

Our annual gift

Traditionally, as Salesian Family we receive the Strenna every year; a gift at the beginning of the year, and in these few lines I am keen to look inside this gift to welcome it as it deserves, without losing any of the freshness of the gift.

A gift, because first of all, *strenna* means: I give you a gift! I give you something important to celebrate a new time, a new year. This is how Don Bosco thought of it and gave it to all the young people and adults who were with him.

This gift, the *strenna*, I want to give you for the beginning of the new year, of a new time.

This is beautiful and important: a new year, a new time is a container containing all its other contents. The year to come is not the same as the ones you have experienced so far. The new year requires a new look to live it to the full; because the new year will not return! Every time is unique because we are different from last year, from the way we were last year.

The *Strenna* is about preparing for this new time, beginning to look inside this new year, highlighting certain things that will be an important part of this year.

The common thread

The gift of time, of life; in life the gift of God and all the other gifts within: people, situations, occasions, human relationships. Within this providential way of seeing the gift of time and life, the *strenna*, a gift that Don Bosco, and after him all his successors have given every year to the whole Salesian Family... is a look at the new year, at this new time, to see it with new eyes.

The *strenna* helps us to see the time to come by focusing on a common thread that guides this new time: the common thread that the *strenna* gives us is Hope. This is also important! The new year will certainly have many things in store, but don't get lost! Start thinking about how important it is... don't throw things to the winds, but collect!

The *strenna* that our Father Angel has put together for us, like a new suit, highlights events that we will all experience, and unites them with a common thread, Hope!

The events that the 2025 *Strenna* highlights are global or particular events that involve us, for us to live them well:

- **The ordinary Jubilee of the year 2025:** a Jubilee is a Church event in the Catholic tradition that the Holy Father gives us. To live the Jubilee is to live this pilgrimage that the Church offers us to put the presence of Christ back at the centre of our lives and the life of the world. The Jubilee that Pope Francis give us has a generative theme: *Spes non confundit!* Hope does not disappoint! What a wonderful generative theme! If there is one thing the world needs at this difficult time, it is Hope, but not the hope of believing we can do things for ourselves, at the risk of it becoming an illusion. It is the Hope of the re-discovery of the Presence of God. Pope Francis writes: 'Hope fills the heart!' Not only warms the heart, but fills it. Fills it to an overflowing measure!

- **Hope makes us pilgrims.** The Jubilee is a pilgrimage! It sets you on the move internally, otherwise it is not Jubilee. Within this Church event that makes us feel Church we, as a Salesian Congregation and as the Salesian Family have an important anniversary: it takes place in 2025:

- **The 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition to Argentina.**

In Valdocco, Don Bosco cast his heart beyond all borders: he sent his sons to the other side of the world! He sent them, beyond all human security, sent them when he did not even have what he needed to carry on what he had started.

He just sent them! Hope is obeyed, because Hope drives Faith and sets Charity in motion. He sent them, and the first confreres set out and went to where not even they knew! From there we were all born, from the Hope that sets us on our way and makes us pilgrims.

This anniversary should be celebrated, like every anniversary, because it helps us to recognise the Gift, (it is not your

property, it was given to you as a gift) to remember and to give strength for the time to come with the energy of the Mission.

Hope founds the Mission, because Hope is a responsibility that you cannot hide or keep to yourself! Do not keep hidden what has been given to you; acknowledge the giver and hand over with your life what has been given to the next generations! This is the life of the Church, the life of each one of us.

St Peter, with foresight, writes in his first letter: 'always be ready to answer anyone who asks you about the hope that is in you!' (1 Pet 3:15). We must think that answering is not just words; it is life that responds!

With the hope that is in you, live and prepare for this new year to come, a journey with young people, with our brothers and sisters, to renew Don Bosco's Dream and God's Dream.

Our coat of arms

Sul mio labaro brilla una stella (On my standard shines a star) we used to sing once upon a time. On our coat of arms, as well as the star there is a large anchor and a burning heart.

These are some simple images to begin to move our hearts in the direction of the time to come, 'Anchored in hope, pilgrims with youth'. Anchored is a very strong term: the anchor is the salvation of the ship in the storm, firm, strong, rooted in Hope!

Within this generative theme there will be all of our daily life: people, situations, decisions... the 'micro' of each one of us that is welded with the 'macro' of what we will all experience together... handing over to God the gift of this time that is given to us. Because to the Strenna that we will all receive you must add your part; your daily life that you will know how to illuminate with what we have written and will receive, otherwise it is not a Hope, it is not what your life is based on and it does not set you in 'motion', making you a Pilgrim.

