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Magnus Lundberg & James W. Craig

Giuseppe Maria Abbate

The Italian-American Celestial Messenger



Uppsala Studies in Church History 7

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About the authors

Magnus Lundberg is Professor of Church and Mission Studies and Acting Professor of Church History at Uppsala University. He specializes in early modern and modern church and mission history with a focus on colonial Latin America, Western Europe and on contemporary traditionalist and fringe Catholicism. This is his third monograph in the Uppsala Studies in Church History Series. In 2017, he published *A Pope of Their Own: Palmar de Troya and the Palmarian Church* and *Tomás Ruiz: Utbildning, karriär och konflikter i den sena kolonialtidens Centralamerika*.

The Rev. Father James W. Craig is a priest living in the Chicagoland area. He has a degree in History from Northeastern Illinois University and is a member of Phi Alpha Theta the national honor society for historians. He was ordained to the priesthood of the North American Old Roman Catholic Church in 1994 by the late Archbishop Theodore Rematt. From the time he first started hearing stories of the Celestial Father he became fascinated with the life and legacy of Giuseppe Maria Abbate. He is also actively involved with the website Find a Grave, to date having posted over 31,000 photos to the site and creating over 12,000 memorials to commemorate the departed.

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Editorial Address: Uppsala Studies in Church History, Uppsala University,
Department of Theology, Box 511, 751 20 UPPSALA, Sweden
Email: magnus.lundberg@teol.uu.se

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Preface | 1 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| The Making of an Italian-American Celestial Messenger | 7 |
| Italians and the Catholic Church in Chicago | 14 |
| The New Jerusalem Catholic Church | 23 |
| Court, Asylum and Community | 37 |
| New Trials | 43 |
| Continuing the Mission – Escaping the Media | 47 |
| The Padre Celeste’s Last Years and the Old Roman Catholic Connection | 52 |
| Abbate’s Legacy and the Sacred Heart Church | 60 |
| Conclusion | 69 |
| Appendix 1: Charter of the New Jerusalem Catholic Church | 72 |
| Appendix 2: Photos | 75 |
| References | 106 |

Preface

Giuseppe Maria Abbate (1886–1963) was one of the many Italians who immigrated to the United States in the early twentieth century. However, his career in the new country would become quite unusual. Not only did he found a new religious group, the New Jerusalem Catholic Church, but he also claimed that he was a divinely elected Celestial Messenger and even the Celestial Father, God incarnate. Though a few authors have mentioned Abbate in passing, this is the first detailed investigation about him and his religious movement.¹

In the writing of this work, I (Magnus Lundberg) have counted on the close collaboration with Fr. James W. Craig, a priest in the North American Old Roman Catholic Church, the jurisdiction which pastored Abbate's parish from the mid-1950s onwards, and whose archbishop was formally named Abbate's successor, while not accepting his far-reaching religious claims. Fr. Craig is one of the very few persons who know much about this theme. For example, the chapters entitled "The Padre Celeste's Last Years and the Old Roman Catholic Connection" and "Abbate's Legacy and the Sacred Heart Church" are mainly based on his research, personal knowledge, and interviews.

I also want to acknowledge Dr. John Plummer, an expert on Independent Catholicism, who was the catalyst for this project. Aware of my interest in similar things, he asked me if I knew anything about

¹ Abbate is mentioned briefly in a few works on the Italian community in Chicago: Candeloro 2003: 48, Catrambone & Shubart 2007: 114 and Candeloro 2013. See also Vance Randolph's inventory of "Americans who believed they were gods": Randolph 1943: 18.

the Celestial Messenger in Chicago, which I did not. Starting to search for material on Abbate on the Internet, I found Fr. Craig's photographic documentation of Abbate's tomb on the Find a Grave website. When I contacted him, he told me that he had wanted to write something on the Celestial Messenger for many years. So, we decided to co-operate in this quite complicated mission; Abbate and his church is undoubtedly a challenging research field.

I want to thank Archbishop William Myers of the Priestly Society of Mercy in the Old Roman Catholic tradition for his help and encouragement. I would also like to acknowledge Sister Maria Bernadette Beninato, the last surviving nun of Abbate's Order of Our Most Blessed Lady, Queen of Peace Reincarnated, whom Fr. Craig interviewed in May 2018.

Last, but not least I am grateful to my colleagues in the Church History Research Seminar at Uppsala University, who read an earlier version of the whole manuscript and made several important observations that improved the final text.

Uppsala in May 2018

Magnus Lundberg

Introduction

By the mid-1910s, the Celestial Messenger Giuseppe Maria Abbate emerged as a religious leader in the Italian-American neighborhoods in Chicago. Groups of people were fascinated by his charisma and his healing skills and joined his movement that somewhat later became an organized church. The beliefs survived Abbate's death in 1963 and though very much decreased, there are still people who venerate his memory. How unique were Abbate's teachings, how was he able to attract and retain members and how did his mission and his legacy change over time?

This book presents aspects of Giuseppe Maria Abbate's biography, his religious claims, and mission as well as the history of the New Jerusalem Catholic Church, which he founded. The outline is chronological mainly, following Abbate from his birth in 1886 until his death in 1963, but with a clear focus on the period from the late-1910s onwards, when he appeared as a religious leader. It also includes an investigation of the congregation's development after the founder's death and the legacy of the Celestial Messenger.

Given its pioneer status, the study has an explorative character, documenting this little-known case in as great detail as possible. Though the focus is on Abbate, both he and the New Jerusalem Catholic Church are placed in a broader historical context, not least through a study of the Italian-American community in Chicago and its religious situation in the early twentieth century.² We try to present Abbate and his

² To some extent, this book is part of Magnus Lundberg's much more extensive project on twentieth and twenty-first century alternative popes,

church's beliefs in as fair and multifaceted a way as possible. Still following a general religious studies approach we look upon the beliefs as nothing but human constructs related to particular contexts and ideas of the time, though the adherents believed that Abbate was much more than that.

There are several source-related problems involved in the study of Abbate and his group. Very little material produced by him is extant, though we know that the New Jerusalem Catholic Church published lots of booklets and leaflets for missionary purposes. And of course, Abbate and his secretaries wrote many letters and other documents. Unfortunately, a sizeable collection of material that once was found in Abbate's residence was destroyed in the 1990s.³

Given this state of things, the single most valuable source on Abbate's religious claims turned out to be an article series published in the Italian journal *La Settimana INCOM Illustrata* in 1950, which we were lucky to encounter. The two long articles reproduced some of the material that Abbate and his Church propagated. They also featured many photographs of Abbate and his adherents, which in themselves are valuable sources. Still, the articles say little about the organization and the activities of the New Jerusalem Church.⁴

Nevertheless, there are many other types of sources that have contributed to the study. We have made use of official records from both Italy and the United States. In the Italian case, we have employed birth registers from Abbate's hometown: Isnello, Sicily. As for the United States, we have used a series of National Censuses, but also draft records

though Abbate claimed to be more than that: He was the Celestial Father, whom the Pope should obey and venerate. The first monograph related to the project, on the Spanish Palmarian Catholic Church and its popes was published in 2017 (see Lundberg 2017) and a second volume, including all other known cases is currently in preparation (see Lundberg forthcoming).

³ For details on the fate of the collection, see the chapter entitled "Abbate's Legacy and the Sacred Heart Church." However, Fr. Craig has a few relevant documents in his personal archive (hereafter referred to as JWCA) as do Archbishop William Myers (WMA).

⁴ The articles are referred to as Pieroni 1950a and Pieroni 1950b.

and lists of births, deaths, and burials. Court records contribute to the study, both as regards Abbate's criminal record and the development of his religious community.⁵

Newspapers are essential sources for our study. In total, we have encountered more than a hundred articles that deal with Abbate and the New Jerusalem Catholic Church, though several of them are overlapping or even identical, being published in various journals at around the same time. Most of them are found in U.S. dailies from the late 1910s to the mid-1930s, and without any doubt, the *Chicago Tribune* has the best coverage.⁶

Newspaper reports are not unproblematic sources. If entering into religious issues at all, the journalists generally underlined the strangeness of his religious claims and group, describing Abbate as an insane and/or evil cultist. As the journalists—quite understandably—considered the Celestial Messenger's ideas outlandish, they did not observe or describe the parts of the beliefs and rituals that, in fact, strictly followed traditional Roman Catholic use. The press material includes few detailed descriptions of the New Jerusalem Church's beliefs and ceremonies but pieced together and used together with other kinds of sources they have provided us with useful evidence. Further, it is important to stress that the lion's part of the articles is related to a series of legal processes against Abbate in the 1920s and 1930s.

Apart from the newspaper articles on Abbate, we have used press reports from the 1980s and 1990s on the archbishops of the North American Old Roman Catholic Church, who took over his parish, known

⁵ The censuses and other official materials from the United States are available through www.familysearch.com. The Italian material is indexed on www.polizzigenerosaisnelloitaly.net. The printed court records have been consulted through different legal databases. For details, see the List of References.

⁶ Our article search has been systematic. We have mainly used searchable and scanned articles found on www.newspapers.com. Apart from that, we have used the digital archives of individual newspapers available freely online or via Uppsala University Library.

as the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Much of this material, too, is related to conflicts and legal processes.

Of great importance for our study of the history of the church from the 1950s onwards is Fr. James W. Craig's documentation of conversations with Old Roman Catholic archbishop Theodore Rematt (1945–2016) from the late 1980s onwards, as well as his own observations while serving in the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish in the 1990s and early 2000s. In addition, valuable information on Rematt's predecessor, Archbishop John E. Schweikert (1924–1988) was provided to Fr. Craig by a former student of Schweikert's as well as a priest ordained by him. These observations are essential when trying to understand the development of the congregation after Abbate's death and the struggles over his legacy.⁷

In May 2018, Fr. Craig interviewed Sister Maria Bernadette Beninato, the only living member of Abbate's religious order. Although Fr. Craig and Sr. Bernadette attended Sacred Heart Church during the same period, they never formally met and had never previously discussed Abbate or his legacy. Born in 1925 into a family of adherents, only six years after the foundation of the Church of New Jerusalem, she entered the Order of Our Most Blessed Lady, Queen of Peace Reincarnated, at the age of fourteen, and she has provided us with a rare inside perspective on the mission of the Celestial Messenger.

To end this introductory chapter, we will consider a few research ethical matters related to anonymity. In this study, we refer to several individuals who were born less than a hundred years ago. Some of them were victims of Abbate's criminal acts; others were ordinary church members. Given the sensitive nature of the matters and with respect for them and their families, throughout we use pseudonyms when we refer to them. On the other hand, we use the civil and/or religious names of Abbate's bishops, priests, nuns, and monks. They had a formal status in the church and were registered as such in the United States Censuses and other official documents.

⁷ In the footnotes, Fr. Craig's observations are referred to as JWCA, *Notes*.

The Making of an Italian-American Celestial Messenger

Giuseppe Maria Abbate was born in the town of Isnello, Sicily on January 8, 1886. Unfortunately, his mother's name does not appear in the civil birth registers, but his father was the police officer Carmelo Abbate.⁸ Giuseppe Maria was the oldest of at least five children.⁹ His hometown has medieval origins and is situated some 70 kilometers from Palermo, in a valley surrounded by forests and mountains. By the time of Abbate's birth, Isnello had around 4,000 inhabitants and five churches, plus several smaller chapels. Like many other rural parts in Sicily, the local economy focused on agriculture and pastoring, and the production of wool and dairy products was central.¹⁰

At the age of twenty, in 1906, Giuseppe Abbate immigrated to the United States. Before embarking on the transatlantic voyage, he had left Isnello and lived for some time in Partanna in north-western Sicily.

⁸ See the Indexes to the Civil Records of Polizzi Generosa and Isnello: Isnello 1886 births. In that record, no exact date of birth is given. The date is, however, found in e.g. the United States World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918, serial number 481, and order number 392.

⁹ His known siblings were Maria Santa (b. 1887), Maria Carmela (b. 1890), Luigi (b. 1892) and Nicolò (b. 1894). See the Indexes to the Civil Records of Polizzi Generosa and Isnello: Isnello 1886–1895 births. No indexes are available for the period between 1896 and 1901, and from 1902 onwards there are no indications that any children were born into the Abbate family.

¹⁰ For a detailed monograph on Isnello's history and topography, written towards the end of the nineteenth century, see Virga 1877. For the number of inhabitants in 1881 (3,875) and 1901 (4,390), see <http://www.comuni-italiani.it/082/042/statistiche/popolazione.html>

Having arrived in New York, Abbate stayed briefly with his cousin Giovanni Battista Zappalà in Brooklyn, before moving to Chicago.¹¹

Together with New York, Chicago was the U.S. immigrant city par excellence at the time and its population grew exponentially. By the turn of the century, the city had about 1.6 million inhabitants. In 1920 the number had raised to 2.7 million. The number of Italians living in Chicago increased rapidly, too. According to the United States Census of the year 1900, 16,000 of the inhabitants were born in Italy. Ten years later, they were 45,000, and according to the 1920 Census, 60,000 of the inhabitants were Italian-born. The vast majority came from the southern areas of the country, the macro-region known as Mezzogiorno, and not least from Sicily. Most of the immigrants were impoverished peasants (*contadini*), and many were illiterate, at least on arrival.¹²

In the first decade of the twentieth century, between 80 and 90 percent of the Italian immigrants who arrived in the United States were male, and a large percentage of those who lived in Chicago worked on railroad projects or toiled as members of construction crews in the rapidly expanding city. While most Italian-Americans were outdoor workers, some were tradesmen or worked in shops or restaurants. However, at least in the first decades of the twentieth century, relatively few were hired for factory work, even if groups of men and

¹¹ New York Passenger Arrival Lists (Ellis Island), April 22, 1906, sheet 54. For some reason, several later sources indicate that Abbate arrived in the United States as early as 1901. See e.g., United States Census 1920: Chicago, District ED 1061, sheet 14B. For a portrait of the newly arrived Abbate, see Photo 1 in Appendix 2 in this book.

¹² In 1906, no less 273,000 Italians arrived in the United States (Guglielmo 2011). That meant that about a fourth of all immigrants that year were Italians. Of them the vast majority came from the southern parts of the country. According to official data, about half of the adult immigrants who arrived from southern Italy around the turn of the century were illiterate (see Di Palma Castiglione 1905: 183–185). In total, four million Italians arrived in the United States between 1890 and 1920.

women worked in the textile industry.¹³ The Italian-Americans lived in several parts of the Chicago, but Near West Side was the area where most of them gathered. Still, there were no pure “Little Italies”; Greeks, Jews, Germans, Irish, and other groups lived in the same areas.¹⁴

Giuseppe Abbate did not belong to the most impoverished strata in Sicily. His father was the local chief of police, and he received some formal schooling, but like so many of his compatriots, he looked for better opportunities on the other side of the Atlantic, and he was among those who remained in the United States, never returning to Italy, not even for a visit. Arriving in Chicago, he came to work as a barber, and at that time, his name was often anglicized as Joseph or Joe Abbate.¹⁵ Some newspaper accounts even referred to him as Joseph or Joe Abbott. In 1907, Giuseppe’s younger brother Luigi (Louis, 1892–1960) arrived in the United States. Before settling down in Chicago, he stayed briefly with his uncle, Nicolò Abbate in New York, where Luigi worked as a barber, just like his older brother.¹⁶

According to news reports from the late 1910s, Giuseppe Abbate claimed that his life changed dramatically in 1906, though the event probably took place a few years later. One afternoon, when he was wielding a razor, he saw Christ enter his barbershop on Polk Street. Sitting in the barber’s chair, the Savior asked Abbate if he spoke Hebrew—or “Jewish” if we should believe another newspaper article. Answering in the negative, Christ used Latin to convey the message that God had chosen the twenty-year-old barber as his Celestial Messenger,

¹³ For studies on the Italian immigration to the United States and Italians in Chicago, see Nelli 1970, Vecoli 2003 and Candeloro 2003. Cf. Di Palma Castiglione 1905: 189.

¹⁴ Vecoli 2003, Candeloro 2003 and Catrambone & Shubart 2007.

¹⁵ “Celestial Cult Trails its Robes in a City Court”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919. Cf. “A New Religious Cult among the Italians”, *L’Italia*, July 27, 1919.

¹⁶ For Luigi Abbate’s date of birth, see Indexes to the Civil Records of Polizzi Generosa and Isnello: Isnello 1892 births. Cf. New York Passenger Arrival Lists (Ellis Island), June 15, 1907, sheet 67; the United States Census 1920: Chicago, District ED 1061, sheet 14B; and Kankakee County, Illinois Death Index, 1870–1992.

ordering him to preach and found a church. To be able to carry out this mission, Christ instantaneously ordained Abbate to the priesthood. In the following years, Abbate combined his work in the barbershop with evangelization, conveying the story of his mission on earth, not least to recently arrived, Italian immigrants.¹⁷

According to the hagiographies that his Church published later, the story about how he really came to understand that he was the Celestial Messenger was somewhat different. There, the significant change took place in 1912 or 1913. By then, he had lived as a boarder with a family on Wabash Avenue for about five years. He claimed to receive heavenly visions on a daily basis, and he began studying the Bible, focusing on the prophetic books of the Old Testament in search of evidence that could explain what was happening to him and the world at large. While working in the barbershop, he had begun to suffer from rheumatism and had problems moving his limbs. Abbate considered leaving Chicago for a warmer place, either returning to Italy, or going to California, but he did not have the money, nor the strength to do it.¹⁸

To pray for recovery, Abbate went to St. Mary's Church near his home. There, he felt great anxiety and was convinced that he was about to die and before a statue of Christ, he prayed to Him and Our Lady of Lourdes. Suddenly, he saw Jesus smiling and His right hand blessing him. Shortly after this vision, Abbate saw an angel dressed as a warrior with a helmet, a green mantle, a staff with a five-pointed star, sword by his side and a lance in hand.¹⁹

A shining circle, a kind of halo, appeared on Abbate's head. It remained there as he walked out of the church where he suddenly was brought up in the air. Reaching about five stories high, he realized that he was freed from his rheumatism. In his later publications, Abbate claimed that while he was flying over the ground, he could have chosen

¹⁷ "Celestial Cult", *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919.

