones’.

From Homily to Treatise

The substantial interpenetration between the care of the soul and the care of the sacred space present in the doctrine of Carlo Borromeo, well taken up by Orsini, leads to a logical consequence: the sacred building must be treated with the same method with which the Good Shepherd awakens the faith in his flock. Accordingly, historiography is unanimous in defining Borromeo’s preaching work as one of the greatest achievements of his pastoral action. In a climate of fervent disputes of faith, Saint Charles’ homily was not philosophical but essentially popular. Moreover, Borromeo’s intellectual working method, which is influenced by his mens iuridica, is based on perspicuitas, the utmost clarity

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15G. Dominici, Regola del governo di cura famigliare (Firenze 1860), 79.
and communicative effectiveness.\textsuperscript{16} In the composition of his homilies, little
space is reserved for improvisation. The inspirational principles of the speech
are arranged according to logical ‘tree-like’ schemes that outline the plot of the
subjects to be developed and branch out into gradually simpler concepts,
functional to the game of content symmetries and useful for memorization (see
Figure 3). The message of the sermon is thus diluted in such a way as to divert
the personal needs of each member of the faithful towards a collective
devotionality, made up of mystical impulses and direct involvement in the rite.
The objective is to speak to the heart of the faithful since the prelate sensed that
‘irreligiosity is a disease of the heart before being a disease of the brain’.\textsuperscript{17} The
architectural \textit{Instructiones} are developed using the same deductive ad arbores
method with which the key concepts of a sermon are branched out (see Figure
4). This innovative approach is precisely one of the reasons why this literary
work, for a long time, was not considered a true treatise on architecture. In this
regard, the exclusion of the text from the famous \textit{Artistic Literature} (1924) by
Julius von Schlosser is emblematic. Antony Blunt was the first, in 1940, to
define Carlo Borromeo ‘the only author who applied the Tridentine decree to
the problem of architecture’.\textsuperscript{18} The great novelty of the work lies in having
completely overturned the way of writing about architecture; no longer, as in
Palladio’s treatise (1570), through a structure that unravels from the particular
to the general with an eye fixed on the classical models. We find ourselves in
front of a gigantic work of disassembly in which the sacred building is
decomposed into its parts, progressively descending in scale. This examination
expresses the author’s meticulousness in revising the physical reality of the
building: the visibility, the hierarchy of the architectural elements, the measures
and dimensions of the parts, the furnishings and the vestments, even lingering
over minute prescriptions. The only concern of the bishop-legislator is that of
reducing the various aspects of the liturgy into ‘norms’, making sure that every
element of the sacred space does not get in the way of the Christian rite for
which the place is functional. In the writings of St. Charles, a continuous
interweaving between the doctrine of the soul and the sacred building is
outlined, aiming to give the Church the image of an institution organically
constituted in its material and spiritual reality. On the one hand, the homily
must be composed according to a disciplined architecture of knowledge; on the

\textsuperscript{16}Carlo Borromeo graduated in canon and civil law from the University of Pavia (1552-59)
where he studied under Francesco Alciati. See C. Fantappiè, “Per una reinterpretazione
dell’opera e dell’eredità giuridica di san Carlo Borromeo”, in \textit{Carlo Borromeo e il
cattolicesimo dell’età moderna. Nascita e fortuna di un modello di santità} (Milan: Bulzoni,
linguistica in Carlo Borromeo”, in \textit{Carlo Borromeo e l’opera della “grande riforma”
 Cultura, religione e arti nella Milano del pieno Cinquecento} (Silvana editoriale, Milano
1997), 366.
\textsuperscript{17}A. Novelli, “S. Carlo Borromeo oratore sacro”, in \textit{San Carlo Borromeo nel terzo centenario
\textsuperscript{18}A. Blunt, \textit{Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450-1600} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 137.
other hand, the sacred building must result in ‘a creative living [...] that knows how to make the human talents, mentioned in the Gospel parable, bear fruit’. ¹⁹

**Figure 3.** Autograph scheme of Carlo Borromeo’s homily for Easter Mass in 1581  
Source: Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana

**Figure 4.** Compositional scheme ‘ad arbores’ of the Instructiones of Carlo Borromeo (1577)  
Source: Author’s elaboration