We entrust this journey to the Mother of the Lord, Mother of

the Church and our Helper; Pilgrim of Hope with us.

Missionaries 2024

On Sunday 29 September, at 12:30 p.m. (UTC+2),
at the basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, 27
Salesians of Don
Bosco and 8 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will receive
the missionary
crucifix, renewing their apostolic generosity in favour of so
many young people
throughout the world.

As is the case every year, on the last Sunday of September,
Don Bosco's
missionary heart is renewed through the availability of the
Salesians of Don
Bosco and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians sent as
missionaries ad
gentes.

So much time has passed since that 11 November 1875, the day
on which a
fundamental step was taken: the first group of Salesian
missionaries headed for
Argentina began the transformation of the Salesians into a
worldwide
congregation, now spread over 138 countries. Two years later,
the FMA also
crossed the ocean, beginning the work of spreading beyond the
Italian borders.

As we approach the 150th anniversary of the first missionary
expedition, we can

take a closer look at the preparation of the Salesian new missionaries, which is developed in the 'Germoglio' course organised by the Missions Sector team and coordinated by Fr Reginaldo Cordeiro. The course runs for five weeks, immediately before the missionary expedition. In prayer, in listening to testimonies, in sharing experiences, in personal reflection and in joyful coexistence with the other course participants, the new missionaries are helped to verify, deepen and, at times, discover the profound reasons for their going on mission.

Obviously, the discernment of a missionary vocation begins much earlier. Traditionally, on 18 December, the day of the founding of the Salesian Congregation, the Rector Major issues a missionary appeal indicating the missionary priorities to be addressed. In response to the appeal, many Salesians write their availability, after listening to God's will, helped by their spiritual guide and the director of their community, following the guidelines of the Missions Sector. A profound re-reading of one's own life and a careful journey of discernment are required for the missionary vocation *ad gentes*, *ad exteros*, *ad vitam* to mature. The missionary, in fact, leaves for a lifelong project, with the prospect of inculturation in a different country and incardination in a new Province, in a context that will

become 'home', despite the many challenges and difficulties. On the other hand, it is important that there is a well-structured missionary project in the Provinces, which allows the arriving missionary to be accompanied, to fit in and to serve in the best possible way.

The Germoglio Course begins in Rome, with an introductory core, which aims to provide departing missionaries with the basic skills and attitudes necessary for a successful completion of the course. The motivations for the missionary choice are addressed, in a gradual journey of awareness and purification. Each missionary is invited to draw up a personal missionary life project, highlighting the essential elements and the steps to be taken to respond adequately to God's call. Then an introduction to Italian culture and a meeting on 'emotional literacy', fundamental for the experience of living to the full in a context different from one's own, and a session on missionary animation and Salesian missionary voluntary work. All this in a community context, where informal moments are precious and participation in community moments of prayer is vital, in a Pentecost style where languages and cultures mix for the enrichment of all. In these days, a pilgrimage to the places of Christian faith helps to retrace the roots of one's own faith, together with the closeness to the universal Church, also manifested in participation in a papal audience.

This year, on 28 August, the pope showed closeness to missionaries, reminding them in a brief conversation during a group photo of the figure of St Artemides Zatti, together with the beauty and importance of the vocation of Salesian brothers.

The second part of the course moves to Colle Don Bosco, Don Bosco's birthplace, where we get to the heart of the experience by going deep into the preparation from an anthropological, theological/missiological and Salesian charismatic point of view. Preparing oneself for the inevitable culture shock, being aware of the importance and effort of getting to know a new culture and a new language, and being open to intercultural dialogue, knowing that one will have to face conflicts and misunderstandings, are fundamental elements for living a true, human and full experience. Some missiological fundamentals help to understand what the mission is for the Church, and notions on First Announcement and integral evangelisation complete the perspective of the missionary. Finally, the typically Salesian characteristics, starting with some historical notes and then focusing on the present situation, discernment and Salesian spirituality. The group of missionaries then has the opportunity to visit Don Bosco's places, in a week of spiritual exercises on the move, in which they can face up to the

saint of youth and entrust their missionary dream to him. The experience continues with a pilgrimage to Mornese, where the missionary charism in the female version of St Mary Domenica Mazzarello is presented, together with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The last few days are spent in Valdocco, where the itinerary around Don Bosco's places is completed and preparation for the 'yes' to the missionary call is completed. A conversation with the Rector Major (his Vicar in this case) and the Mother General closes the programme before Sunday, when the missionary crucifixes are handed over to the departed during the 12:30 mass.