¹⁸ Alfredo Pieroni, "La Singolari Carriera di Giusepppe Abbate di Carmelo, Parte 2: Ma che sei matto? Smettila e fa' il barbiere!:", *La Settimana INCOM illustrata*, 1950, no. 45 (hereafter referred to as Pieroni 1950b).

¹⁹ Pieroni 1950b.

to go to Heaven, but that he had wanted to fulfill his mission on earth. Then God said to him: “*La mia Podestà Divina è già in Te*” – “My divine authority is already in you.” The locution was a confirmation that Abbate possessed divine powers; that he was omnipotent and omniscient.²⁰ It is interesting to note that this time God spoke to Abbate in Italian, whereas in the earlier apparition Latin was used.

Apart from having visions and experiencing miracles while in Chicago, Abbate claimed to have an extra-terrestrial pre-existence. According to the New Jerusalem Church’s official account, he lived on Mars before coming to earth, but his Martian existence ended at the age of seven when he was overrun by a chariot. The accident took place in one of the planet’s cities as he was out walking together with his parents. Later, Abbate made detailed drawings of the accident with explanations in both Italian and English.²¹

The stories about his Martian background are found in the earliest available sources and remained unaltered throughout the years; texts from the late 1910s concur with material produced in the 1950s. According to Abbate, all Martians were free from sin, and they continually showed reverence for God. On Sundays, for example, all people went out in the streets, playing musical instruments to honor their creator. The cities on the planet were well-ordered and clean, not chaotic as on earth, and there were no wild animals. Abbate recounted that the weather was always excellent and that there were never any clouds in the sky. During the day, the sunlight was red-orange, and at night everything was blue. He also claimed that all Martians spoke Italian, but of a very refined type without any trace of dialect, resembling Dante’s literary style.²²

When Abbate died on Mars, on a Sunday when he was out playing instruments on the street, his body and soul were separated, and in

²⁰ Pieroni 1950b.

²¹ Alfredo Pieroni, “La Singolari Carriera di Giuseppe Abbate di Carmelo, Parte 1: È sceso da Marte. Il Messaggero Celeste”, *La Settimana INCOM illustrata*, 1950, no. 44, (hereafter referred to as Pieroni 1950a).

²² Pieroni 1950a.

spirit, he traveled through the universe before he was brought to Heaven. Nevertheless, instead of experiencing eternal bliss, he only remained there for twenty minutes, or according to other sources, just twelve minutes. God was worried about the situation on earth as the humans were becoming increasingly sinful and he wanted to send Abbate there. Abbate was hesitant at first, but then said “*Eccomi, manda me*”–“Here I am, send me.”²³

Thereafter, two angels brought him to earth, and when he was approaching Isnello on Sicily, where he should be reborn, he was able to save his earthly father-to-be from an armed attack. In fact, he had some prior knowledge of the earth. While growing up on Mars, the young Abbate had wanted to become a scientist, and he often sat on a hill looking through a telescope and among other things, he studied the tellurian landscapes, and he also observed a big city, which he later realized was Chicago, where his universal mission would begin.²⁴

Around the turn of the century, there was a growing literature about extraterrestrial adventures and aliens. The books of H.G. Wells were central for the development of the genre, but there were very popular Italian authors in the field, too. One of them was Emilio Salgari, who wrote novels such as *Alla conquista della Luna* (“The Conquest of the Moon,” 1893) and *Il re dell'aria* (“The King of the Air,” 1907). Another was Enrico Novelli, known as Yambo, who published science fiction books such as *Gli esploratori dell'infinito* (“Explorers of the Infinite,” 1906), *La colonia lunare* (“The Lunar Colony,” 1908) and *Re dei Mondi* (“King of the Worlds,” 1910).²⁵ Whether Abbate had read or even knew about any of these books, we cannot know, but such book became increasingly popular in those very years, and they were available in cheap editions or in installments.

According to the official history, as a child on earth, Abbate did not remember his Martian pre-existence, but at a young age, he became

²³ Pieroni 1950a.

²⁴ Pieroni 1950a. See also Photos 2–5.

²⁵ On Italian science fiction in the early twentieth-century, see Carlo Pagetti & Giulia Iannuzzi 2017.

convinced that he in some way was elected by God. In 1898, he was riding a horse that suddenly started to gallop, and he prayed to the souls in purgatory that they should help him. Indeed, a group of souls, dressed as carabinieri came to his assistance, but to no avail. Instead, he fell off the horse, and when it was on its way to crush him, he prayed to the Virgin, and due to her intercession, the wild horse calmed down. In this context, he realized he was chosen by God, but Abbate still did not understand that he was the Celestial Messenger.

Apart from the stories about his background and election to carry out God's mission in the End-time, there is little information about the contents of Abbate's teachings in the early years. It is probable that he began his mission in 1912 or 1913, as he mentioned that he had lived five years in Chicago when the miracles in the church happened. Still, it seems that it was precisely the claims about his divine election that was the center of his message; all people and religious leaders should regard him as the Celestial Messenger and submit to him. Only so, the world would be saved from eternal damnation.²⁶

²⁶ Pieroni 1950a.

Italians and the Catholic Church in Chicago

Most of the people whom Abbate approached in his missionary attempts were of Italian origin; many of them recently arrived from Europe. Though the vast majority of the Italian-Americans were cradle Catholics, only a minority were practicing in the sense that they went to Mass or confessed on a regular basis. Many of the early immigrants found it hard to accommodate to the worship style in the Catholic parishes in their new home country, which often were dominated by Irish, Polish or German immigrants.²⁷ By the turn of the century, there was only one Italian Catholic temple in Chicago: the Assumption Church in Illinois Street. But Mass was also celebrated in a civic hall in Forquer Street. Still, while the ministry was carried out in Italian, the priests were Irish.²⁸

With the risk of simplifying, the south-Italian versions of Catholicism could be described as Mario-centric and saint-oriented, where collective religious celebrations (*feste*) had a significant place, as well as home-based veneration, praying before religious images. The organized Catholic Church and its clergy often had a less central role in their lived religion. Moreover, as in the homeland and elsewhere in the United States, anticlericalism was widespread among the Italian-Americans in Chicago, and the ecclesiastical authorities considered many of the Italian-Americans as indifferent or downright hostile to the organized church.²⁹

The Italian and Italian-American anticlericalism appeared in different forms. There was a Liberal and Socialist minded critique

²⁷ Vecoli 1969, cf. D'Agostino 1997 and D'Agostino 2004.

²⁸ Sciavo 1928: 75.

²⁹ Vecoli 1969. For the role of “feste”, see also Orsi 2010: 55–60.

among better-educated males, who thought the church to be an obstacle for human evolution. However, above all, there was a widespread popular skepticism against priests, who were often looked upon as little more than parasites. This kind of anticlericalism was much more common among males, and in the first decade of the twentieth-century, they made up 80 or even 90 percent of the Italians in Chicago. Still, many of the men were undoubtedly practicing Catholics in the sense that they prayed and kept religious images at home, and went to religious ceremonies as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. However, they rarely attended Sunday Mass.³⁰

By the turn of the century, there were few Italian-speaking priests in Chicago, and both the Holy See and the U.S. church authorities saw an “Italian problem,” which had both social and religious components: most immigrants were impoverished, and many of them were not religiously active at all. In an attempt to counteract the situation, groups of Scalabrini missionaries, members of a religious corporation of secular priests founded in 1887, were sent to work among Italian immigrants in the United States. They arrived in Chicago from 1903 onwards and were followed by Italian priests who belonged to other religious orders. Still, most Italian parishes in Chicago remained in the hands of Scalabrini priests for many decades.³¹ Apart from the male priests, the Italian Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart had been present in Chicago since 1899, where they run a hospital.³²

While the Holy See did not accept the unified Italian Kingdom, as it had put an end to the Papal States and made the pope a “prisoner in the Vatican,” the Scalabrini Fathers maintained a more pragmatic relation to the Italian state. Their mission in the United States had a clear nationalist element, trying to create and strengthen a sense of

³⁰ D’Agostino 1997, cf. Orsi 2010: lvii–lix.

³¹ The corporation’s official name was the Pious Society of Missionaries of St. Carlo Borromeo, and the popular designation Scalabrinians related to its founder: Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini. For thorough study of the Scalabrinians’ work in the United States, see D’Agostino 1997.

³² Catrambone & Shubart 2007: 68–69.

italianità—Italianness—overseas; an identity built on national rather than regional belonging. Historian Peter R. D’Agostino puts it well when pointing out that the founder of the corporation, Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini

envisioned ‘Italian colonies’ abroad held together by religion and national sentiment, in which the reconciliation between the church and the Italian Kingdom would be practically operative as missionaries and government agents would cooperate for the good of Italians abroad.³³

In this and many other aspects, there was a significant contrast between the people from rural southern Italy and the educated, urban priests, who often came from the northern parts of the country. The southerners often had little interest or understanding for the nationalist project; their allegiance was more local and regional (*campanalismo*). Generally, they identified much more as, for example, Sicilians than Italians. In his detailed and perceptive study of the history of the Scalabrini missionaries in the United States, D’Agostino writes:

The culture, nationality, and language of which he [the founder Bishop Scalabrini] spoke were unknown in the provincial Italian south. In reality, the task awaiting Scalabrini missionaries in America’s church was to nationalize and Christianize peasants from lands penetrated by neither the spirit of Italian nationalism nor the Counter-Reformation, a task not unlike that of the Italian church during the same years.”³⁴

Though the word Counter-Reformation is perhaps not very well-chosen, we agree with the author’s central argument: that the missionaries wanted to propagate a clerically led religious life, where parishioners’ knowledge in the Catholic doctrine played a significant role. However,

³³ D’Agostino 1997: 126.

³⁴ D’Agostino 1997: 127–128.

it must be underlined that D'Agostino made a general observation. Of course, there were local and not least individual variations.

Still, there is ample evidence that the Italian priests found their work in the United States very difficult and that they met criticism from the Roman Catholic authorities there for not doing enough to solve the "Italian problem." In 1911, a Scalabrini priest, Giacomo Gabrera, the pastor of the St. Maria Addolorata Parish in Chicago had to defend the work of the missionaries in an article in *New World*, the Archdiocese's journal. He wrote:

If there is in America a hard mission it is that of the Italian clergy, who must fight against ideas, popular customs and must defend themselves against unjust aversion, both political and religious, and at the same time it will be understood that up to the present the Italian priests have done for the immigrants all that was humanely possible.³⁵

Though they met anticlerical opposition from Italian-American Liberals and Socialists, not least through the press, priests found it particularly challenging to control and regulate the religious activities of the parishioners. Civil-religious *feste* were arranged by local leaders, not by clergy, and the clerics generally found these festivities "irreligious," though they were reluctantly tolerated. The priest also tried to get control over them and integrate them in the ordinary parish life.³⁶

Thus, in the early decades of the twentieth century, the relationship between Scalabrini missionaries and southern Italian immigrants, who lived in Chicago, was certainly not harmonious. Reciprocal contempt, or at least lack of mutual respect, was typical, and most Italian Catholics were very reluctant towards contributing economically to the church or send their children to Catholic schools. In that respect, too, Italians were very different from Irish and Polish

³⁵ Quoted in D'Agostino 1997: 131.

³⁶ Vecoli 1969 and D'Agostino 1997, cf. Orsi 2010: 55–60.

Catholic immigrants at the time. Still, it is important to note that many Italian women were very devout and spent long hours at church, and their share of the Italian-American population gradually increased in the 1910s and 1920s.³⁷

Wanting to contribute to the solution of the “Italian problem,” the Archdiocese of Chicago financed six parishes that the Scalabrini missionaries established between 1903 and 1915. However, the diocesan financial support was diminished when new archbishop. He had a more “Americanizing” vision of the church, which was based on assimilation rather than different ethnic identities. Nevertheless, by the late 1920s, there were a dozen Italian Catholic churches in Chicago, the vast majority administered by Scalabrini Fathers. As the decades passed—and more women arrived—the Italian-Americans became much more active churchgoers. Likewise, an increasing number of parents sent their children to parochial schools.³⁸

Apart from the officially dispatched members of religious orders, in the first decades of the twentieth century there were hundreds of Italian “freelance priests,” or perhaps better put “clerical individualists” in the United States. Most of them belonged to the secular clergy. They came to the United States as ordinary immigrants, searching for better life opportunities overseas, and many were not directly involved in any parish work. Others, indeed, served in parishes, usually as auxiliary priests, but often without being formally incardinated in any U.S. diocese.³⁹

Thus, canonically speaking, they were still under the jurisdiction of the home bishops in Italy. In 1917–1918 an apostolic delegation computed that of around 330 Italian secular priests living in the United States only one in five were formally incardinated in a diocese. As a result, the Holy See decided that Italian clerics who emigrated should

³⁷ Vecoli 1969.

³⁸ D’Agostino 1997 and Candeloro 2003,

³⁹ D’Agostino 2004: 135–136

have the written consent of both Rome and the local bishop. That decision almost stopped this kind of migration.⁴⁰

Some of these Roman Catholic secular priests joined Protestant denominations, becoming pastors or missionaries, as did groups of Italian lay people. In his 1928 book *The Italians in Chicago: A Study in Americanization*, Giovanni E. Schiavo mentioned a number of Protestant congregations ministering to the Italians in the city: the Saint John Presbyterian Church, two Methodist Episcopal Churches, the Waldensian Presbyterian Church, the Moody Italian Church, the Campbell Park Presbyterian Church, and the Italian Reformed Church.⁴¹ Still, the Protestantization of the Italian-American community should not be overstated. In the early twentieth century, the share of Protestants in the whole population group never accounted for more than a few percent.⁴²

Moreover, in the same period a few Independent Italian Catholic churches were founded, most often run by former Roman Catholic priests. They included the Italian National Episcopalian Church, implanted in the United States by Bishop Paolo Miraglia-Guilotti (1857–1918). In 1900, he was consecrated by the Frenchman René Vilatte (1854–1929), who lived in North America for several decades, though he was traveling much in Europe, too. Vilatte had a very complex religious background, being associated to the Roman Catholic, the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian and the Russian Orthodox Churches, to mention but a few.

René Vilatte was consecrated by a bishop of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, who claimed to be the Archbishop of Ceylon, Goa and the Indies, but soon left his jurisdiction, too. Following his consecration, Vilatte became one of the most prominent providers of apostolic succession to Catholic Independents in the United States and neighboring countries. Vilatte founded and led the American Catholic

⁴⁰ D'Agostino 2004: 136–137.

⁴¹ Sciavo 1928: 85–92.

⁴² Vecoli 1969: 241–242, cf. Form 2000 for a study on Italian Protestants in the United States and Mercadante 2011 for Italian conversions.

Church, incorporated in the state of Illinois, and lived in Chicago for long periods in the early twentieth century.⁴³

Writing about Italian Chicago in 1928, Giovanni Schiavo did include the American Catholic Church among the congregations that attracted small groups of Italians. Still, it is noteworthy that the author did not mention Abbate's church at all, despite the fact that it had many more members. The reason for the omission was probably that Schiavo wanted to present Italian-Americans, and especially his Sicilian compatriots, in a favorable light and that a description of Abbate's group would not contribute to such an image.⁴⁴

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was definitely an anti-Italian sentiment in the public debate and the press in Chicago, as elsewhere in the United States. It was not least directed at the Sicilians. Through "scientific racism," the press claimed that they had a specific propensity for violence and criminality. The city's largest newspaper, the *Chicago Tribune* eagerly spread this kind of ideas. The description of the southerners in the journal of the Archdiocese of Chicago's was less hostile, but patently paternalistic, describing them as carefree children.⁴⁵

Taken together, the widespread popular skepticism towards organized Roman Catholicism and the many religious options available in the new country, implied that the Italian-American population in the early decades of the twentieth century were less religiously homogenous and much less practicing than perhaps could be expected. Thus, there was evidently room for a prophet like Giuseppe Maria Abbate, who combined traditional Catholic beliefs and rituals with Sicilian popular practices as well as much more unique claims and stories.

According to newspaper articles from the late 1910s and early 1920s, Abbate was at least partially successful. "He got quite a

⁴³ For a succinct treatment of Vilatte's biography and his consecrations in the United States, see Byrne 2016: 100–111. For a detailed study of the life, works and succession of Vilatte, see Kersey 2017b.

⁴⁴ Sciavo 1928: 85–92.

⁴⁵ D'Agostino 1997: 130–131.

following,” according to one journalist. Combining his roles as barber and priest for some time, from around 1915, Abbate was able to dedicate himself to full-time ministry, having a couple of hundred more or less firm adherents, though numbers from 500 up to a thousand are mentioned in some articles. Unlike the Roman Catholic clergy, he was also successful in getting economic resources from his Italian followers and was able to purchase real estate for his church and costly religious paraphernalia.⁴⁶

A central part of Abbate’s message was his claim to have potent charismatic gifts; or even omnipotence. He became widely known for his thaumaturgic powers, claiming to be able to heal blind, lame and insane people, something that naturally contributed to his popularity. Abbate kept a register of all alleged miracles and the later publications by Abbate’s church included many testimonies about people who had been cured by him.⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, the Celestial Messenger met a lot of hostility, too. He was physically attacked, harassed and ridiculed for his proselytizing, but was adamant to take revenge on his adversaries, using his omnipotence. In fact, he claimed that he created the Spanish Influenza pandemic to chastise his enemies and humanity at large for not accepting him as the Universal Protector and Celestial Messenger. But in the end, he decided to halt the global epidemic, as he thought that his enemies had suffered enough.⁴⁸ The *L’Italia* newspaper, published in Chicago, reported that Abbate had stated that

during the past years, he had performed many and various miracles. He maintained also that the Spanish-flu had been sent

⁴⁶ “Celestial Cult Trails”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919 and “A New Religious Cult”, *L’Italia*, July 27, 1919. Cf. Photos 6–12, 16–18, 20–26.