The ‘Antica Basilicografia’ by Pompeo Sarnelli (1686)

The use of this innovative dialectic *a genere ad speciem* is not only to be considered the technical expedient of an academic. On the contrary, it is the practical method chosen by a bishop who wanted his people to understand the essential concepts of the faith, spreading the doctrine of the Counter-Reformation throughout the territory. This is the purpose of the *Instructiones*, which are not to be read as a set of precepts to be rigidly followed but as successfully experimented guidelines in the Milanese diocese and proposed as a model, tacitly favouring great freedom of action precisely because of the norms outlined in the Treaty. The objective is to give weight to the local needs of each community as highlighted by the bishop, who, in turn, takes into good account the opinion of the architect. Bishop Orsini was inspired by the principles of adaptability and usability of the Caroline norms, experimenting with local models of the *Instructiones* that could adapt to the needs of the diocese of Benevento where, before his arrival, ‘there was not a church in which it was possible to celebrate’. After the fruitful experiences in the dioceses of Manfredonia and Cesena, during his first visits to the churches, Orsini understood the state of the city. It is no coincidence that in 1686, the year of his settlement in Benevento, the *Antica Basilicografia* was printed. Pompeo Sarnelli’s treatise ideally attempts to reconstruct the spaces of the primitive church-building through reckless use of the sources, referring to the original meaning of ‘basilica’ of the early Christian age, also proposing a graphic reconstruction (see Figure 5). We are facing erudite research on religious architecture that aims to intercept no longer the mass of the clergy and the ‘heart’ of the faithful but an audience of authoritative ecclesiastics and scholars. The drastic change of the interlocutor is accompanied by the blurring of some characteristics at the basis of the Caroline Treatise, such as the bishop-architect relationship well outlined by Borromeo with the specificity of tasks and roles. In this case, the architecture does not take shape from the constant dialogue between client and technician but thanks to the *auctoritas* of the past, reconstructed piece by piece with great obstinacy. Hence, the text attempts a mediation between the erudite studies already carried out for some time on sacred buildings (such as the work of Cataneo or Panvinio) and the practical approach of the norms of Saint Charles. This is also evident in the compositional choices; as the author himself confirms, the reference to the *Instructiones* is constant (the subdivision of the paragraphs keeps well in mind the technique ad arbores, articulating the discourse from the general to the particular) but the approach to look at the source has changed (see Figure 6).

The author describes the various parts of the sacred building, forgetting the *perspicuitas* of the post-Tridentine treatise and inserting long historical and symbolic reflections. St. Charles’ precepts are generally placed at the end of a series of authoritative quotations, thus losing the ‘flexibility’ that his careful vision made possible (see Figure 7). Fully aware that he is reaching an audience of a select few, Sarnelli chooses the path of erudition. This does not mean that his goal is only a disquisition among intellectuals. The *Basilicografia* was born above all to highlight the strength of the example and discipline of Orsini; the treatise itself is emphatically described as the ‘basilica of his Orsini roses’ and in many passages, the work illustrates the results obtained by Orsini’s episcopal government. In the drafting of the text, the author moves in the same direction as the pastoral attitude of the bishop, who, having recently arrived in Benevento, realized the serious deficiencies in the local religious education so much so that he personally visited many cities ‘doing the usual functions and preaching what the holy visitation was’. The worrying spiritual emergency is accompanied by the material one, for which the sacred buildings had ‘semblance of hovels, or caves’. As Carlo Borromeo had taught, all that remained was to restructure the diocese to ‘provide for the crumbling churches and restore discipline’. Sarnelli’s treatise aims to respond to these needs, addressing the problems related to architecture concerning the much more serious deficiencies in the field of religious education. As such, just the continuous oscillation between norm and erudition highlights ‘the attempt to reconcile morality and erudition or, rather, to put the latter at the service of the former’.