If we look at who the Salesians of the 155th missionary expedition are, we immediately notice how the paradigm shift is evident: all Provinces, and all countries, can be recipients and senders at the same time. The missionaries are no longer only Italian, as was the case at the beginning, or European, but come from the five continents, in particular from Asia (11 missionaries, from the two regions of South Asia and East Asia-Oceania) and Africa (8 missionaries), while the Mediterranean region will welcome the largest number of missionaries in this expedition. For some years now, the Missions Sector has been preparing a map to graphically help visualise the distribution of new missionaries around the world (you can download it [here](#)). This year there are five priests, two

brothers, one deacon and 19 Salesian students. Joining them are a few missionaries from past expeditions, who were unable to attend the preparation course.

Below is a detailed list of the new missionaries:

Donatien Martial Balezou, from Central African Rep. (ATE) to Brazil – Belo

Horizonte (BBH);

Guy Roger Mutombo, from Congo Dem. Rep. (ACC) to Italy (IME);

Henri Mufele Ngandwini, from Congo Dem. Rep. (ACC) to Italy (EMI);

Brother Alain Josaphat Mutima Balekage, from the Rep. Dem. of Congo (AFC) to

Uruguay (URU);

Clovis Muhindo Tsongo, from Rep. Dem. of Congo (AFC) to Brazil (BPA);

Confiance Kakule Kataliko, from Congo Dem. Rep. (AFC) to Uruguay (URU);

Fr Ephrem Kisenga Mwangwa, from the Democratic Republic of Congo (AFC) to

Taiwan (CIN);

Ernest Kirunda Menya, from Uganda (AGL) to Romania (INE);

Éric Umurundi Ndayicariye, from Burundi (AGL) to Mongolia (KOR);

Daniel Armando Nuñez, from El Salvador (CAM) to North Africa (CNA);

Marko Dropuljić, from Croatia (CRO) to Mongolia (KOR);

Krešo Maria Gabričević, from Croatia (CRO) to Papua New Guinea – Solomon

Islands (PGS);

Rafael Gašpar, from Croatia (CRO) to Brazil (BBH);

Fr Marijan Zovak, from Croatia (CRO) to the Dominican Republic (ANT);

Fr Enrico Bituin Mercado, from the Philippines (FIN) to Southern Africa (AFM);

Alan Andrew Manuel, from India (INB) to North Africa (CNA);
 Fr Joseph Reddy Vanga, from India (INH) to Papua New Guinea –
 Solomon Islands
 (PGS);
 Fr Hubard Thyrniang, from India (INS) to North West Africa
 (AON);
 Fr Albert Tron Mawa, from India (INS) to Sri Lanka (LKC);
 Eruthaya Valan Arockiaraj, from India (INT) to Congo (ACC);
 Herimamponona Dorisse Angelot Rakotonirina, from Madagascar
 (MDG) to
 Albania/Kosovo/Montenegro (AKM);
 Brother Mouzinho Domingos Joaquim Mouzinho, from Mozambique
 (MOZ) to
 Albania/Kosovo/Montenegro (AKM);
 Nelson Alves Cabral, from East Timor (TLS) to the Democratic
 Republic of Congo
 (AFC);
 Elisio Ilidio Guterres Dos Santos, from East Timor (TLS) to
 Romania (INE);
 Francisco Armindo Viana, from East Timor (TLS) to Congo (ACC);
 Tuân Anh Joseph Vũ, from Vietnam (VIE) to Chile (CIL);
 Trong Hữu Francis Đ, from Vietnam (VIE) to Chile (CIL).

These are the SDB members of the 155th Salesian missionary
 expedition, while
 the FMA will have its 147th expedition.

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians new missionaries are:
 Sr Cecilia Gayo, from Uruguay;
 Sr Maria Goretti Tran Thi Hong Loan, from Vietnam;
 Sr Sagma Beronica, from India, Province of Shillong;
 Sr Serah Njeri Ndung'u, from the East Africa Province, sent to
 South Sudan;
 Sr Lai Marie Pham Thi, from Vietnam;
 Sr Maria Bosco Tran Thi Huyen, from Vietnam;
 Sr Philina Kholar, from India, Shillong Province, sent to
 Italy (Sicily);

Sr Catherine Ramírez Sánchez, from Chile.