⁴⁷ “Celestial Cult Trails”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919, Pieroni 1950a and Pieroni 1950b.

⁴⁸ “Celestial Cult Trails”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919, “A New Religious Cult”, *L’Italia*, July 27, 1919 and Pieroni 1950a.

to punish those Italians of Forquer Street that were persecuting him. Because of his intercession, the plague stopped.⁴⁹

The “Italians of Forquer Street” meant the Roman Catholic priests and faithful of the Holy Guardian Angel Church. Referring to the power granted to him by God, Abbate also claimed to have brought an end to the World War, but that it could have finished much earlier if only the world had welcomed the Prince of Peace, that is, Abbate. In short, Giuseppe Maria Abbate, the barber-turned-celestial messenger, had very far-reaching spiritual claims.

⁴⁹ “A New Religious Cult”, *L'Italia*, July 27, 1919.

The New Jerusalem Catholic Church

Though some kind of organized religious community existed before, in 1917, Giuseppe Abbate founded a formal church organization: La Chiesa Cattolica di Nuova Gerusalemme (the New Jerusalem Catholic Church), also known as La Chiesa Cattolica di Nuova Gerusalemme del Messaggero Celeste (the New Jerusalem Catholic Church of the Celestial Messenger). It had its headquarters in a small, three-story building at 2021 DeKalb Street in the Near West Side area of Chicago, and most, if not all, of the early adherents, were Italian immigrants, and the vast majority women.⁵⁰ When the press wrote about the church for the first time, in 1919, they described it as

A new religious cult, the so-called “Celestial Cult,” which has been in existence for the past three years on the West Side and practiced by a number of Italians under the spiritual leadership of an ex-barber, Joseph M. Abbate.⁵¹

Naturally, the “Celestial Cult” was not the group’s self-designation. By the time, “cult” was a relatively recent concept referring to newer religious groups, led by charismatic and cunning “false prophets,” who attracted followers that often were described as “fanatics.” Towards 1920, the word “cult” and the related “cultist” and “cult-leader” had become common designators, obviously not needing any explanation in a newspaper article. “Cults” could be fringe groups related to Christianity, though understood to be heretical or heterodox, or to other

⁵⁰ “Celestial Cult Trails”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919. See also Photo 19.

⁵¹ “A New Religious Cult”, *L’Italia*, July 27, 1919.

religious traditions. Though the term “cult” was not used with these connotations in the nineteenth century, groups such as Shakers, Mormons or Christian Scientists often became targets for accusations of false prophesy, fanaticism and moral depravity.⁵²

In the early decades of the twentieth century, there was, indeed, several people in the United States, who proclaimed themselves to be the Messiah, the Second Coming of Christ or divinely elect prophets, which should guide humanity or at least the faithful remnant in the End-time. In many cases, they and their adherents lived in communes or constituted other kinds of closely knitted groups.⁵³

Close to Chicago, for example, the Scottish-born healer John Alexander Dowie (1847–1907), founded a large commune in Zion City, Illinois in 1901, declaring himself the Messenger of God’s Covenant and Elijah the Restorer: He who should renovate humanity in the End-time. The community was known as the Christian Catholic (Apostolic) Church and related to early Pentecostalism.⁵⁴ Frank Sandford (1862–1948), who had contacts with Dowie, had similar ideas. In the first years of the twentieth century, he declared himself the reincarnations of Elijah and King David and founded “The Kingdom,” a commune in Shiloh, Maine.⁵⁵

Both Dowie and Sandford claimed to be at least semi-divine messengers. Another early-nineteenth-century American who, indeed, declared himself God was George Baker (c. 1879–1965). He was an African-American whose background is little known, but who seems to have originated in Maryland. In 1906, he took part in the Azusa Street Pentecostal Revival in Los Angeles. At about that time he became an itinerant preacher and started to refer to himself as the Messenger, and “spoke of himself in godlike terms.” In 1914, he established a commune in New York, first located to Brooklyn, then to Long Island. Around 1920, Baker began to claim that he was the Second Coming of Christ

⁵² Jenkins 2001

⁵³ Jenkins 2001: 10–84, cf. Randolph 1947.

⁵⁴ For Dowie and Zion City, see Cook 1996.

⁵⁵ For Sandford and Shiloh, see Nelson 2016.

and call himself Father Divine. His group was called the Peace Mission Movement. By the 1930s, the Movement had an estimated membership of between 20,000 and 30,000, most of whom lived in a chain of communes throughout the United States. In 1946, Father Divine married Edna Rose Ritchings (1926–2017), a White adherent, later known as Mother Divine, who after the Father's Death was seen as his successor. In the Peace Mission Movement, New Thought ("positive thinking") and beliefs in inner divinity, were combined with a strict moral code of modesty and chastity.⁵⁶

Thus, in claiming to be a unique divine messenger or an incarnation of God, Giuseppe Abbate was not unique, but he differed from the other known U.S. Messiahs in that he originated in the Roman Catholic Church and that he kept many of the Church's other beliefs. Unlike Dowie and Sandford, but like the Peace Mission Movement, Abbate's church was clearly an urban phenomenon, not a group establishing themselves in a countryside commune. In fact, apart from the members of the religious order, Abbate's adherents did not live in organized communities.

The Roman Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Chicago considered Abbate's activities a threat. Not only did he attract a rather sizeable group of Italian Catholics, but most of his followers were women, who usually were more practicing Catholics than the males. Still, he was also something of a laughing stock for the Roman Catholic clergy. In a 1919 article in the *Chicago Tribune*, the journalist quoted Father E.J. Fox, pastor of the St. Charles Borromeo Church. He claimed that Abbate was an imposter and continued.

⁵⁶ For a succinct study on Father Divine, see Bromley & Crutsinger 2014. For still another twentieth-century Messiah, see Shaw 2008, which tells the story of a woman with a background in the Church of England, Mabel Barltrop, renamed Shiloh or Octavia. From 1919 until her death in 1934 she claimed to be the Messiah and the Daughter of God and gathered a community around her. The Community of the Holy Ghost (later the Panacea Society) spread globally, too. As Abbate, she was known for her healing powers.

I have been warned that if I went near the ‘Celestial Messenger,’ I would be converted, as he possessed both spiritual and hypnotic powers. If he has these powers he made no effort to exercise them on me—if he did I haven’t noticed it.⁵⁷

In 1919, the Roman Catholics inaugurated the St. Callistus parish at 2167 DeKalb Street, just a few blocks away from Abbate’s headquarters, which was pastored by an Italian-speaking Irish priest until the Scalabrini Fathers took over. The establishment of the parish was explicitly mentioned as a reaction to the local presence of Abbate and his congregation. There were already two Italian churches nearby: the Holy Guardian Angel Church on Forquer Street and Our Lady of Pompeii Church on West Lexington Street. Until a separate church building was constructed, St. Callistus parish was located in a former Baptist church.⁵⁸

In May 1919, Abbate’s New Jerusalem Catholic Church was incorporated as an officially recognized religious entity, and a trust agreement was filed with the Secretary of State of Illinois. The charter which was appended to the application included some clauses on the church organization and Abbate’s role in it. The New Jerusalem Catholic Church was defined as a hierarchical organization governed by a single individual: Giuseppe Maria Abbate. He was “the sole Trustee of the Church,” and the document underlined his absolute authority and his uniqueness as *the* divinely elect Messenger and *the* Celestial Father. Although he might have successors as the church leader, none would have the same elevated status as he had.

No successor shall ever be named or considered as Padre Celeste. All successors shall assume and bear the name of Santo Padre, and who shall, so far as God may give them power, prosecute and carry on the heavenly tasks entrusted to the said Giuseppe Maria Abbate, and who shall have the same power to nominate and appoint a Successor as is herein given to the said Giuseppe Maria

⁵⁷ “Celestial Cult Trails”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919.

⁵⁸ On St. Callistus parish, see Catrambone & Shubart 2007: 64–66.

Abbate, and all subsequent successors shall be endowed with the same powers as the first successor of the said, Giuseppe Maria Abbate. --- He [Abbate, but also his successors] may establish branch churches, societies or congregations, at any and all places wherein, in his judgment the same may be required.⁵⁹

Thus, his successors should be called *Santo Padre*, a title customarily referring to the Roman Pope, while Abbate was something more than that. He had the supreme power provided to him by God, while his successors would have the authority to continue the mission, but they would never receive a direct divine appointment and were fallible and not omnipotent and omniscient in the way that he was. Although Abbate, not least from the mid-1920s onwards, often dressed in white cassock and zucchetto, he does not seem to have made any direct claims to the papacy, but then again, his position was more exalted than any human church leader, and he had replaced the pope. All Catholics and humanity at large should accept him as God's vicar on earth or, in fact, God.⁶⁰

In 1919, the *Chicago Tribune* printed a substantial article about Giuseppe Abbate and his newly founded church.⁶¹ The news from the United States soon reached Italy, too, where *La Stampa* published a brief notice, based on the Chicago newspaper's report.⁶² The immediate context for the article in the *Chicago Tribune* was that one of Abbate's faithful, a 22-year-old woman, Caterina [our pseudonym], "was charged with contributing to the delinquency of her two younger brothers by taking them to the 'Church of New Jerusalem,' in De Kalb Street, too often."⁶³ Apparently, the church was looked upon as a dangerous

⁵⁹ Quoted in Appellate Court of Illinois, First District, Third Division. 1995.IL.5455, 653 N.E.2d 34, 273 Ill. App. 3d 447, 210 Ill. Dec. 447, No. 1-91-2100 06/28/95 Andrew Rizutto v. Theodore J. Rematt. The text of the 1919 charter is reproduced as Appendix 1 of this book.

⁶⁰ See, e.g. Photo 16.

⁶¹ "Celestial Cult Trails", *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919.

⁶² "Giornali e Riviste", *La Stampa*, September 7, 1919.

⁶³ "Celestial Cult Trails", *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919.

environment that would lead young men to criminality, and Caterina's older brother wanted to take custody of his siblings as he thought they were in dire straits under the influence of their "fanatic" sister.

When Caterina's case was heard at a local court, Abbate appeared there in full ornate to give testimony about himself and his church. His grand entry was described in the paper:

[He] wheeled up in front of the Maxwell street court in a taxicab. Behind him came ten taxi loads of women—his character witnesses. The admiring looks of his white veiled witnesses followed him as he haughtily swept into the judge's chamber.⁶⁴

The presence of the Celestial Messenger and his big entourage, including a woman referred to as a deaconess who fanned him during the hearing, triggered the journalist to investigate the religious group and its leader a bit further. He talked to Abbate and some of his adherents and visited the group's chapel on DeKalb Street: the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church. The anonymous article has quite a neutral tone, mostly describing what he had heard and seen *in situ*. In that way, it differs from most other press reports.⁶⁵

By the last years of the 1910s, Abbate called himself Giuseppe (or Joseph) Maria di Carmelo Abbate. He was generally known both as the Celestial Messenger (*Messaggero Celeste*) and the Celestial Father (*Padre Celeste*), but he also referred to himself as the Universal Protector, St. Michael the Archangel, the Prince of Peace, God's Vicar on Earth, and the Celestial King. Thus, Abbate claimed to be something of a combination of a pope, an archangel, a prophet, a king and God incarnate.⁶⁶ Just as in the case of George Baker—Father Divine—Abbate "spoke of himself in godlike terms," though the terminology he used was diverse.

⁶⁴ "Celestial Cult Trails", *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919.

⁶⁵ "Celestial Cult Trails", *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919.

⁶⁶ Pieroni 1950a and Pieroni 1950b.

The Padre Celeste's appearance was striking, often using shiny, silvery clothing, a crown and with a globe in a chain around his neck, but he also appeared in different military uniforms or in full episcopal regalia: a miter with unusually large lappets worn to the front and a crozier, better described as a staff with a star on its top.⁶⁷ In fact, his outfits often resembled the description of the angel he saw in the church when he was healed from his rheumatism and received his mission.

On his miter were the words "Alfa, Elfa, Sette," which also appeared on many other liturgical vestments, objects and images. According to Abbate, the phrase was revealed to him by God. The approximate meaning of the phrase was "He who was, He who is, and He who is to come." He, of course, being Abbate. In our interview with Sister Maria Bernadette, one of Abbate's nuns, however, she claimed that it was a reference to the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.⁶⁸ In any case, the phrase indicated Abbate's self-understanding: that he was divine. The words were also related to a vision he claimed to have had in 1913 when he saw a blue cross over Lake Michigan with the words "*Sono quel che sono*"—"I am who I am"—a phrase that appeared on his coat of arms.⁶⁹

On Abbate's miter, there was also an allusion to chapter 3 in the Old Testament book of Malachy, which he, not surprisingly, claimed to refer to himself. The first verses of the chapter read:

[1] Behold I send my angel, and he shall prepare the way before my face. And presently the Lord, whom you seek, and the angel of the testament, whom you desire, shall come to his temple. Behold he cometh, saith the Lord of hosts.

[2] And who shall be able to think of the day of his coming? and who shall stand to see him? for he is like a refining fire, and like the fuller's herb:

⁶⁷ See Photos 6–12, 18, 26 & 33.

⁶⁸ Interview with Sister Maria Bernadette, May 8, 2018.

⁶⁹ Pieroni 1950b.

[3] And he shall sit refining and cleansing the silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and shall refine them as gold, and as silver, and they shall offer sacrifices to the Lord in justice.

[4] And the sacrifice of Juda and of Jerusalem shall please the Lord, as in the days of old, and in the ancient years.

[5] And I will come to you in judgment, and will be a speedy witness against sorcerers, and adulterers, and false swearers, and them that oppress the hireling in his wages; the widows, and the fatherless: and oppress the stranger, and have not feared me, saith the Lord of hosts.⁷⁰

With Abbate, the Celestial Messenger, this prophesy had been fulfilled. Beginning now and in Chicago's "Little Italies," the angel-messenger would cleanse and punish the sins of humanity and exalt the oppressed.

Other biblical references that appeared on his liturgical vestments and in the church included the part of chapter 21 in the Book of Revelation, which describes the founding of the New Jerusalem:

[1] And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth was gone, and the sea is now no more.

[2] And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

[3] And I heard a great voice from the throne, saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them. And they shall be his people; and God himself with them shall be their God.

[4] And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away.

[5] And he that sat on the throne, said: Behold, I make all things new. And he said to me: Write, for these words are most faithful and true.

[6] And he said to me: It is done. I am Alpha and Omega; the beginning and the end. To him that thirsteth, I will give of the fountain of the water of life, freely.

[7] He that shall overcome shall possess these things, and I will be his God; and he shall be my son.

⁷⁰ Malachi 3: 1–5, quoted from the Roman Catholic Douay-Rheims version (1899 Baltimore edition), based on the Vulgate Latin text.

[8] But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, they shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

[9] And there came one of the seven angels, who had the vials full of the seven last plagues, and spoke with me, saying: Come, and I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb.

[10] And he took me up in spirit to a great and high mountain: and he showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.⁷¹

The text is thematically related to the verses in Malachy, but also to other Old Testament prophecies. In the Book of Revelation, a new world, a New Jerusalem, coming down from Heaven just as the Celestial Messenger who would be present on earth. The inauguration of the new world will mean consolation and life abundantly for the righteous and death and suffering to the wrongdoers and oppressors. The New Jerusalem had begun to unfold in the New Jerusalem Catholic Church in Chicago, and with time it would be spread to all corners of the world.

On some of Abbate's liturgical vestments, there were also references to chapters 9, 11 and 61 of the Book of Isaiah, which refer to the arrival of the Messiah.⁷² Chapter 9 includes a prophecy on the coming of the Prince of Peace, who will establish justice and peace on earth. Chapter 11 is on the Branch from Jesse, who appears with a spirit of wisdom and righteousness. He will establish real peace and a world where people and animals will live in harmony. Finally, chapter 61 of the Book of Isaiah is on the year of grace, when the world will be renewed, the poor will be uplifted, the captives released and the saddened comforted.⁷³

Just as the passages from Malachy and the Book of Revelation, in Abbate's understanding, the Isaiah texts included messianic

⁷¹ Rev. 21: 1–10, quoted from the Roman Catholic Douay-Rheims version.

⁷² See photos 7–12 & 32.

⁷³ Isaiah 9:1–7; 11; and 61.

prophecies about his arrival to earth, the divine election and the inauguration of the New Jerusalem (Church), which was founded in the End-time on the direct request of Christ. Yet another similar text that played an essential role for Abbate's self-understanding was Hebrews, chapter 7 on Melchizedek, the eternal high-priest and the king of righteousness and peace.⁷⁴ In spite of his more developed biblical exegesis, his arrival was often described in less complicated terms. A prayer used by the New Jerusalem Church summarized Abbate's descent from Heaven and his mission on earth:

Giuseppe Maria has descended from paradise with a cheerful smile to indicate the path that leads to Truth, Goodness and the Beauty of the heart for those who have faith in the Lord.⁷⁵

Moreover, Abbate thought that names could say everything about a person and his or her future. Among many other things, he provided an explanation of his own new name: Giuseppe Maria Abbate di Carmelo, Padre Celeste. Elaborating on each of the letters in the name he distilled the following message about his identity and mission:

Gesú Incarnato Umanato Santissimo Emmanuele Principe Pace
Eterno
Mandato A Reincarnarsi In Abbate
A Bandire Benedizioni A Tutti Eternamente
Divinità Incarnata
Celeste Angelo Re Messia Emanato L'Angelo Ordinato
Porta A Dio Religiosi Eletti Cristo Emmanuele Luce Eterna
Settima Tromba Esultante.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Hebrews 7: 15–17.