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23 P. Sarnelli, *op. cit.*, 168-171.
24 A. De Spirito, *op. cit.*, 104.
Figure 5. Graphic reconstruction of the interior and atrium of the early Christian Basilica.
Source: P. Sarnelli, *Antica Basilicografia*, 1686

Figure 6. Compositional scheme ‘ad arbores’ of the macrothemes of the Antica Basilicografia of P. Sarnelli
Source: Author’s elaboration
Figure 7. Detail of the development of the paragraph dedicated to the item ‘atrium’ in the Antica Basilicografia. It is evident how much the speech is based on authoritative quotations of classical and Christian kind, and then closes with the norm of Saint Charles

Source: Author’s elaboration

The ‘Rettore ecclesiastico’ by Marcello Cavalieri (1688)

If the first times of Orsini’s episcopate in Benevento allowed a certain erudite reflection on religious architecture, in 1688, there was the urgency to move to the operational phase after the earthquake that struck the city. The acts of the Visits that the bishop made in those years testify to serious damage to sacred buildings. Orsini, speaking of the tragedy, refers to the age of the buildings and does not fail to emphasize how the divine hand had wanted to punish the clergy for the unseemly way in which they were used to guard the house of God. The most urgent need at that time was to rebuild the places of worship, proposing a model of management of the sacred space that would allow reaching ‘at least decency, when having does not allow to compliment abundance; making up for more with kindness [...]. Because God [...] puts the fullness of heart before the preciousness of the vows’. Since the earthquake suddenly changed the priorities of the Benevento diocese, the bishop was forced to move towards crude practicality that left no room for erudite digressions. With this spirit he turns to Cavalieri, commissioning him to write the Rettore Ecclesiastico, which, even more than the Antica Basilicografia, appears to be a work dominated by the ‘express commandment’ of the prelate that, in this case, must be contained ‘within the limits of a bare and literal

27A. De Spirito, op. cit., 55-60.
28M. Cavalieri, Il Rettore ecclesiastico istruito sulle regole della fabbrica e delle supplielettili... (Napoli: Fusco editore, 1688), Introduction
instruction, so as to facilitate its execution with brevity and reading, with
adapting to the short intelligence of not a few’. The intention to create a link
with the *Basilicografia* of Sarnelli printed two years earlier is clear. According
to Cavalieri, it is not necessary to make erudite reasoning on the primitive
Christian church because it was St. Charles himself who had ‘accommodated’
the ancient practices according to ‘modern customs’ and the ‘dictates of
architecture’. Avoiding preambles and clearly departing from Sarnelli’s vision,
the *Rettore Ecclesiastico* is set up as a parish handbook. The work recovers the
Caroline model in many ways, so much so that several times this treatise has
been spoken of as a simple translation ‘to the letter’ of the sixteenth-century
*Instructiones*. However, reading the words of the author and accompanying
them with a careful analysis of the composition of the work, it is possible to
realize that the norm of Saint Charles underwent important modifications, since
it was adapted to the functional needs of the diocese, which required rules of
immediate application. Although the chapters of the treatise reflect the
‘disassembly’ of the sacred building proposed by Saint Charles, they do not
follow the order dictated by the Milanese bishop but are composed differently,
highlighting ‘the author’s long experience as a “visitor” in the diocese of
Benevento’ (see Figures 8–9). ‘I do not deny, however, that I have put in
some small part of my own, which, with the office of Visitor in this diocese
[...] I have judged more proper and appropriate to the different circumstances of
places and times’. The greatest novelty of Cavalieri’s work lies in the fact that
he fully understood the spirit with which Borromeo had printed his treatise on
architecture, leaving full freedom of action to the local bishop who, as Good
Visitor, could have proposed ‘those rules that in the progress of the holy
visitation have arisen suitable to needs, and universally necessary no less to
practice than to know’. The aspect on which he insists, even in a redundant
way, is that of the ‘cleanliness’ of the sacred buildings, with entire paragraphs
dedicated to the problems of humidity, the ‘clearness’ of the walls and the
repairs to be carried out ‘without delay’, recalling on several occasions the
poverty in which the churches of Benevento were after the earthquake. The
result is a treatise that scrupulously follows the system ad arbores of San Carlo;
in some cases, it shortens or eliminates entire parts of the original text because
they were not considered necessary to the practical needs of the diocese. In this
respect, the first lines of Title I are exemplary: the reader is warned that the first
two chapters of the *Instructiones* of Saint Charles, dedicated to the site and
form of the church, are not included. As the author affirms, the *Rettore
Ecclesiastico* has the task of reporting only the news ‘that concern the
construction of the churches already built’. Completely absent, for obvious