Most of them still do not know their missionary destination, which will be communicated after the formation course.

This year, a group belonging to the Community of the Mission of Don Bosco (CMB), a group of the Salesian Family led by Deacon Guido Pedroni, will also receive the missionary cross together with the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Let us pray that this varied vocational availability bears fruit throughout the world!

Marco Fulgaro

The Good Shepherd gives his life: Father Elia Comini on the 80th anniversary of his sacrifice

Monte Sole is a hill in the Apennines near Bologna that until the Second World War had several small villages along its ridges: between 29 September and 5 October 1944, its inhabitants, mostly children, women and the elderly, were the victims of a terrible massacre by SS troops (Schutzstaffel, 'protection squads'; a paramilitary organisation of the National Socialist German Workers' Party

created in Nazi Germany). 780 people died, many of them refugees in churches. Five priests lost their lives, including Father Giovanni Fornasini, proclaimed blessed and martyred in 2021 by Pope Francis.

This is one of the most heinous massacres carried out by the Nazi SS in Europe during the Second World War, taking place around Monte Sole in the Marzabotto, Grizzana Morandi and Monzuno (Bologna) areas and commonly known as the 'Marzabotto massacre'. Among the victims were a number of priests and religious, including Salesian Father Elia Comini, who throughout his life and until the end strove to be a good shepherd and to spend himself unreservedly, generously, going out of himself with no return. This is the true essence of his pastoral charity, which presents him as a model of a shepherd who watches over the flock, ready to give his life for it, in defence of the weak and the innocent.

'Receive me as an expiatory victim'

Elia Comini was born in Calvenzano di Vergato (Bologna) on 7 May 1910. His parents Claudio, a carpenter, and Emma Limoni, a seamstress, prepared him for life and educated him in the faith. He was baptised in Calvenzano. He made his First Communion and received Confirmation in Salvaro di Grizzana. From an early age he showed great interest in catechism, church services and singing in serene and cheerful friendship with his companions. The archpriest of Salvaro, Monsignor Fidenzio Mellini, as a young soldier in Turin, had attended the Valdocco oratory and had met Don Bosco who had prophesied the priesthood for him. Monsignor Mellini highly regarded Elias for his faith, kindness and unique intellectual abilities and urged him to become one of Don Bosco's sons. For this reason he directed him to the small Salesian seminary in Finale Emilia (Modena) where Elia attended middle school and upper secondary. In 1925 he entered the Salesian novitiate at Castel De' Britti (Bologna) and made his religious profession there on 3 October 1926. From 1926-1928 he attended the Salesian high school in Valsalice (Turin), where Don Bosco's

grave was then kept, as a student cleric of philosophy. It was in this place that Elias began a demanding spiritual journey, witnessed by a diary he kept until just over two months before his tragic death. These are pages revealing an inner life as profound as it was not perceived on the outside. On the eve of the renewal of his vows, he would write: 'I am more than ever happy on this day, on the eve of the holocaust that I hope will be pleasing to You. Receive me as an expiatory victim, even though I do not deserve it. If you believe, give me some reward: forgive me my sins of the past life; help me to become a saint.'

He completed his practical training as assistant educator in Finale Emilia, Sondrio and Chiari. He graduated in Literature at the State University of Milan. On 16 March 1935 he was ordained a priest in Brescia. He wrote: 'I asked Jesus: death, rather than failing my priestly vocation; and heroic love for souls'. From 1936 to 1941 he taught Literature in the 'San Bernardino' aspirant school in Chiari (Brescia), giving excellent proof of his teaching talent and his attention to young people. In the years 1941-1944 religious obedience transferred him to the Salesian institute in Treviglio (Bergamo). He particularly embodied Don Bosco's pastoral charity and the traits of Salesian loving-kindness, which he transmitted to the young through his affable character, goodness and smile.

Triduum of passion

The habitual gentleness of his demeanour and heroic dedication to the priestly ministry shone out clearly during the short annual summer stays with his mother, who was left alone in Salvaro, and at his adopted parish, where the Lord would later ask Father Elias for the total gift of his life. Some time earlier he had written in his diary: 'The thought that I must die always persists in me. Who knows! Let us act as the faithful servant always prepared for the call, to give an account of stewardship'. We are in the period from June to September 1944, when during the terrible situation

created in the area between Monte Salvaro and Monte Sole, with the advance of the Allied front line, the Stella Rossa partisan brigade settled on the heights, and the Nazis at risk of being bottling up brought the population to the brink of total destruction.