⁷⁵ Pieroni 1950b: “Giuseppe Maria è disceso dal paradiso con giocondo sorriso per indicare il sentiere che conduce al Vero, al Buono e al Bello del cuore, a chi ha fede nel Signore”

⁷⁶ Quoted in Pieroni 1950b. Our translation: Jesus, Incarnate, Made Human, Most Holy Immanuel, Eternal Prince of Peace. Sent to be re-incarnated in Abbate. To Bless Everybody Eternally. Divinity Incarnate. Celestial Angel, King, Immanuel, the Messiah Arrived, the Ordained Angel. The Door to God,

Already in the courtroom in 1919, the journalist from the *Chicago Tribune* noted the presence of a four-year-old girl, Gianna [our pseudonym] whom the group believed to be the reincarnation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, through another Immaculate Conception, with Abbate laying hands on her mother, who was an adherent of his. In court and in pictures from the time, the little girl was dressed “in her robe of worship, covered with tinsel and wearing golden tinted slippers.”⁷⁷ There is a picture, which can be dated to 1916 or possibly 1917, where Abbate wears a helmet, a cape, and a sword carrying the little girl, who according to the text was “the Madonna Child Reincarnated at one year of age”—Gianna was born in 1915—and Abbate appeared as her protector.⁷⁸

After attending a Mass at DeKalb Street, the journalist could report that on that occasion at least, Abbate had no active role in the liturgy, but sat on a throne with the little Virgin Mary/Gianna on his lap. It was his closest man at the time, Bishop Lumeno Monte (1896–?), who said Mass, assisted by a deacon and a subdeacon, the latter being members of Abbate’s Order of the Celestial Messenger. Apart from them, there were several altar boys and a group of twelve men, who constituted an honorary guard, all in colorful uniforms and elaborate hats or helmets, featuring copious amounts of medals. Some fifty other adherents sat in the pews; women in front and men at the rear end.⁷⁹

Bishop Monte had been consecrated by Abbate in 1918. To secure apostolic succession from some validly ordained bishop, an essential element in (Independent) Catholicism appears to have been a non-issue

Elected Religious. Christ, Immanuel, Eternal Light, the Sound of the Seventh Trumpet.”

⁷⁷ “Celestial Cult Trails”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919. The news about the Immaculate Conception in Chicago also made it into the pages of *The American Journal of Urology and Sexology* vol. 15 (1919).

⁷⁸ See Photo 6.

⁷⁹ “Celestial Cult Trails”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919.

for the New Jerusalem Church, given the direct celestial origin of the founder, who was ordained and consecrated by Christ himself.⁸⁰

An official document, the 1920 United States General Census provides some more information about the religious community of New Jerusalem Catholic Church of the Celestial Messenger. At that time, four people lived at 2021 DeKalb Street. According to the Census list, the head of the household was the Italian-born Bishop Monte, who was 24 years old and had immigrated to the United States a decade before. In reality, it was hardly him who ran the business, but the Celestial Messenger, who was the supreme authority of the Church.

In the document, “Reverend Abbat [sic]”, is registered as a priest. The Census list also indicates that he had the formal intention of becoming a U.S. citizen, but that he still held Italian citizenship. In fact, he would never become a naturalized citizen of the United States. Apart from Abbate and Monte, two monks lived in the house: Brother Francesco aged 47 and Brother Anthony aged 23. Both were born in Italy, and both had regular jobs as construction workers.⁸¹ According to a newspaper article, published in 1922, the community had grown somewhat in the last couple of years and now included two priests—Abbate and Monte—and four monks.⁸²

The three-story building in DeKalb Street, now complete with bell towers, housed a school and a kitchen on the base floor. Upstairs was the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, also known as the Santo Tempio—the Holy Temple—and sometimes the Tempio del Sole—the Temple of the Sun. At the top level was the monastery, where Abbate and the religious lived, and where the Celestial Messenger had his offices. On the roof, processions were organized on a regular basis.⁸³ Still, large processions were sometimes organized outside the building. At least one Corpus

⁸⁰ “Celestial Cult Trails”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919, cf. “The Celestial Messenger, Joseph Abbate”, *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 23, 1922 and “Girl 12, Accused ‘Priest’ of Cult”, *The Courier Journal*, September 11, 1922.

⁸¹ United States Census 1920: Chicago, District ED 1061, sheet 14B

⁸² “Contractors’ Homes Struck; Jar Church”, *Chicago Tribune*, April 11, 1922.

⁸³ See Photos 20–25.

Christi Sunday the New Jerusalem Church procession met a Roman Catholic procession. Needless to say, this led to a clash between the two groups.⁸⁴

Though there were many unusual elements in Abbate's teachings, not least the claims about his extra-terrestrial background and the divine election; the liturgy used in the Sacred Heart of Jesus church strictly followed Roman Catholic ritual. In short, they said Mass and administered other sacraments according to the authorized Roman Catholic liturgical books.⁸⁵

When on his missions to attract prospective faithful, Abbate would dress like an ordinary Roman Catholic priest—using a black suit and clerical collar—and go down to the docks when boats from Italy arrived. At such occasions, he offered immigrants free meals and a place to stay and said he would help them find jobs. To the unsuspecting, it looked legitimate (i.e. that he was an ordinary Roman Catholic priest) and he, indeed, offered them meals, beds and help with employment—and, in his view—the true Catholic faith.⁸⁶

As could be expected, Giuseppe Abbate's relations with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese were bad. The ecclesiastical authorities saw the Celestial Messenger as a crazy and evil heretic and a fraudster who had nothing to do with Christianity (i.e. Roman Catholicism). In their view, he was nothing but an imposter who used clerical garb to fool recently arrived Italians and others to think that his chapel was a regular Roman Catholic parish church. As one way of counteracting Abbate's influence, the Archdiocese used to place Italian priests to stand in front of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church on Sundays and major feast days, informing Catholics of its non-canonical status and trying to convince them of not attending ceremonies there, not least as that, *ipso facto* (automatically) would lead to excommunication.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ JWCA, *Notes*.

⁸⁵ JWCA, *Notes*.

⁸⁶ JWCA, *Notes*.

⁸⁷ "Celestial Cult Trails", Chicago Tribune, July 25, 1919, cf. JWCA, *Notes*.

Giuseppe Maria Abbate and his church were attacked in much more violent ways, too. In April 1922, the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church was severely damaged in an explosion. In fact, the attack against the church was one of four detonations in the neighborhood that happened within half an hour. According to press reports, the chapel's interior was devastated, as a black powder bomb was placed on the second floor, just outside the chapel doors.⁸⁸

In this context, Abbate testified that he had received threats on several occasions: if he did not pay a fee, the chapel would be destroyed. In the other places, people were injured, whereas all inhabitants at DeKalb Street escaped the bombing without any physical injuries. Shortly after the attack, the police arrested a few men related to what was known as *Mano Nero* (The Black Hand). The *Mano Nero* was not an organized group, but rather a criminal *modus operandi*, using extortion letters. The method was used by many individuals and small groups, which threatened, persecuted and murdered many peoples each year in the 1910s and 1920s. Their primary goal was to get money, not, for example, destroy a church which was considered heretic.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ "Contractors' Homes Struck; Jar Church", *Chicago Tribune*, April 11, 1922 and "Business Poor, Barber Starts New Cult, Bang!" *The Acron Beacon Journal*, April 14, 1922.

⁸⁹ "Contractors' Homes Struck; Jar Church", *Chicago Tribune*, April 11, 1922. On *Mano Nero* in Chicago, see Lombardo 2002.

Court, Asylum and Community

In the 1920s and 1930s, the press devoted numerous articles to the Italian-American Celestial Messenger, Giuseppe Maria Abbate. Media attention was focused on a long series of legal processes against him. The first case was in 1922–1923 when Abbate was accused of enticing a twelve-year-old girl into his residence where he assaulted her. The girl was a chorist (also known as a “cherub”) in his church; member of *Le Figlie di Maria*, the Daughters of Mary. At about the same time, other girls, not belonging to the congregation, reported similar experiences of a man in clerical garb, later identified as Abbate, who offered them the sacrament of confirmation if they followed him to the church.⁹⁰

At the legal hearing, policemen had to protect Abbate “from the vengeance of hundreds of angry former followers, who stormed the courtroom.”⁹¹ When the proceedings continued after its chaotic start, every spectator was searched for weapons as threats had been received. Among the spectators were both current and former church members, and the situation was tense. In court, Abbate began telling the story about his mission, explaining that he was the Celestial Messenger, the Reincarnated Christ and the leader of the New Jerusalem Catholic

⁹⁰ “Self-Styled Priest is Accused by Girl, 12”, *Chicago Tribune*, September 8, 1922; “Girl 12, Accused ‘Priest’ of Cult”, *The Courier Journal*, September 11, 1922; “‘Messiah’ Saved from Vengeance of Ex-Followers”, *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 1923; “Guard Leader of Cult Held on Girl’s Charge”, *Chicago Tribune*, March 9, 1923; “Court Halts Trial of Celestial Messenger”, *The Decatur Herald*, March 14, 1923; “New Religion Head Committed to Asylum”, *Rockford Republic*, March 16, 1923; “Lord’s Messenger is Sent to Asylum”, *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1923; and “‘Celestial Messenger’ in Trouble with a Cherub”, *The St. Louis Star and Times*, March 20, 1923.

⁹¹ “‘Messiah’ Saved”, *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 1923.

Church. In this context, he also referred to it as the Independent Catholic Church of New Jersey, a somewhat strange name that does not appear in any other sources known to us. Maybe it was just a misunderstanding on the part of the reporter, but it can also mean that it was incorporated as a New Jersey not-for-profit corporation. Still, the judge cut him short, stating that he did not want to listen to his theological meanderings, but only assess the case in question.⁹²

In the end, the Celestial Messenger was declared criminally insane and confined to Elgin State Hospital, a large mental institution located about 50 kilometers from Chicago.⁹³ One Illinois journal described the hearings and the strong reactions of his adherents to the court's decision:

Joseph Abbate Di Carmelo, the "prophet" who was transported through space from Mars to this earth to preach the doctrine of a new and weird cult is now becoming settled in his new quarters at the Elgin State Hospital. Di Carmelo, who earlier had perhaps a thousand followers of his teachings in Chicago, was rudely jerked from their presence by the law recently to explain an alleged serious charge involving a 12-year old girl.

After a hearing in court he was adjudged insane and sent to the Elgin hospital. The judgment of the court had the effect of a bombshell among the hundreds of followers of the "prophet." They stormed the offices of prominent politicians and judges in Chicago in an effort to, obtain his release, but without avail.

Then came the tribute to the "prophet" at the station. As he was placed on a train, accompanied by two guards, he was showered with flowers and was presented with scores of envelopes

⁹² "Court Halts Trial of Celestial Messenger", *The Decatur Herald*, March 14, 1923 and "New Religion Head", *Rockford Republic*, March 16, 1923.

⁹³ "Guard Leader of Cult", *Chicago Tribune*, March 9, 1923, "Court Halts Trial", *The Decatur Herald*, March 14, 1923, "New Religion Head", *Rockford Republic*, March 16, 1923. For a brief note on the history of Elgin State Hospital, see Fichtner 2000. For a good, much more general study on U.S. psychiatry and diagnostics in the early twentieth century, see Noll 2011.

containing money. With money which he was given in jail he received more than \$1,000 from his followers and went to the Elgin hospital well stocked with funds.⁹⁴

A couple of months later, Abbate managed to escape from his confinement at the asylum, and while on the run, he was searched for having something to do with the disappearance of a twelve-year-old girl. Before leaving her home, she had said that she was going to be confirmed that night. According to witnesses, she had later been seen on a tram in the company of a man, who answered to the description of the Abbate. At about the same time, two other girls testified that they had been approached by a man offering them confirmation. The police thought that this clearly resembled Abbate's *modus operandi*. However, he was later freed from all charges; Abbate was not the man on the tram, and the witnesses were not even sure that it was the missing girl they had seen. In any case, Abbate was soon brought back to Elgin, from where he was released in 1925.⁹⁵

Although the New Jerusalem Catholic Church of the Celestial Messenger survived the almost two-year absence of its leader, membership decreased, though the exact numbers are difficult to establish. When the church was founded and even shortly before his arrest, the news media claimed that it had as many as 500 members or even a thousand. When he was released, some 200 or 300 remained, though Abbate often claimed that they were at least double that amount. In any case, there seems to have been a rapid turnover of members. Nevertheless, there was a core group, who remained loyal to

⁹⁴ "Head of Cult to State Hospital", *The True Republican* (Sycamore, Ill.), March 28, 1923.

⁹⁵ "Hunt Crazy Cult Head as Girl's Kidnaper [sic!]", *Chicago Tribune*, December 4, 1923; "Escaped Madman and Missing Girl", *Rockford Republic*, December 4, 1923; and "Quiz 'Celestial Angel' as to Missing Child", *The Bee*, December 6, 1923.

him for many decades, even until his death in the early 1960s and beyond.⁹⁶

Between 1925 and 1930, the press hardly reported anything on the Celestial Messenger and his church, but the religious activities at DeKalb Street seem to have continued as before. An exception to the general media silence was a couple of articles that appeared in 1926 when Abbate was accused of financial irregularities. At this occasion, the tax authorities seized his crown and a golden pectoral cross.⁹⁷ If these objects were re-bought by the congregation or whether the faithful presented their leader with new regalia is not known, but later he wore both a crown, a forty-carat amethyst ring and a large pectoral cross, adorned with the same kind of jewels.⁹⁸

In a 1927 brochure, published by the church, there was a recent photo that shows Abbate in his office, sitting behind a writing desk. In the background, we see his secretary. We can also observe the barber's chair where Jesus was seated when informing Abbate about his holy mission. In this photo, The Padre Celeste did not wear one of his bright royal dresses, but a white cassock and zucchetto, papal-style. In the foreground, there is what first looks like a life-size statue. But, in fact, it is the girl, Gianna [our pseudonym], whom Abbate and his faithful at that time saw as the 12-year old Virgin Mary.⁹⁹

In 1931, several newspapers around the United States published an image of a crowned Abbate sitting on a throne under a baldachin. To

⁹⁶ For membership estimates throughout the years, see "A New Religious Cult", *L'Italia*, July 27, 1919 (up to a thousand adherents); "Celestial Messenger' Given Life Sentence", *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 16, 1931 (around 500 in the late 1910s); "Followers Pray to Keep Leader from Jail Cell", *La Plata Home Press*, May 3, 1934 (200 members); and "Just a Guy Named Joe", *Chicago Tribune*, December 14, 1937 (300 members).

⁹⁷ "Cult Leader in Jewel Row", *Rockford Republic*, February 24, 1926 and "'S Tough Job—Being King", *Corsican Daily*, October 20, 1931.

⁹⁸ "'S Tough Job—Being King", *Corsican Daily*, October 20, 1931. Fr. Craig saw Abbate's crown in the 1990s and concluded that the diamonds were fake. Still, it is unclear if the crown Craig saw was the same as the one Abbate wore in the 1920s, and which the tax authority seized, or if it was a replacement.

⁹⁹ See photo 16.

his left, on another throne was his queen, the now 15-year old Gianna.¹⁰⁰ In fact, an essential part of Abbate's teachings was that he and his followers were incarnations of celestial characters; himself being God/Christ, the girl Our Lady and other adherents different saints. Faithful to this belief, images of the living saints were featured in the chapel.¹⁰¹

A more down-to-earth kind of source, the United States Census of 1930, provides us with some general information about the development of the monastic community at DeKalb Street. Apart from Abbate, none of the religious who were listed in the Census in 1920 seems to have remained a decade later. In 1930, the head of the household (and the community) was Abbate; now officially registered as M[aria] Joseph D[i] C[armelo] Abbate. He was listed as a priest, but the Census also includes another title: "Padre Celeste", an office which probably was unique to him in the history of U.S. censuses.

Apart from the Padre Celeste, the community was constituted by his amanuensis Carlo V. de Maria and two monks, Brothers Rosario and Giuseppe. All were in their forties and Italian-born. Moreover, four boys, aged between seven and thirteen lived in the house. They were referred to as "aspiring monks," some born in Italy, some in the United States by Italian parents.¹⁰²

In the 1930 Census, we also find the first official data on the nuns' convent, which was located in an adjacent building. The Order of Our Most Blessed Lady, Queen of Peace Reincarnate (abbreviated Q.P.) was led by the 56-year mother superior Francesca. In addition to her, the 34-year old Maria Mogavero was registered as a nun and the 25-year old Mary Monachino as a teacher. There was also an "aspiring nun" called Maria Falzone. Three of them were born in Italy, while Mary Monachino was born in the United States. Apart from the religious

¹⁰⁰ "S Tough Job—Being King", *Corsican Daily*, October 20, 1931. See Photo 18.

¹⁰¹ "Celestial Cult Trails", *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1919. Cf. Candaloro 2003 and Catrambone & Shubart 2007. See also Photos 16 & 18.

¹⁰² United States Census, 1930: Chicago, District ED 900, sheet 14A–14B.

community, there were three other women living in the household: a mother and her teenage daughter who were both born in New York but of Italian descent and a 68-year old Italian-born woman. They were not registered as nuns but were adherents of Abbate's.¹⁰³ In 1934, the number of nuns had grown considerably. Apart from six professed sisters, there were several "aspiring nuns"—all of them young girls.¹⁰⁴

According to testimonies of the time, the convent for the sisters was quite comfortable, while the brothers lived in small cells in the attic of the main-building with little or no heat in the winter time and stifling heat in the summer. The nuns worked in the school, whereas the brothers went off to their secular jobs as construction workers, bringing their paychecks to Abbate.¹⁰⁵ In a church which in no small extent were made up by women, in some respect women seem to have had a prominent place, sitting in front of the men in the church, and having rather pleasant living conditions in the convent. Still, in other aspects, at least some young girls were definitely not treated well but became victims of the Celestial Messenger's criminal acts.