30S. Benedetti, *op. cit.*, 131, note 97.
31M. Basile Bonsante, *op. cit.*, 220.
32M. Cavalieri, *op. cit.*, Introduction.
34M. Cavalieri, *op. cit.*, I, 1.
reasons, are the prescriptions on the Ambrosian rite as well as the paragraphs
on the location and shape of the baptistery and the bell tower along with the
instructions regarding the churches and monasteries of the nuns. The
prescriptions on the ecclesiastical furnishings are inserted directly as chapters
within the text without providing for the division into two tomes as had
happened for the *Instructiones* of Borromeo. On other points, however, the
norms of Saint Charles are rewritten to allow for greater flexibility in the
organization of sacred space. Among the most obvious changes on this point,
aimed at simplifying the text by the emergency due to the earthquake in which
the diocese found itself, we must mention the possibility of providing openings
on the sides of the church, expressly forbidden by St. Charles; the possibility,
for poor churches, of having only one sacrarium near the baptistery (on this
point, St. Charles appeared intransigent in providing a sacrarium for the
baptistery and one for the church); the presence of a single pulpit as a simpler
solution (Borromeo describes minutely, according to the width of the church,
the presence of several ambos or pulpits). The same simplification is made in
the case of the minor altars, the sacristy, the bell tower and the burials inside
the sacred space. In other parts of the treatise, on the other hand, the descriptive
meticulousness reaches even more accurate results than Borromeo had done,
precisely because of the practice of the Holy Visit (see Figures 10-11). In
addition to inserting entire paragraphs on the ‘cleanliness’ of the churches, the
major additions concern practical expedients: detailed description of drapes,
veils, lamps, candlesticks, tablecloths to be used on the altars and the
tabernacle; the addition of an entire paragraph dedicated to the ‘cabinet of the
holy oils and its annexes’ (tit. IX). In general, it is worth noting the scrupulous
attention paid to coverings, restorations and maintenance to be done constantly,
which are absent in Borromeo’s text. The text constantly repeats the works of
‘retouching’, ‘whitewashing’ of the ‘disacconcised’ paintings as well as the
obligation, for each church, to place a cross in the presbytery, at the intersection
with the nave, so that ‘at the first entry into the church it is made visible and
excites the piety of the faithful to veneration’.

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35 M. Cavalieri, op. cit., XI, 26
Figure 8. Compositional scheme ‘ad arbores’ of the macro-themes related to the exterior of the sacred building in the Rettore Ecclesiastico
Source: Author’s elaboration

Figure 9. Compositional scheme ‘ad arbores’ of the macro-themes related to the interior of the sacred building in the Rettore Ecclesiastico Source: Author’s elaboration
Figure 11-12. Detail of the development of the item ‘Main altar’ in the Instructiones of Saint Charles (top) and in the Rettore Ecclesiastico (bottom) Source: Author’s elaboration

Conclusions

The massive circulation of the Antica Basilicografia and the Rettore ecclesiastico in the undergrowth of the ecclesiastical literature of the time can be explained by the fact that we are dealing with a perfect synthesis of Orsini’s discipline, whose key principles are the formation of a clergy suited to the care of souls and the meticulous attention given to sacred space. Orsini’s pedagogical choice, centred on the importance of the pastoral visit, is intertwined with the archetype of Carlo Borromeo’s Instructiones, examined on the concrete dimension of the local tradition. The use of the ‘ad arbores’ technique, index of a vision of religious building linked to concreteness and
practical reason, allowed to adapt in time the compositional scheme of the Caroline treatise, leading the Good Shepherd to change, correct or innovate principles and corollaries to ‘invent solutions suitable for the infinite ways in which the fragility of man is manifested, to support and accompany him with Christian charity in the path of faith’. 36 Like Orsini, who more than anyone else embodies the model of Saint Charles par excellence, many other contemporary prelates of the South set up their pastoral practice, emulating the sixteenth-century norms. The study of the various ‘Instructions’ that were printed between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries allows us to look at the religious architecture of these times from a different perspective, making the text of St. Charles, with all the local variations, one of the possible normative sources. After all, as Kirschbaum stated, ‘the Catholic Reformation created neither Mannerism nor Baroque: it found them, infused them with its spirit, and made use of them’ (Kirschbaum, 1945: 106). 37

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