On 23 July, the Nazis, following the killing of one of their soldiers, began a series of reprisals: ten men were killed, houses set on fire. Father Comini did his utmost to welcome the relatives of those killed and to hide those still wanted. He also helped the elderly parish priest of San Michele di Salvaro, Monsignor Fidenzio Mellini: he taught catechism, led retreats, celebrated, preached, exhorted, played and sing and made people sing to calm down a situation that was heading for the worst. Then, together with Father Martino Capelli, a Dehonian, Father Elias continually rushed to help, console, administer the sacraments and bury the dead. In some cases he even managed to save groups of people by leading them to the rectory. His heroism was manifested with increasing clarity at the end of September 1944, when the *Wehrmacht* (German Armed Forces) largely gave way to the terrible SS.

The triduum of passion for Father Elia Comini and Father Martino Capelli began on Friday 29 September. The Nazis caused panic in the Monte Salvaro area and the population poured into the parish in search of protection. Father Comini, risking his life, hid about seventy men in a room adjoining the sacristy, covering the door with an old wardrobe. The ruse succeeded. In fact, the Nazis, searching the various rooms three times, did not notice. In the meantime, news arrived that the terrible SS had massacred several dozen people in 'Creda', among whom were wounded and dying people in need of comfort. Father Elias celebrated his last Mass early in the morning and then together with Father Martino, taking the holy oils and the Eucharist, they hurried off in the hope of still being able to help some of the wounded. He did this freely. In fact, everyone dissuaded him: from the parish priest to the women there. 'Don't go, father. It is dangerous!' They tried

to hold Father Elias and Father Martino back by force, but they made this decision in full awareness of the danger of death. Father Elias said: 'Pray, pray for me, because I have a mission to fulfil'; 'Pray for me, don't leave me alone!'.

The two priests were captured Near Creda di Salvaro; they were forced to carry ammunition and, in the evening, were locked up in the stable at Pioppe di Salvaro. On Saturday 30 September, Father Elia and Father Martino spent all their energy comforting the many men locked up with them. The Prefect Commissioner of Vergato Emilio Veggetti, who did not know Father Martino, but knew Father Elia very well, tried in vain to obtain the release of the prisoners. The two priests continued to pray and console. In the evening, they heard each other's confession.

The following day, Sunday 1 October 1944, at dusk, the machine-gun inexorably mowed down the 46 victims of what was to go down in history as the 'Massacre of Pioppe di Salvaro': they were the men considered unfit for work; among them, the two priests, young and forced two days earlier to do heavy work. Witnesses who were at a short distance, as the crow flies, from the site of the massacre, could hear the voice of Father Comini leading the Litanies and then heard the sound of gunfire. Father Comini, before falling to his death, gave absolution to all and shouted: 'Mercy, mercy!', while Father Capelli got up from the bottom of the barrel and made wide signs of the cross, until he fell back with his arms outstretched on the cross. Nobody could be recovered. After twenty days, the grates were opened and the waters of the Reno swept away the mortal remains, completely losing track of them. In the Botte people died amid blessings and invocations, amid prayers, acts of repentance and forgiveness. Here, as in other places, people died as Christians, with faith, with their hearts turned to God in the hope of eternal life.

History of the Montesole massacre

Between 29 September and 5 October 1944, 770 people were killed, but overall the victims of the Nazis and

Fascists, from the spring of 1944 to the liberation, numbered 955, distributed across 115 different locations within a vast territory that included the municipalities of Marzabotto, Grizzana and Monzuno (and some portions of neighbouring territories). Of these, 216 were children, 316 women, 142 the elderly, 138 the victims recognised partisans, and five were priests whose guilt in the eyes of the Nazis consisted in having been close, with prayer and material aid, to the entire population of Monte Sole during the tragic months of war and military occupation. Together with Father Elia Comini, a Salesian, and Father Martino Capelli, a Dehonian, three priests from the Archdiocese of Bologna were also killed in those tragic days: Father Ubaldo Marchioni, Father Ferdinando Casagrande and Father Giovanni Fornasini. The Cause of Beatification and Canonisation of all five is underway. Father Giovanni, the 'Angel of Marzabotto', fell on 13 October 1944. He was twenty-nine years old and his body remained unburied until 1945, when it was found heavily tortured. He was beatified on 26 September 2021. Father Ubaldo died on 29 September, killed by a machine gun on the sanctuary of his church in Casaglia; he was 26 years old and had been ordained a priest two years earlier. Nazi soldiers found him and the community intent on praying the rosary. He was killed there, at the foot of the altar. The others – more than 70 – in the nearby cemetery. Father Ferdinando was shot in the back of the head on 9 October, with his sister Giulia; he was 26 years old.