¹⁰³ United States Census 1930: Chicago, District ED 900, sheet 14A-14B.

¹⁰⁴ "Followers Pray to Keep Leader from Jail Cell", *La Plata Home Press*, May 3, 1934.

¹⁰⁵ JWCA, *Notes and Interview with Sister Maria Bernadette*, May 8, 2018.

New Trials

During the first half of the 1930s, there was, once again, a significant number of articles on Giuseppe Maria Abbate in the Chicago press, but to some extent also in newspapers from other parts of the country. Almost all were related to a new series of legal processes against him. This time, Abbate was accused of having raped a thirteen-year-old girl in 1929. The articles describe the complicated legal turns, the evidence, and the discussion whether he should be sentenced to prison or be confined to a mental institution once more.¹⁰⁶

The first court hearing took place in 1931 before Judge Harry M. Fisher. The girl, Angela [our pseudonym] then aged fifteen accused Abbate of having raped her two years earlier. At that time, she lived in the nuns' convent at DeKalb Street together with her mother. The two had left New York shortly before that time, leaving their husband/father behind.¹⁰⁷

According to Angela, one day when she was on her way home, Abbate stopped her and forced her into his residence where he locked the door and raped her. Angela testified that when this had happened "she immediately went to her mother and told her what had taken

¹⁰⁶ "Former Barber Accused by Follower, Aged 13", *Chicago Tribune*, October 11, 1931; Cult Chief Gets Life Term for Attacks on Girls", *Chicago Tribune*, October 16, 1931; "'Celestial Messenger' Given Life Sentence", *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 16, 1931; "Girl Accuses Cult Leader", *Montana Butte Standard*, November 8, 1931.

¹⁰⁷ Illinois Supreme Court, June 24, 1932, *The People v. Abbate*; "'Celestial Messenger' Given Life Sentence", *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 16, 1931; "S Tough Job—Being King", *Corsican Daily*, October 20, 1931; and "Girl Accuses Cult Leader", *Montana Butte Standard*, November 8, 1931.

place, [but] her mother told her it was all right and that the priest was entitled to the first fruits.“ That is that he claimed the right to deflower all teenage girls in the congregation. In this context, Angela added that in the community The Padre Celeste “was the ruler and his word was law.” Nobody could criticize him or act against his decisions. She also asserted that the conditions she had lived under in the convent were prisonlike. Being questioned about her daughter’s testimony, Angela’s mother denied all knowledge of the case until 1931, when they had left Chicago and returned to New York. There, Angela told her father, who reported it to the police.¹⁰⁸

In court, Giuseppe Abbate denied all charges made against him, stating that he was not even in Chicago on the day of the purported crime, but in a summerhouse in Michigan. Several witnesses, all church members, corroborated his story, but some were unsure about the exact dates of Abbate’s absence from Chicago. Eventually, and mainly based on Angela’s testimony, in October 1931, Abbate was sentenced to life imprisonment for statutory rape. In his verdict Judge Fisher said:

This man is guilty of a heinous offense. The purpose of punishment is not merely the incarceration of a man. In this particular case my judgment is that he be removed from society so that he cannot again commit such an offense.¹⁰⁹

In early 1932, Abbate and his legal representative appealed to the Illinois State Supreme Court. After revising the case, the judge declared that the evidence was too weak and that Abbate had been sentenced on

¹⁰⁸ Illinois Supreme Court, June 24, 1932, *The People v. Abbate*. See also “‘Celestial Messenger’ Given Life Sentence”, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 16, 1931; “‘S Tough Job—Being King’”, *Corsican Daily*, October 20, 1931; and “Girl Accuses Cult Leader”, *Montana Butte Standard*, November 8, 1931.

¹⁰⁹ Illinois Supreme Court, June 24, 1932, *The People v. Abbate*. Cf. Cult Chief Gets Life Term for Attacks on Girls”, *Chicago Tribune*, October 16, 1931; “‘Celestial Messenger’ Given Life Sentence”, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 16, 1931; “‘S Tough Job—Being King’”, *Corsican Daily*, October 20, 1931; “Girl Accuses Cult Leader”, *Montana Butte Standard*, November 8, 1931.

loose grounds, observing that several witnesses had contradicted themselves and that there was no concrete evidence, apart from the girl's testimony, which he found inconsistent. Referring to legal precedents, he concluded that the evidence presented was "not sufficient to establish the guilt" and granted Abbate a new trial on the local level.

Interestingly enough, in this context, the Illinois State Supreme Court declared that the local judge might have been prejudiced against the defendant because of his unorthodox beliefs or because, as he, too thought: that Abbate was an evident religious hoaxer. He wrote

that the defendant was on trial on a specific charge. He was not on trial for pretending to be a priest, or for operating a questionable institution under the guise of religion. It is not necessary to consider in detail the merits of these questions.¹¹⁰

The Celestial Father thus got a new trial, but once again, he was found guilty of statutory rape. The judge first stated that Abbate had been sane enough when he committed the crime in 1929 and he was sentenced to ten years in prison. However, later it was declared that he now was insane and once again brought to Elgin State Hospital, not to prison. Towards the end of 1933, he was released from the asylum, as a judge declared that "he was but a harmless religious fanatic and had recovered his sanity." When he was released, the Celestial Father appeared at DeKalb Street in "a fashion befitting the archangel Michael and announced himself to be that personage. On succeeding occasions, he appeared as other characters of the Bible." The same reporter also noted the presence of

A bodyguard of followers wearing silk tunics of bright colors, silk stockings wrapped with ribbon, overseas helmets and various

¹¹⁰ Illinois Supreme Court, June 24, 1932, *The People v. Abbate*. Cf. "Church Founder Wins New Trial for Attack", *Alton Evening Telegraph*, June 24, 1932; and "Church Founder Wins New Trial for Attack", *Alton Evening Telegraph*, June 24, 1932.

medals paraded before him. Girls garbed as angels and women as various allegorical figures were part of the procession in the thanksgiving services.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, Abbate was soon brought back to the mental institution, as medical doctors found him dangerously insane. This time, he remained at Elgin State Hospital until May 1935, when a court declared him sane enough to be released. But just after he was freed, the police arrested him again. As he was out of Elgin, the state attorney once again wanted to re-open the case, so that Abbate, whom he considered a menace to society, would be sent to prison to serve his sentence. However, there was no further trial as Angela did not want to testify yet another time.¹¹² This was the last time Abbate was formally accused of a crime, and it seems that he did not spend any more time at a mental institution.

¹¹¹ "Followers Pray to Keep Leader from Jail Cell", *La Plata Home Press*, May 3, 1934

¹¹² "Cultist, Twice Convicted of Rape, at Large", *Chicago Tribune*, December 25, 1933; "Order Arrest of Cult Leader to Serve Sentence", *Chicago Tribune*, December 26, 1933; "Move for Arrest of Cult Chief Convicted of Rape", *Chicago Tribune*, December 27, 1933; "Cultist Abbate is Sent Back to Insane Hospital", *Chicago Tribune*, January 24, 1934; "Followers Pray to Keep Leader from Jail Cell", *La Plata Home Press*, May 3, 1934; "Twice Convicted of Rape; Cultist Seeks Freedom", *Chicago Tribune*, May 2, 1935; and "Witness Balks; Abbate Freed in Rape Case", *Chicago Tribune*, June 8, 1935.

Continuing the Mission – Escaping the Media

Giuseppe Maria Abbate di Carmelo, Padre Celeste must have been a very charismatic person, who was able to remain in control, even when he was away for years. The New Jerusalem Church survived his long absences. Although the number of faithful ebbed and flowed over the years, he always had a loyal group of a few hundred supporters who stayed with him no matter what. Some authors have suggested that Abbate's church disintegrated in the 1930s and that he disappeared as a religious leader.¹¹³

In fact, it remained in existence until his death in 1963, when there was an increasing number of second and even third generation members of the New Jerusalem Church of the Celestial Messenger. Still, it is easy to understand why modern authors thought that the group ceased to exist in the 1930s. After Abbate's release from Elgin State Hospital in 1935, with very few exceptions, he and his church seem to have passed below (or above) the media radar.

In late 1937, however, *Time Magazine* published a brief piece on Abbate. The article appeared during one of the most active anti-cult campaigns in the United States, and the journalist's tone was undoubtedly very critical and ironical, making abundant use of scare quotes. By now, it was also well-known that Abbate had a criminal record and had been confined to a mental institution on several occasions. The *Time Magazine* article could be cited *in extenso*, as it is the last somewhat more detailed report on Abbate and his church,

¹¹³ See e.g. Candeloro 2003 and Candeloro 2009.

which we have encountered in the press until 1950. An underlying message is that Abbate and his followers continued as before his imprisonment and confinement at the asylum.

U. S. religious cultsters, practicing esoteric arts for the weak in spirit and confused in mind, have their quota of quacks and racketeers, their full share of psychotics. Last week in Chicago an egregious religionist, who in his time had attracted the notice of both police and psychiatrists, was discovered by the *Chicago Times* (tabloid) to be “doing business at the same old stand.” He was Giuseppe Maria Abbate, 51, onetime convict, onetime maniac, known to his 100-odd present followers as the “Celestial Messenger.”

“Padre” Abbate’s people believe that he was not born of mortal parents but formed from “the ashes of Jesus Christ.” Once he crowned the small daughter of one of his Italian-born parishioners, Mrs. Morelli [we have anonymized her name], as “the Virgin Mary,” instructing his followers to worship her. In 1923 the “Celestial Messenger” was convicted of ravishing a small girl, was adjudged insane. Convicted later of two more attacks, Abbate was occasionally in jail but always turned loose because of his original insanity.

In the Elgin State Hospital (Illinois), where he spent two years, clad in clerical garb, Abbate became a prime exhibit for psychology classes from Chicago universities, readily telling students of the messages and visions he experienced.

Last week “Padre” Abbate was installed once more, surrounded by men and women in monastic robes, in a three-story house containing his church and living quarters. He posed for photographers, wearing vestments resembling a bishop’s and a miter bearing cabalistic words, with one of his tonsured “monks” by his side. He held services for his people, giving them “the sacraments,” for, as his housekeeper explained, “we are really a Roman Catholic church although we are not under the Pope.”

But when the press began getting too inquisitive, “Padre” Abbate secreted himself, had a sign put on the door: For Members Only.¹¹⁴

Apart from a summary of the criminal record of Abbate, the brief article includes some notes about the New Jerusalem Church’s beliefs and ceremonies. It is doubtful that the ritual in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, described by the journalist, was a new “installment” of Abbate. As the Celestial Messenger, he would hardly need such a ritual. Still, the ceremony seems to have been a more public affair, inviting the press.

In the *Time Magazine*, there is an assertion that we have not encountered in any other sources: that the Celestial Messenger was born “from the ashes of Jesus Christ”, something that would mean that Christ was dead. It is also the only instance we have seen, in which an adherent claim that they constituted “a *Roman Catholic church* [italics are ours].” Still, there are few indications that the belief system and the rites of the New Jerusalem Catholic Church changed much, if all, over time, something that is uncommon in similar cases, based in cases where religious leaders who claim constant private revelations.¹¹⁵

The 1940 United States Census is one of the very few sources about Abbate and the New Jerusalem Catholic Church in the 1940s. According to the Census list, the religious community included five people: Abbate and four brothers, who were all ordained deacons: Simone Evangelista (b. 1875), Dominic Signa (b. 1887), Giuseppe Zarantonello (b.1888) and Felice Castrogiovanni (b. 1890). All were Italian-born, and three of them were construction workers, while the fourth was a private nurse.¹¹⁶

Thus, other than the Padre Celeste, there were no longer any bishop or priest in the New Jerusalem Catholic Church, at least not

¹¹⁴ “Celestial Messenger”, *TIME*, December 20, 1937. We have not been able to consult the original article in the *Chicago Times*. Cf. Photo 26.

¹¹⁵ Randolph 1943: 18 mentions the “ashes of Jesus Christ”, too, but that article was based on the *TIME* article. For cases in which ongoing private revelations, indeed, contributed to rapid doctrinal changes, see Lundberg 2017 and Lundberg (forthcoming).

¹¹⁶ United States Census 1940: Chicago, District 103-1592, sheet 61A.

among the inhabitants listed at DeKalb Street, and there is no indication that there was any other congregation somewhere else. Even if he was not registered in either the 1930 or the 1940 Census, another priest is, indeed, seen in a photograph of a Palm Sunday procession that can be dated to the 1930s. His name was John Higgins, and he appears to have been one of the very few non-Italian members of the New Jerusalem Catholic Church. At least, he was the only non-Italian who belonged to any of the Celestial Messenger's religious orders. In the same photo, there is also another male religious, who is not registered in any of the Censuses: Brother Fedele Lodato.¹¹⁷

In the 1940 Census, we have only encountered two of the nuns found in the Census ten years earlier: Mary Monachino and Mary Falzone.¹¹⁸ Moreover, Sister Maria Bernadette, whom we interviewed in 2018, entered the convent in 1940, at the age of 14. Among the other very few sources we have encountered from the 1940s, is Giuseppe Maria Abbate's application to become a U.S. citizen, which was dated in 1941. However, he withdrew the application, probably understanding that he had no chance obtaining the goal, given his ample criminal record.¹¹⁹ There is also an entry on Abbate in the United States World War II Draft Registration of 1942. The registrar did not indicate Abbate's employer or job but wrote a big question mark. In any case, the Celestial Father did not join the Armed Forces.¹²⁰

We have not encountered a single article on Abbate in the U.S. press during the 1940s. In 1950, however, the Italian magazine, *La Settimana INCOM Illustrata* published two long, lavishly illustrated articles on the Celestial Messenger by a famous reporter called Alfredo Pieroni. From the looks of them, several of the photos were from the

¹¹⁷ Pieroni 1950b. Cf. Photos 20–25. The reason we date these pictures to the early 1930s, before the rape trial against Abbate, is the presence of the teenage reincarnated Virgin Mary. The Padre Celeste's secretary Carlo de Maria is also present in the picture.

¹¹⁸ United States Census 1940: Chicago, District 103-1592, sheet 4A.

¹¹⁹ Illinois, Northern District, Naturalization Index, 1840-1950: 1941, A 130.

¹²⁰ United States World War II Draft Registration Cards, Illinois Selective Service System registration cards, fourth registration, 1942, Serial number 846.

early period in the 1910s and 1920s where he wore royal or military costumes, but there were also more recent ones, from the 1930s and 1940s, including pictures that show an ageing Abbate, dressed in papal attire, including cassock and zucchetto.¹²¹

The catalyst of the article was that a Pieroni interviewed an old Sicilian man, born in Isnello, who had returned home after five decades in the United States. During their conversation, the returnee mentioned a few people from Isnello who had succeeded in the United States. Apart from a lawyer, a medical doctor and a businessman, he brought up the Celestial Father in passing. It caught the reporter's interest, and leaving the man's house, by coincidence, he ran into Giuseppe Abbate's sixty-year-old sister, Maria Carmela, who still lived in Isnello. She was an adherent of her brother's church, though she also attended the ordinary Roman Catholic Church, and the local priests did not criticize her heterodox devotion, at least not publicly.¹²²

In the articles, Alfredo Pieroni's tone was descriptive, setting them apart from almost everything else written about the Celestial Father and his church. The lion's share of the article was based on church publications, sent by Abbate to Pieroni, which has provided us with material to the study of the Celestial Messenger's stories about his extra-terrestrial origin, his divine election and the miracles that he performed. In the articles, nothing is written about his criminal record, apart from a brief mention of a legal process in 1923; still, the journalist took for granted that the re-Incarnated Virgin Mary was Abbate's daughter with one of his adherents.

From the articles, it becomes clear that Abbate tried to evangelize in Italy, too. Booklets and documents about him and his global mission were at least spread throughout his old home province, though it is not known if he had any Sicilian adherents apart from his sister. At least she was the only one in his old hometown.¹²³

¹²¹ Pieroni 1950a and Pieroni 1950b.

¹²² Pieroni 1950a.

¹²³ Pieroni 1950a and 1950b.

The Padre Celeste's Last Years and the Old Roman Catholic Connection

In the early 1950s, the headquarters of the New Jerusalem Catholic Church on DeKalb Street were torn down, when the City of Chicago demolished much of the old Italian neighborhood to make room for community housing, the Congress Expressway, and not least a new campus for the University of Illinois.¹²⁴

At that time, the Church moved to the Old Irving Park area on the Northwest Side of Chicago, where they acquired a house at 4200 N. Kedvale Avenue, which served as the rectory. The nuns' convent was situated in a separate house nearby. On the first floor of the rectory were the offices, and in the basement was storage and a passage from the rectory to the convent. Moreover, Abbate had the garage behind the residence torn down, and a foundation dug out for a new church and a school. The foundation was covered with a roof, and the construction became known as the "Basement Church," though the official name, as before, was the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Half of that building was the church, and a half was the school. Though Abbate planned the construction of a more prominent church, the project was halted in the 1950s, probably due to financial constraints. The church's address was 4154 W. Berteau Avenue.¹²⁵

Although the 1919 Trust Agreement stated that Abbate could freely name a successor, he could not find a suitable candidate, and in the 1950s none of priests or bishops who had been with him remained in

¹²⁴ JWCA, *Notes*. Cf. Candeloro 2003 and Catrambone & Shubart 2007.

¹²⁵ JWCA, *Notes*.

the New Jerusalem Catholic Church.¹²⁶ At that time, the community included the Padre Celeste and nine religious: five nuns and four monks. In 1955, the brothers were between 65 and 80 years old, while the sisters were younger; aged between 30 and 60.

The Order of Our Most Blessed Lady, Queen of Peace Reincarnated

Abbess Marianna Monachino (1904–1989)

Sister Maria Grace Falzone (1895–1985)

Sister Mary Rita DeMaria (1905–1998)

Sister Maria Gertrude Quarisa (1906–1989)

Sister Maria Bernadette Beninato (b.1925).¹²⁷

The Order of the Celestial Messenger

Brother Simone Evangelista (1875–1966)

Brother Dominic Signa (1887–1969)

Brother Giuseppe Zarantonello (1888–1968)

Brother Felice (Vincent) Castrogiovanni (1890–1964).¹²⁸

As Abbate's health started to deteriorate in the mid-1950s, the congregation established contact with the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago, whose bishop, Gerald Burrill (1906–2001), agreed to send priests to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church to say Mass there on Sundays. Part of the reason was that some of his priests "wanted to work on their Latin."¹²⁹ Consequently, Episcopal clergy said Mass according to the Roman Catholic Tridentine Missal in what must be called a very unusual

¹²⁶ The text of the trust agreement is found in this book as appendix 1. See also Interview with Sister Maria Bernadette, May 8, 2018.

¹²⁷ Cf. Fr. Craig's documentation of their graves on www.findagrave.com. Of the sisters, Monachino and Falzone appeared already in the 1930 Census. Beninato entered the convent in 1940. We have not encountered any information on when DiMaria and Quarisa joined the order, but it must have been in the 1940s.

¹²⁸ Cf. Fr. Craig's documentation of their graves on www.findagrave.com. All the brothers were registered in the 1940 Census, but not in the 1930 one.

¹²⁹ JWCA, *Notes*.

Independent Catholic Church, led by a person claiming to be the Celestial Father, ordained directly by Christ. It was a somewhat unique kind of ecumenism.

Though the Episcopalian clergy continued to say Mass at Sacred Heart for some time, from 1955 onwards a priest from the North American Old Roman Catholic Church (NAORCC) became its pastor. His name was John E. Schweikert (1924–1988), a former Episcopal deacon, who would later become a bishop and archbishop in the NAORCC and eventually named the formal successor of Abbate at Sacred Heart.¹³⁰

The NAORCC has a background in European Old Catholicism, which has its roots in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Due to accusations of heresy, Rome broke with its bishop in the first decade of the eighteenth century and installed an apostolic vicar instead. Still, in 1724 the diocese managed to secure apostolic succession through Dominique Marie Varlet, bishop of Babylon. Though present in the Netherlands throughout the years, Old Catholicism became more international and active as a reaction to the reinforced Ultramontanism, the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854), the First Vatican Council (1869–1870), and the promulgation of the Dogma of Papal Infallibility (1870). In the decades to come, national Catholic churches were founded in several European countries, and their leaders would make up the International Bishops' Conference.¹³¹

In 1908, Arnold Harris Mathew (1852–1917), a former Roman Catholic priest was consecrated bishop for the Old Catholic Church in Great Britain and Ireland. Already in 1910, however, he issued a Declaration of Autonomy, breaking with continental Old Catholicism. Mathew claimed that they had distanced themselves from traditional Catholicism, becoming too Protestant. The result of the Declaration

¹³⁰ JWCA, *Notes*.

¹³¹ For good overviews of the history of Old (Roman) Catholicism, see Trela 1979. For more general studies on Independent Catholicism, see Plummer & Mabry 2006 and Byrne 2016.

became the Old Roman Catholic Church in Great Britain with Mathew as its Primate-Archbishop.

In his Declaration, Mathew stated that the fundamental doctrines of the Old Roman Catholic Church were found in the First Seven Ecumenical Councils. He taught that Christ instituted seven sacraments and that auricular confession was an obligation. Mathew also stated that Mass should be said according to the Tridentine Rite, but that both Latin and the vernacular could be used. He underlined the importance of invoking and venerating the Virgin Mary and of using holy images and relics as aids to devotion. Though not accepting the universal jurisdiction of the Pope, according to the Declaration, the Pope was the Patriarch of the Western Church and should be included in the prayers and sacrifices. In short, Mathew argued that continental Old Catholicism had departed from many of these teachings and practices.¹³²

To expand the small and newly founded Old Roman Catholic Church, Mathew consecrated Rodolphe François Ghislain de Lorraine de Landas Berghes St. Winock (1873–1920) as bishop of Scotland. He was an Italian-born nobleman who had lived most of his life in Great Britain. Nevertheless, being an Austrian citizen, he had to leave the country at the beginning of World War I. He arrived in the United States in 1914, and two years later, he consecrated Carmel Henry Carfora (1878–1958), an Italian-born former Capuchin, who for some time had been a priest, and possibly a bishop, in the Independent Italian Catholic Church in the United States. The consecration of Carfora, in 1916, became the starting point for the North American Old Roman Catholic Church.¹³³

¹³² Trela 1979: 5–9, Byrne 2016: 75–125 and Kersey 2017a: 30–181.

¹³³ On Landas Berghes and Carfora, see Trela 1979: 10–27 and Kersey 2017a. Melton 2009 is an encyclopedia that is of utmost importance for understanding the complicated relationship between the jurisdictions and actors in the Old Roman Catholic tradition, as well as many other North American religious groups. See also Ward, Persson, & Bain 1990 for biographies of independent bishops. Useful works on the NAORCC are Trela 1979, Myers 2014 and the articles included in vol. 1 (2016) of *One Faith: An Old Roman Catholic Journal*.

When Landas Berghes re-joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1919, Carfora became the Metropolitan-Primate of the NAORCC, an office he upheld for almost four decades. During this time, he consecrated more than thirty bishops, though the majority left him and established jurisdictions of their own or left ministry altogether. Consequently, many Independent Catholic Churches in the United States claim apostolic succession through him. At its height, Carfora's jurisdiction may have had as many as 50,000 members, as he managed to integrate various independent parishes, but for most of the time, the church had about 15,000–20,000 adherents. Many of the incorporated parishes built on ethnicity. As a result, the NAORCC was unusually multi-ethnic, including, for example, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Mexican, Afro-Caribbean and African-American faithful.¹³⁴

Archbishop Carfora did not name a successor as the Metropolitan-Primate, and after his death in 1958, at least four men claimed that position, something which led to the proliferation of new jurisdictions. First, Carfora's last auxiliary bishop, Cyrus Augustine Starkey († 1965), formerly of the Holy African Church, became the new leader of the NAORCC. A few months later, however, the general synod instead elected Bishop Hubert A. Rogers (1887–1976), a native of the Dutch Antilles and formerly of the African Orthodox Church. He had been Carfora's auxiliary until months before his death, when Starkey took over the office. A split was inevitable, and both these jurisdictions used the name NAORCC, as did other competitors.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Trela 1979: 18–27 and 75–87.

¹³⁵ Trela 1979: 18–34 and 75–87. Trela 1979, Melton 2009 and Kersey 2017a list several of the jurisdictions that were founded directly after Carfora's death in 1958 and in the following decade. 1. NAORCC (Cyrus A. Starkey 1958, later Richard A. Marchenna); 2. NAORCC (Hubert A. Rogers, 1958); 3. NAORCC (Joseph Kelly, 1958); 4. NAORCC (Cyrus A. Starkey 1962, later John E. Schweikert), and 5. ORCC in North America (Robert A. Burns, 1963). Most of these jurisdictions have split, too, giving rise to other jurisdictions, such as RCC of the Ultrajectine Tradition, ORCC-Utrecht Succession, Traditional RCC in the Americas, American Catholic Church and ORCC (from 1974, two churches),

As already mentioned, from the mid-1950s, there was a connection between the NAORCC and the New Jerusalem Catholic Church. One of the ecclesiastics who visited Abbate and the Sacred Heart parish on a regular basis in the mid-1950s was a young, decidedly High-Church Episcopal deacon: John E. Schweikert. He did not believe in the stories about Abbate's Martian origin, or that Christ had ordained him in a barbershop, but he was still interested in him and his community, wanting to administer valid sacraments to them.¹³⁶

At that time, Schweikert was due to be ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church, but the night before the planned ordination, he informed Bishop Burrill that he had changed his mind: he would leave the Episcopalians and become an Old Roman Catholic instead.¹³⁷ On June 4, 1955, Schweikert was ordained to the priesthood in the NAORCC by Bishop Zigmantas (Sigismund) K. Vipartas (1894–1961), a former Roman Catholic priest, later ordained in the American National Church, who served the Lithuanian faithful in the coal mining town of Westville, Illinois, and who had been consecrated by Carfora in the mid-1940s. After ordination, Schweikert took over as pastor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, ministering to Abbate's faithful.¹³⁸

It is known that John E. Schweikert was consecrated a bishop on June 8, 1958, but there are differing accounts as to whom consecrated him. According to the records of the NAORCC archives, Schweikert was consecrated by Bishop Richard A. Marchenna (1900–1982), an African-

Church of Utrecht in America and Independent ORC Hungarian Church of America.

¹³⁶ JWCA, *Notes*.

¹³⁷ JWCA, *Notes*.

¹³⁸ WMA, "Testimony of the Ordination and Consecration by the Most Reverend John E. Schweikert, Sacred Heart of Jesus Church," no date, but probably from the late 1960s. See also JWCA, Prayer card "Commemorating First Anniversary of The Succession of The Most Reverend John E. Schweikert M.M.I. to The Most Reverend Giuseppe Maria Abbate D.C. Padre Celeste February 18, 1968–1969". Cf. Photo 39. On Bishop Vipartas, see Trela 1979: 74.

American who in his turn had been consecrated by Carfora.¹³⁹ Marchenna was involved in many conflicts. He was deposed twice by Archbishop Carfora and eventually excommunicated from the NAORCC. Then he established a U.S. branch of the Old Roman Catholic Church in England.¹⁴⁰

By the early 1960s, Marchenna was at odds with most other Old Roman Catholic bishops, including Schweikert. After the break with Marchenna, Schweikert instead asserted that his main consecrator, in fact, had been Bishop Zigmantas K. Vipartas, and that the co-consecrators were Bishops Cyrus A. Starkey, Francis Parkin and A. Patrick Mahoney (1889–1964) all in the Carfora lineage. The latter was the leader of Old Catholic Church of Canada.¹⁴¹ In still another version, Vipartas was the main consecrator with Richard A. Marchenna and Gerard Shelley (1891–1980), Archbishop of the Old Roman Catholic Church in Great Britain but living in the United States, as co-consecrators.¹⁴² What is known with certainty is that, in 1959, Archbishop Cyrus A. Starkey, as Primate of the Americas of the NAORCC, appointed Schweikert as Bishop of the Western Province, “consisting of the Western and Mid-Western States [of the United States].”¹⁴³

Bishop Schweikert would continue to serve in the Sacred Heart in the late 1950s and early 1960s, though the Celestial Father was still alive. Nevertheless, despite his feeble health, Abbate probably said Mass himself, at least on an irregular basis, and his far-reaching religious claims and self-understanding remained unaltered.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Melton 2009. On Marchenna, see also Murphy, Melton & Ward 2011: 481.

¹⁴⁰ Trela 1979.

¹⁴¹ WMA, “Testimony of the Ordination and Consecration by the Most Reverend John E. Schweikert, Sacred Heart of Jesus Church.” On Starkey, also see also Murphy, Melton & Ward 2011: 723. On Mahoney, see <http://www.netministries.org/see/churches/ch05841>

¹⁴² JWCA, *Notes*.

¹⁴³ WMA, Letter from Cyrus A. Starkey, Archbishop and Primate of Americas and Canada of the North American Catholic Church, June 15, 1959.

¹⁴⁴ JWCA, *Notes*.

After an extended period of illness, Abbate died in 1963, at the age of 77. He was buried at Elmwood Cemetery, River Grove, where the church had acquired burial lots for the clergy, the nuns and the faithful at large. Abbate's tomb is quite impressive. The inscription on the front reads "The Most Rev. Father Giuseppe Maria Abbate D.C. Padre Celeste, Jan 8, 1886, † Oct 13, 1963". Abbate's central phrase: "Alfa, Elfa, Sette" appears there as well as his coat of arms with the message "Sono quel che sono." On the backside of the grave monument, one can read the following inscription: "The Promised High Priest Hebrews 7:15-17 Founder of Chiesa Cattolica La Nuova Gerusalemme del Messaggero [sic!] Celeste, Sacred Heart of Jesus Church".¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ See Fr. Craig's photographic documentation on www.findagrave.com. Cf. Photos 37 & 38.

Abbate's Legacy and the Sacred Heart Church

A few weeks after the Padre Celeste's death, in October 1963, John E. Schweikert was raised to the rank of archbishop. It is not known who elevated him to this position, and in 1965 he claimed to be Primate-Archbishop of the NAORCC.¹⁴⁶ When Abbate passed away, Schweikert had served in the Sacred Heart of Jesus church for eight years. There is nothing that indicates that he ever believed in Abbate's status as the Celestial Messenger or accepted his alleged ordination and consecration, which he thought were non-existent. Schweikert believed that through his own orders and apostolic succession he had brought valid sacraments to the Sacred Heart for the first time.¹⁴⁷

Over time, Schweikert slowly tried to reduce the congregation's devotion to Abbate, replacing it with more traditional Catholic beliefs. Still, he seems to have been quite diplomatic and cautious. He did permit the shrine/altar dedicated to Abbate to remain in the church, and the nuns used to adorn it with flowers and candles. Moreover, the Celestial Messenger's barber chair stayed, having a sacred status for the adherents. By the relic, there was a note literally saying: "No toucha this chair."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ JWCA, *Notes* and JWCA, Prayer card "Commemorating the First Anniversary of the Succession of the Most Reverend John E. Schweikert M.M.I. to the Most Reverend Giuseppe Maria Abbate D.C. Padre Celeste February 18, 1968–1969. Cf. Photo 39.

¹⁴⁷ JWCA, *Notes*.

¹⁴⁸ JWCA, *Notes*.

The liturgy remained unaltered, as both Abbate and the NAORCC said Mass according to the Traditional Roman Rite. In fact, some of Abbate's old copies of the liturgical books remain.¹⁴⁹ In 1966, when he was interviewed as part of the Chicago Graduate School of Theology inventory of religious groups, Schweikert stated that he only celebrated Mass in English, but that Latin rites were used for ordinations and consecrations "to ensure their validity."¹⁵⁰ While it is known that Schweikert introduced the Old Roman Catholic custom of Mass in the vernacular well before the Vatican II changes, he did, in fact, continue to say Mass in Latin until his death in the late 1980s, although an English (Low) Mass was added to the schedule.¹⁵¹

It is evident that the nuns and the archbishop had very different views on Abbate's religious status, but they hoped that he would change, and he hoped that they would.¹⁵² In 1967, when Schweikert had been at Sacred Heart for over ten years, the Mother Superior, Marianna Monachino sent him a brief note, stating the close relationship between the New Jerusalem Catholic Church, the Celestial Messenger and the archbishop, though it is possible to interpret it as they this relationship had been closer before.

Your Excellency, As Jesus, Mary and Joseph were united with God's plan, may they keep us ever united and faithful to the Holy New Jerusalem Catholic Church of the Celestial Messenger.
Mother Superior Marianna – 12-13-67.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ JWCA, *Notes*.

¹⁵⁰ WMA, copy of the "Information gathered concerning North American Old Roman Catholic Church (Starkey) in personal conversation with the Most Reverend John E. Schweikert, December 30, 1966." Cf. Piepkorn 1977 for the results of the inventory of North American Catholic Churches. For Abbate's copy of the Roman Rituale, see Photo 43.

¹⁵¹ JWCA, *Notes*.

¹⁵² JWCA, *Notes*. Cf. Interview with Sister Maria Bernadette, May 8, 2018.

¹⁵³ JWCA, Card from Reverend Mother Marianna to Archbishop John E. Schweikert, December 13, 1967.

Nevertheless, at about the same time, the Reverend Mother contacted the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, asking them for a priest, who could say Mass “because their priest [i.e. Abbate] had died.” Unsurprisingly, they were not forthcoming, stating that the parish was not under their jurisdiction and that they would not send a priest “to serve in a non-Roman Catholic congregation.”¹⁵⁴

Eventually, the nuns must have been satisfied enough with Archbishop Schweikert despite him not being convinced of Abbate’s status. On February 18, 1968, they officially declared him “Successor to the Most Rev. Giuseppe Maria Abbate, D.C., Padre Celeste.”¹⁵⁵ Though now formally his successor, Schweikert never wore the white cassock or white zucchetto, as Abbate had done, and he never allowed anyone to refer to him as Santo Padre or Holy Father, though Abbate had declared just that in his 1919 Charter for the New Jerusalem Catholic Church. According to testimonies, if Abbate’s claims came up in Schweikert’s presence, he glossed over them and changed the subject. When one of Schweikert’s priests questioned him, he said that Abbate had had “mental aberrations.”¹⁵⁶

By 1970, all the brothers of the Order of the Celestial Messenger were dead, while the five nuns remained. At that time, they started a school for children with special needs, the Little Sisters School, where the youngest nun, Maria Bernadette (b. 1925) played a significant role until the early 1990s, though there were also some external employees. By that time, she and the 85-year old Sister Mary Rita DeMaria were the only nuns left in the Order of Our Most Blessed Lady, Queen of Peace Reincarnated.¹⁵⁷ For his part, Archbishop Schweikert continued to serve in Sacred Heart of Jesus Church until his death in 1988. He had

¹⁵⁴ JWCA, *Notes*.

¹⁵⁵ JWCA, Prayer card “Commemorating First Anniversary of the Succession of the Most Reverend John E. Schweikert M.M.I. to the Most Reverend Giuseppe Maria Abbate D.C. Padre Celeste February 18, 1968–1969”. Cf. Photo 39.

¹⁵⁶ JWCA, *Notes*.

¹⁵⁷ For the history of the Little Sisters School, see Bezkorovainy 2008: 260–267. Bezkorovainy’s wife was the principal of the school in the 1980s.

a PhD degree and for some time he earned a living by teaching at a college. However, as time passed he gave up teaching and became a full-time pastor.¹⁵⁸

When asked about the size of his church, on several occasions Schweikert made incredible estimates. In 1966, he claimed that “according to the book” his jurisdiction had about 80,000 members divided into 120 parishes and missions, but he estimated the actual number at about 15,000 and 20,000.¹⁵⁹ In 1971, Schweikert claimed 119 parishes and missions and no less than 59,422 faithful.¹⁶⁰ Finally, in 1986, he reported 133 parishes and missions, 62,611 members, and 150 clergy. Even if he intended to include all Old Roman Catholic jurisdictions in the United States (and Canada), these numbers were very much inflated. Commenting on these assertions, in his *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, J. Gordon Melton remarked that “researchers have been unable to locate any parishes under Archbishop Schweikert’s jurisdiction other than the single parish and affiliated mission, both in the Chicago area, over which he serves as pastor.”¹⁶¹

The parish was the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Chicago and the mission was located to the Queen of Peace Church in Wheaton, Illinois, about 50 kilometers west of Chicago. In the 1970s and 1980s, Schweikert and the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish served a couple of hundred people. While about a fifth of the parishioners were people from the neighborhood or dis-enfranchised Roman Catholics, about 80 percent were first, second, third or even fourth generation adherents of Abbate. In fact, there were still a few elderly people, who had been members of the New Jerusalem Church since its foundation in the late 1910s. Still, there are clear indications that not everybody in the outsider group

¹⁵⁸ “Obituary: Rev. John Schweikert, Bishop of Catholic Sect”, *Chicago Tribune*, June 3, 1988. Cf. Photos 40 & 41.

¹⁵⁹ WMA, copy of the “Information gathered concerning North American Old Roman Catholic Church (Starkey) in personal conversation with the Most Reverend John E. Schweikert, on December 30, 1966.”

¹⁶⁰ Trela 1979: 62.

¹⁶¹ Melton 2009.

knew about the claims of the Celestial Messenger; by them he was called “Bishop Abbate”, the founder of the parish.¹⁶²

In 1987, when Schweikert became severely ill, he began searching for a successor and eventually chose Theodore Rematt (1945–2016). He was a former banker, who became an Old Roman Catholic priest and established a parish in Denver, Colorado. After the designation, Rematt moved to Chicago and was consecrated a bishop on June 22, 1987.¹⁶³

When Rematt took over after Archbishop Schweikert’s death, his first decision was to finish the construction of the church building, which had been halted in the 1950s. He mortgaged the property and had a full church with sacristy and choir loft built over the foundation near the rectory. The nuns were very supportive of his efforts to complete Abbate’s project, but they were indeed not happy about Rematt’s decision not to install the Padre Celeste’s original altar from DeKalb Street that had been in the basement church. The Mother Superior pointed out that the original altar was a relic from Abbate and that it should be used to preserve his legacy, while Rematt stated practical reasons for his decision; the altar was too small for the new church. As a consequence, it was moved to the convent’s own chapel.¹⁶⁴

When Rematt first came to the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish, he knew next to nothing about Abbate, and Archbishop Schweikert did not provide him with many details, other than that the church had earlier been located in the Old Italian neighborhood and that Abbate was the founder. In 1989, the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart was completed and was ready to be consecrated. A few days before the consecration ceremony, an anonymous woman contacted Rematt by telephone, recounting the stories about the Celestial Messenger. As the bishop was not convinced by her strange account, she told him to go

¹⁶² JWCA, *Notes*.

¹⁶³ JWCA, *Notes*. Cf. the obituary of Rematt in *One Faith: A Old Roman Catholic Journal*, 1.2 (2016) and Photo 45.

¹⁶⁴ JWCA, *Notes*.

into a closet in one of the bedrooms of the rectory. There, behind a false panel, he would find all the proof he needed.¹⁶⁵

Behind the secret panel Rematt, indeed, encountered abundant documentation on the Padre Celeste and the history of the New Jerusalem Catholic Church of the Celestial Messenger: transcripts from his trials, affidavits of support, church publications, and photos. Rematt was shocked by what he read; the founder of the church had believed that he was God and he had been convicted for several serious crimes and declared criminally insane. While Rematt at first allowed a researcher to access the records, he later changed his mind and decided that the story about Abbate should not be preserved in any way, and he ultimately destroyed all the files. Later on, when other traces of Abbate and his activities were encountered, he ordered that they should be destroyed, as well.¹⁶⁶

On the whole, Archbishop Rematt tried to put an end to the Abbate veneration at Sacred Heart. He had the shrine to Abbate in the church dismantled, the famous barber's chair was sold, and in all possible ways Rematt actively counteracted the legacy of the Celestial Messenger. Thus, his way of proceeding was very different from Schweikert's diplomatic approach. Needless to say, the nuns were not happy about this development, nor were many of the faithful, Abbate believers as they were.¹⁶⁷ The radical changes met stiff opposition, there were protests from parishioners even during the religious services, led by Rematt.¹⁶⁸ On the Archbishop's initiative, in 1991 a local court issued a temporary restraining order against fourteen parishioners, barring them from the church grounds. At the hearing the group's attorney stated

There are families among my clients with four generations of people who worship there, and some have worshipped there since

¹⁶⁵ JWCA, *Notes*. Cf. Photo 44.

¹⁶⁶ JWCA, *Notes*.

¹⁶⁷ JWCA, *Notes*.

¹⁶⁸ JWCA, *Notes*.

the church got its charter in 1919. ... The barred parishioners range in age from 19 to 92. I can assure you that the 14 people will present themselves for worship at the 10 a.m. mass Sunday, and if the archbishop bars them from attending, they will have no choice but to hold their own service on the sidewalk outside.¹⁶⁹

Without any doubt, Rematt's time at Sacred Heart was turbulent, and there were a series of legal conflicts in the first half of the 1990s, about the administration and economy of the church. Though he wanted to erase the devotion to the Celestial Messenger, in these court cases, Rematt argued for legal continuity with the church Abbate founded in 1919, and that he, as Abbate's legal successor was the sole trustee and had absolute authority to make decisions, financial and otherwise.¹⁷⁰

In 1990, Rematt suspended and evicted the priest at the mission in Wheaton, Illinois, who said Mass in the Queen of Peace Church and later in his home.¹⁷¹ Another conflict concerned the nun's school for handicapped children, which had been founded in 1971. In 1990, Rematt wanted to transfer Sister Maria Bernadette to the mission in Wheaton, thus removing her from the school. When she refused, the Archbishop ultimately dismissed and evicted her. After several turns, a court ruled that Rematt could make such a decision as he had a legal basis in the original charter.¹⁷² In the press, almost nothing is said about

¹⁶⁹ "Eviction Try at Church is Unholy Mess", *Chicago Tribune*, July 11, 1991; and "Opponents still barred from Old Roman mass", *Chicago Tribune*, July 13, 1991.

¹⁷⁰ Appellate Court of Illinois, First District, Fifth Division, *The North American Old Roman Catholic Church, by its Archbishop, Theodore J. Rematt, Plaintiff-Appellee, v. Maria Bernadette, Defendant-Appellant*, 1992. See also Appellate Court of Illinois, First District, Third Division. *Andrew Rizzuto v. Theodore J. Rematt*, 1995.

¹⁷¹ "Clerics Go to War in Wheaton", *Chicago Tribune*, November 15, 1990; "Judge Tells Priest to Vacate Rectory", *Chicago Tribune*, November 16, 1990; and "Church Rife Might be One of Altar Egos", *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 1990.

¹⁷² Appellate Court of Illinois, First District, Fifth Division, *The North American Old Roman Catholic Church, by its Archbishop, Theodore J. Rematt, Plaintiff-Appellee, v. Maria Bernadette, Defendant-Appellant*, 1992.

the unique background of the congregation and the role of the Celestial Messenger. However, in one article, the journalist quoted Sister Maria Bernadette as saying:

If this were the Roman Catholic Church, the nuns presumably could transfer to another convent beyond the jurisdiction with whom they were at loggerheads. But Sacred Heart of Jesus is *sui generis*, a unique foundation established by Joseph Abbate, an Italian immigrant and barber who heard God's voice calling him to become a preacher.¹⁷³

Another legal process in the 1990s dealt with the Archbishop's use of the funds of the church. Again based on the far-reaching rights conceded in the charter; Rematt won that case, too.¹⁷⁴ With a decreasing group of parishioners, Archbishop Rematt served in the Sacred Heart Cathedral until 2004, when he moved back to his native Pennsylvania, and the episcopal see was declared vacant two years later.¹⁷⁵

When Rematt left Chicago, the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart was sold, and it was later turned into condominiums. At that time, Fr. James W. Craig was the only remaining cleric under the Schweikert–Rematt line. After the closing of Sacred Heart, the parishioners were scattered. Fr. Craig remained in contact with a few and administered the sacraments to them. Some former parishioners did not join any

See also a series of articles: “Parishioners Protest as Teaching Nun is Fired”, *Chicago Tribune*, December 10, 1990, “Archbishop Wins Battle to Evict Nun”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 15, 1991; “Bishops Tries to Settle Differences”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1991; and “Nun Loses Ruling to Stay in Convent”, *Chicago Tribune*, July 13, 1992. For a very critical view on Rematt's way of handling the case, see Bezkorovainy 2008: 260–267. Cf. Interview with Sister Maria Bernadette, May 8, 2018.

¹⁷³ Quoted in “Parishioners Protest as Teaching Nun is Fired”, *Chicago Tribune*, December 10, 1990.

¹⁷⁴ Appellate Court of Illinois, First District, Third Division. Andrew Rizzuto v. Theodore J. Rematt, 1995.

¹⁷⁵ See the obituary of Rematt in *One Faith: A Old Roman Catholic Journal*, 1.2 (2016).

other congregation, while others became members of parishes in the Roman Catholic Church, the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X or other Independent Catholic groups.¹⁷⁶ In many ways, the traditional devotion to Abbate ended with the shutting down of Sacred Heart, though it had been counteracted for decades.

¹⁷⁶ JWCA, *Notes*.

Conclusion

This is the first time that the story of Giuseppe Maria Abbate has been told in some detail. From the 1910s, the Sicilian-born barber in Chicago claimed that he was the Celestial Messenger and even God-on-Earth: the Padre Celeste. He missionized among other Italian-Americans, having had experiences of continuous divine revelations about the Apocalypse and his role in it. Abbate preached about his extra-terrestrial origins and his singular status as the Incarnation of God in the End time.

He attracted groups of Italian immigrants in Chicago with his messages and miracles and founded the New Jerusalem Catholic Church, which also came to include a male and a female religious order. Though parts of his message were very different, the immigrants from Southern Italy probably felt at home in the church, recognizing many of the ceremonies. And in Abbate's church, they encountered a Sicilian whom God had appointed as his only Messenger in the End time.

The story about Abbate certainly has its dark sides. At several occasions in the 1920s and 1930s, he was on trial for assaulting young girls, but though he was initially sentenced to life imprisonment, eventually he was confined to mental institutions being declared criminally insane. Altogether, Abbate spent more than five years at a mental institution.

Still, this development in no way ended Abbate's church. Until his death in 1963, he continued to claim that he was the Padre Celeste, and a small group of female and male religious remained, and so did a couple of hundred lay adherents. Moreover, unlike many other similar religious leaders who claim to receive private revelations, there is nothing that indicates that Abbate's teachings changed much over the decades. He and the other priests continued to administer the

sacraments according to the Roman Catholic liturgical books, and the ceremonies, such as the frequent processions, were very similar to the ordinary Catholic uses in Southern Italy.

Still, none of the men Abbate ordained to the priesthood or consecrated bishops, remained when his health started to deteriorate in the early 1950s. The New Jerusalem Church then reached out to the Episcopal Church, which provided them with priests to say Mass on Sundays. In 1955, John E. Schweikert, the Episcopalian deacon-turned-priest in the NAORCC, became the pastor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish.

The situation became somewhat strange. Most of the parishioners believed in Abbate's claims, but the priest, later archbishop who served them did not. And, as Schweikert did not consider Abbate a validly ordained priest, he claimed that the sacraments had not been valid until he arrived. Still, the religious community made Schweikert the Celestial Messenger's Successor in 1968, and he seems to have acted diplomatically when dealing with the parish majority's belief in the extraordinary status of Abbate and their veneration of his memory.

The radical break with the Abbate legacy came from 1989 onwards with Schweikert's successor, Archbishop Theodore Rematt when he understood the unusual background of the parish. While he claimed the legal authority over the church as a Successor to Abbate, according to the charter, Rematt actively tried to erase all remaining signs of the Celestial Messenger. He left the parish in 2004, the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart is not there anymore, and the old rectory-convent has turned into a private home.

The New Jerusalem Church of the Celestial Messenger was long-lived, and it survived the death of its founder, though in a modified way, as a parish ministered by Old Roman Catholic clergy. Though the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish does not exist anymore, it is evident that Abbate still is an object of veneration, though the number of devotees probably is diminishing. One sign of the kept memory is that there are fresh flowers at his grave at all times.

In 2018, we interviewed the 93-year-old Sister Maria Bernadette, baptized into the New Jerusalem church and a nun in Abbate's order from 1940 onwards. Her veneration of the Celestial Father was intact, 55 years after his death. In the conversation, she repeated that "everyone loved him, and he loved everyone." When the issue of the legal processes was brought up, she stated: "Do you think for a minute if we saw even a hint of what he was accused of that we would have stayed there? Absolutely not. It was all lies." Almost whispering, she continued: "They said that Bishop Abbate was a god – and he was."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Sister Maria Bernadette, May 8, 2018.

Appendix 1: Charter of the New Jerusalem Catholic Church

Signed on May 2, 1919 and filed with the Secretary of State of Illinois on May 19, 1919. Quoted from: Appellate Court of Illinois, First District, Third Division. 1995. IL.5455, 653 N.E.2d 34, 273 Ill. App. 3d 447, 210 Ill. Dec. 447, No. 1-91-2100, 06/28/95 ANDREW RIZZUTO v. THEODORE J. REMATT

The Members of the Congregation, wherever residing *** and all other persons who may become members of said Congregation, or of any other Congregation hereafter to be organized hereinabove named, as Beneficiaries, represented by their Committee appointed for this purpose *** and Giuseppe M. Abbate of said Chicago, Illinois, as sole Trustee, and hereinafter designated as Trustee,

WITNESSETH:

WHEREAS, the said Members of said Congregation *** so represented by the said Committee as aforesaid, convey, assign and deliver, and concurrently herewith have and do transfer, convey, assign and deliver to the said Giuseppe M. Abbate, as sole Trustee, certain personal property rights and interests described as follows.

All rights of organization of use of name, use of form of worship, publication and promulgation, all property tangible and intangible,

now belonging to, or that may hereafter be acquired by said Church, etc., and property which may have been received, or which may hereafter be received by the said Trustee for the purposes of this Trust. The Trustee has agreed and hereby does agree to issue to the Beneficiaries, and each of them, a duly executed Certificate of Membership in (the Church) ***.

First: The Trustee in his capacity as such, shall *** conduct all business, and execute all instruments in writing, and make all other contracts, which may seem in his judgment to be proper or necessary in the performance of this Trust.

[Second:] No successor shall ever be named or considered as Padre Celeste. All successors shall assume and bear the name of Santo Padre, and who shall, so far as God may give them power, prosecute and carry on the heavenly tasks entrusted to the said Giuseppe Maria Abbate, and who shall have the same power to nominate and appoint a Successor as is herein given to the said Giuseppe Maria Abbate, and all subsequent successors shall be endowed with the same powers as the first successor of the said Giuseppe Maria Abbate.

Third: The Trustee shall hold the legal title to all property, both real and personal, tangible and intangible, at any time belonging to the Trust, and shall have and shall assume all contracts now in existence heretofore made by the said (Church) *** and all contracts for, and obligations and liabilities incurred with, or growing out of the property assigned or transferred to him***.

[Fourth]: The Trustee shall have power to acquire property, both real and personal, either by purchase or descent, and may make contracts with corporations or individuals in any form or manner, or for any purpose, which, in his judgment, shall seem advisable, looking to the promulgation and advancement of the interests of the said (Church), in which the Beneficiaries hold Certificates of Membership, as above set

forth, and may institute or defend, settle or compromise actions at law, or in equity, or otherwise, and in general, to do any and all things in his judgment necessary to be done to protect the rights and interests of the Beneficiaries.

He may establish branch churches, societies or congregations, at any and all places wherein, in his judgment the same may be required, and may extend financial assistance to such of said churches, societies or congregations as he may in his judgment see fit, through donations, profits, bequests, legacies or otherwise. He may engage in any lawful enterprise for profits, which in his judgment may be of advantage in furthering the objects of the Beneficiaries herein named ***.

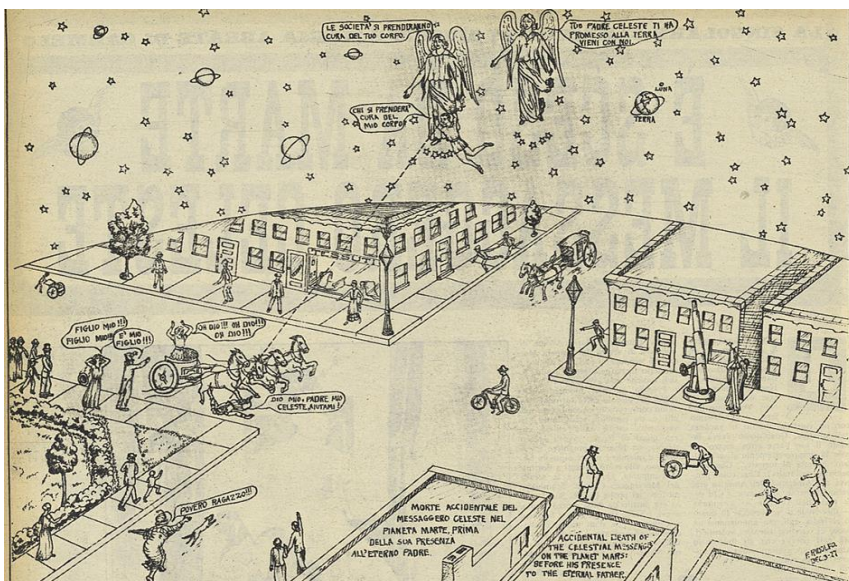
He may sell, mortgage, pledge, encumber or dispose of any of the said property rights and interests herein conveyed to him for the uses and purposes, and for the advancement of the objects and purposes for which the said (Church) was organized and exists, and it shall be the duty of the said Trustee, generally, to do any and all acts and things, which, in his judgment, shall be for the advancement of such objects and purposes

*** He shall have power to appoint an Advisory Board, with whom he may consult on all matters of material interest, but whose judgment shall not be binding upon him***.

Appendix 2: Photos



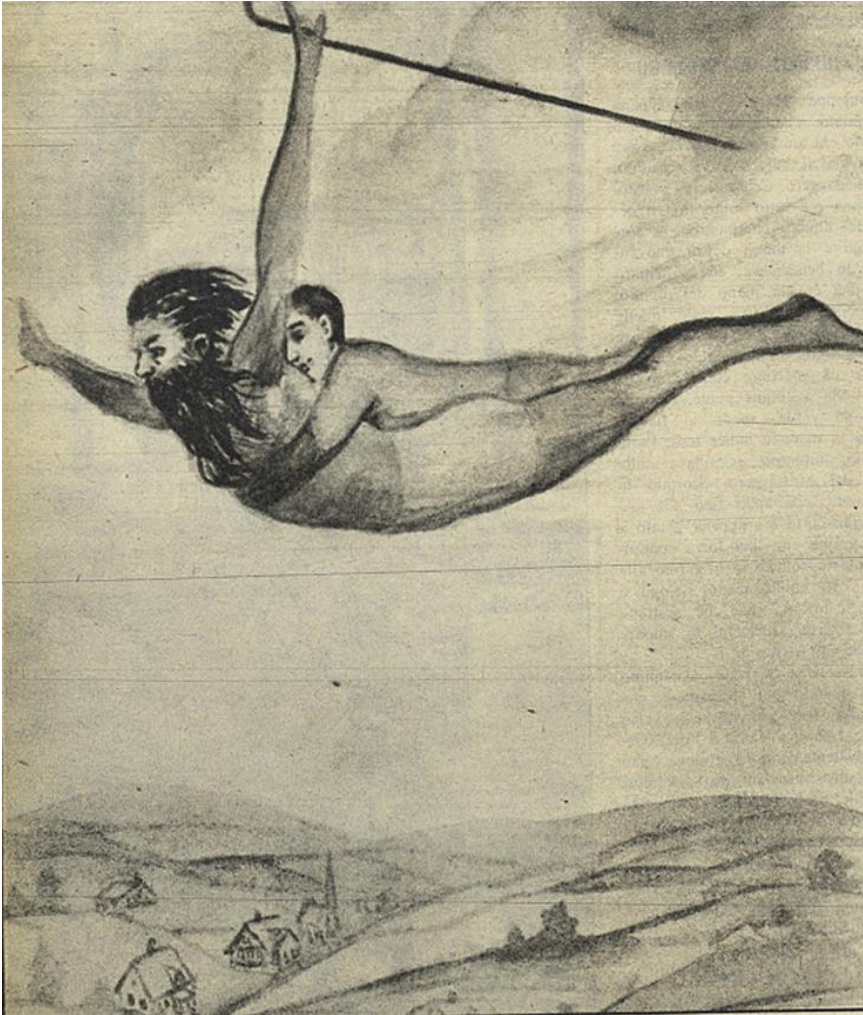
1. A Young Giuseppe Abbate in Chicago
(Source: Pieroni 1950a)



2. Abbate's death on Mars.

3. Abbate on his way from Heaven to Isnello, saving the life of his father-to-be.

(Source: Pieroni 1950a)



4. Abbate is brought through the sky with the help of
“A celestial giant”
(Source: Pieroni 1950b)



5. A girl who claimed to have been healed by Abbate.
Here together with her mother.
(Source: Pieroni 1950b)



6. Abbate with the Re-Incarnated Virgin Mary, c. 1917
(Source: Pieroni 1950b)



7. The Celestial Messenger in the late 1910s–early 1920s
(Source: JWCA)



8. Abbate in 1919 (Source: *Chicago Tribune*, 1919).



9. Abbate on his Throne, 1920s.
(Front page of *La Settimana* 1950, no. 44; Pieroni 1950a).



10. Abbate: The Prince of Peace
(Source: JWCA)



11 and 12: Abbate in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in
DeKalb Street
(Source: JWCA)



13. A Snow Miracle, 1929
(Source: Pieroni 1950b)



14. The Re-incarnated Virgin Mary, ca. 1920
(Source: JWCA)



15. The Re-incarnated Virgin Mary, ca. 1930
(Source: Pieroni 1950a)



16 & 17. Abbate in his offices ca. 1927 and 1940s?
(Source: JWCA)

'S Tough Job—Being King



18. The Celestial King and his Queen
(Source: *Corsican Daily*, 1931)



19. Abbate, the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church and the girl who brought charges against him in 1931
(Source: *Montana Butte Standard*, 1931)



20 & 21. The Celestial Father's Guard of Honor
(Source: Pieroni 1950a)



22 & 23. Palm Sunday Procession on the Roof of the Headquarters in DeKalb Street (Source: Pieroni 1950a)



24 & 25. Palm Sunday Procession on the roof of the headquarters in DeKalb Street (Source: Pieroni 1950a)

Just a Guy Named Joe

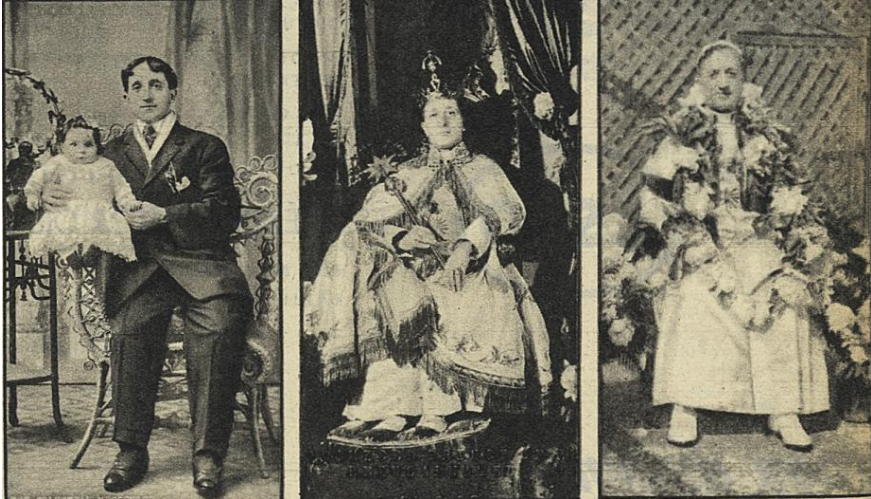


On his throne in all his glory is Abbate Giuseppe Mario de Carmelo, who describes himself as "Celestial Messenger" and who claims his Chicago church has a congregation of 300. The unimaginative Chicago police, however, know the "Celestial Messenger" only as Joe Abbate, ex-convict and former inmate of an Illinois insane asylum.

26. Abbate in 1937 with one of the monks
(Source: *The News Messenger*, 1937)



27: Illustration from one of the Church publications
(Source: Pieroni 1950b)



28–31. Four Aspects of the Celestial Messenger
(Source: Pieroni 1950b)



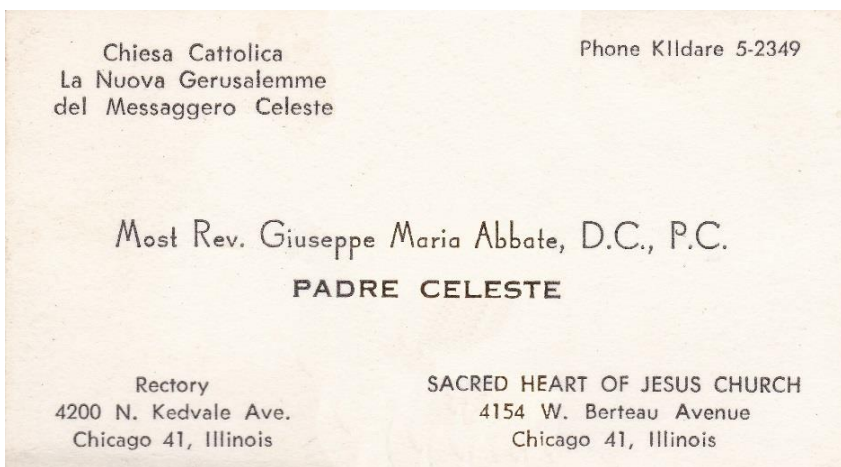
32. Abbate in episcopal/papal attire
(Source: JWCA)



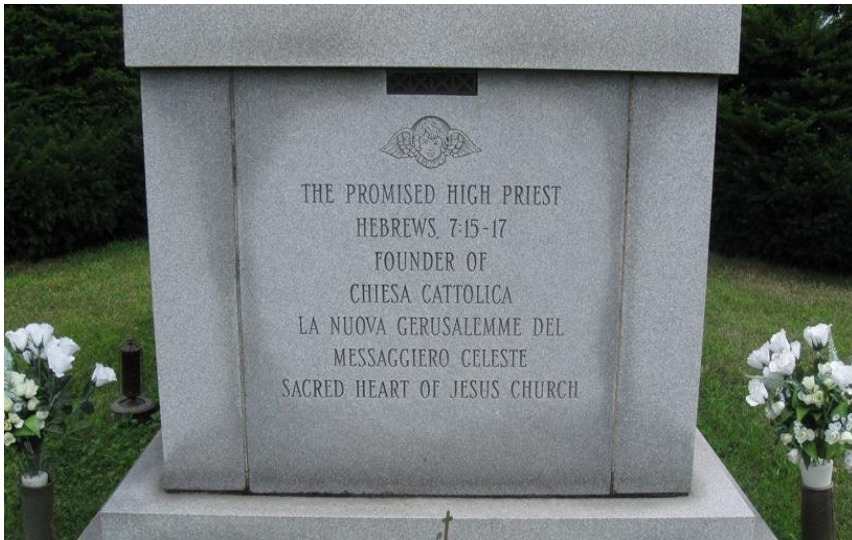
33. Abbate's Sister Maria Carmela in front of a
photo of her brother
(Source: Pieroni 1950a)



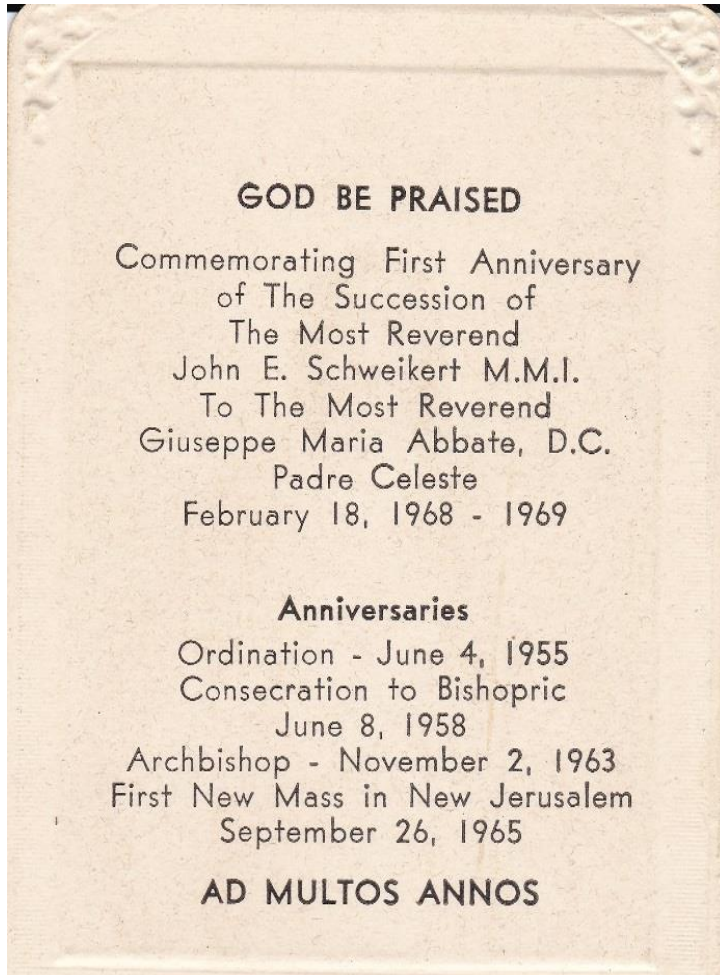
34. The Padre Celeste Censing the Altar in the
Sacred Heart of Jesus Church
(Source: JWCA)



35 & 36: The Celestial Father's coat of arms and
Visiting card, 1950s
(Source: JWCA)



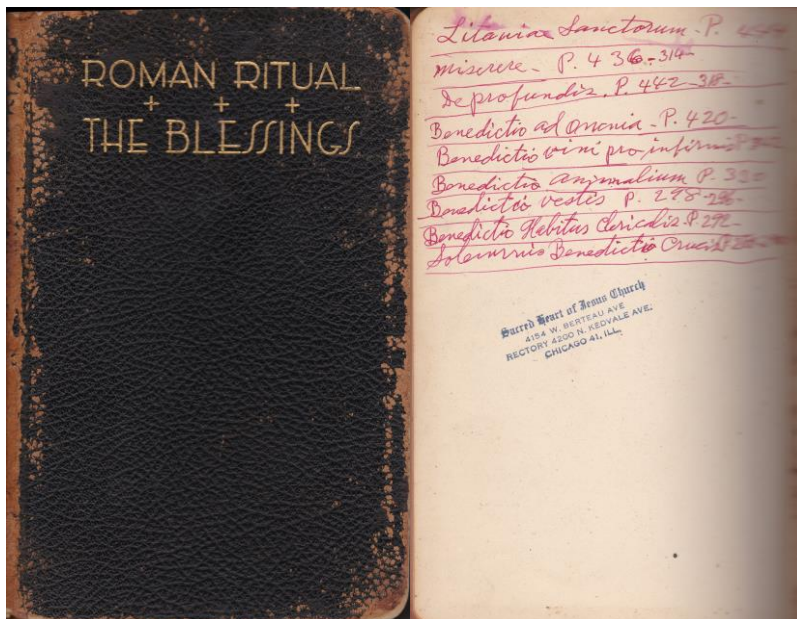
37 & 38: Abbate's grave at Elmwood Cemetery
(Photos: Jim Craig)



39. Prayer Card, Sacred Heart Church, 1969
(Source: JWCA)



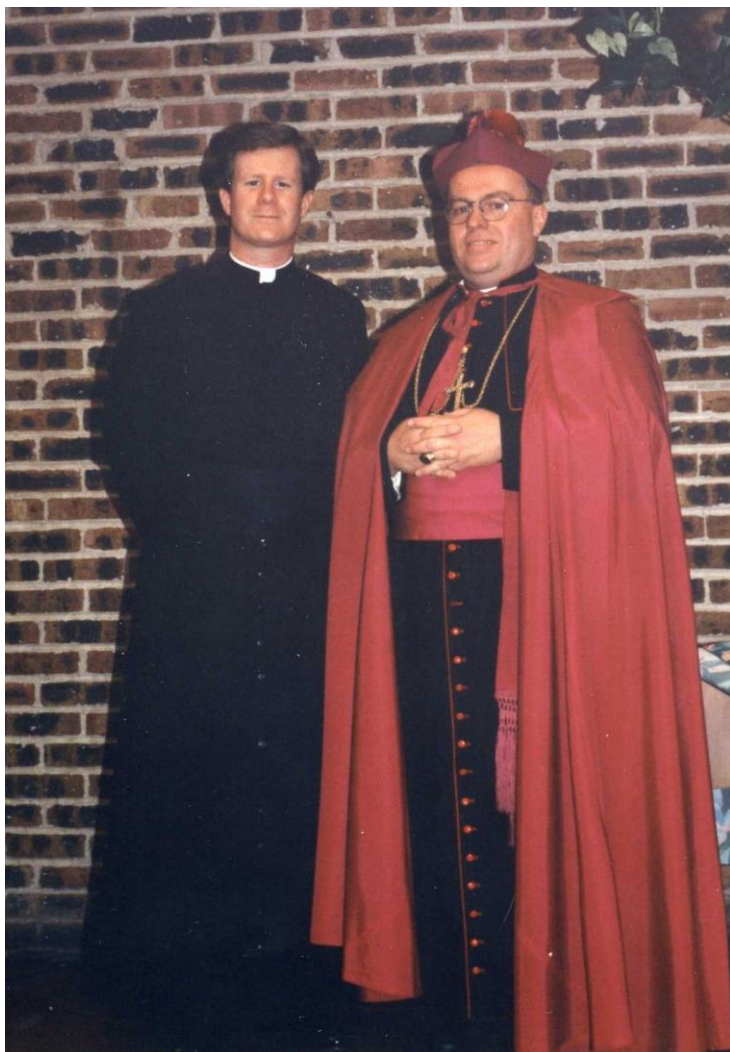
40 & 41. Archbishop John E. Schweikert
(Source: JWCA)



43. Abbate's copy of the Roman Rituale (Photo: Jim Craig)



44. Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral
(Source: JWCA)



45. Archbishop Theodore Rematt with Fr. James W. Craig on the day of his ordination to the priesthood in 1994.
(Source: JWCA).

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