Wonders of the Mother of God

invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians (10/13)

[\(continuation from previous article\)](#)

Chapter XIX. Funds by which this Church was built.

Those who have spoken or heard about this sacred edifice will want to know where the funds were obtained, which in total already exceed half a million. I find myself in great difficulty in answering, therefore less able to satisfy others. I will say, therefore, that the legal bodies gave high hopes at first; but in practice they decided not to contribute. Some wealthy citizens, seeing the need for this building, promised conspicuous largesse, but for the most part they changed their minds and judged it better to direct their charity elsewhere.

It is true that some well-to-do devotees had promised donations, but at an opportune time, that is, they would make donations when they were certain of the work and had seen the work in progress.

With the offerings of the Holy Father and a few other pious people, the land could be purchased and nothing else; so that when it came to starting the work, I did not have a penny to spend on it. Here, on the one hand, there was the certainty that this building was for the greater glory of God; on the other hand, there was the absolute lack of means. Then it became clear that the Queen of Heaven wanted not the moral bodies, but the real bodies, that is, the true devotees of Mary, to take part in the holy endeavour, and Mary herself wanted to put her hand to it and make it known that it was her own work that she wanted to build it: *Aedificavit sibi domum Maria*.

I therefore undertake the account of things as

they happened, and I conscientiously recount the truth, and I commend myself to the benevolent reader to give me benign pity if he finds anything that does not please him. Here it is. The digging had begun, and the fortnight was approaching when the diggers had to be paid, and there was no money whatsoever; when a fortunate event opened an unexpected way to charity. Because of the sacred ministry, I was called to the bedside of a gravely ill person. She had been lying motionless for three months, racked with coughs and fever with severe stomach exhaustion. "If ever" she said, "I could regain a little health, I would be willing to make any prayer, any sacrifice; it would be a great favour to me if I could even get out of bed."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Whatever you tell me."

"Make a novena to Mary Help of Christians."

"What should I say?"

"For nine days recite three Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory Be's to the Blessed Sacrament with three Hail Marys to the Blessed Virgin."

"This I will do; and what work of charity?"

"If you judge well and if you get a real improvement to your health, you will make some offerings for the Church of Mary Help of Christians which is being started in Valdocco."

"Yes, yes: gladly. If in the course of this novena I only get to get out of bed and take a few steps around this room, I will make an offering for the church you mention in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

The novena began and we were already on the last day; I was to give no less than a thousand francs to the terrazzo workers that evening. I therefore went to visit our sick person in whose recovery all my resources were invested, and not without anxiety and agitation I rang the bell of her house. The janitor opens the door and joyfully announces to me that her mistress was perfectly recovered, had already taken two walks and had already gone to church to thank the Lord.

As the maid hurriedly recounted these things, the same mistress came forward, jubilant, saying "I am healed, I have already gone to thank Our Blessed Lady; come, here is the parcel I have prepared for you; this is the first offering, but it will certainly not be the last." I took the parcel, went home, checked it, and found fifty gold napoleons in it, which were precisely the thousand francs we needed.

This fact, the first of its kind, I kept jealously hidden; nevertheless it spread like an electric spark. Others and then others still recommended themselves to Mary Help of Christians by making the novena and promising some donation if they obtained the implored grace. And here, if I wanted to set out the multitude of facts, I would have to make not a small booklet, but large volumes.

Headaches ceased, fevers were vanquished, sores and cancerous ulcers healed, rheumatism ceased, convulsions healed, eye, ear, tooth and kidney ailments instantly healed; such are the means that the Lord's mercy used to provide us with what was necessary to bring this church to completion.

Turin, Genoa, Bologna, Naples, but more than any other city, Milan, Florence, and Rome were the cities that, having specially experienced the beneficial influence of the Mother of Graces invoked under the name of Help of Christians, also showed their gratitude with donations. Even more remote countries like Palermo, Vienna, Paris, London and Berlin turned to Mary Help of Christians with the usual prayers and promises. I am not aware of anyone having had recourse in vain. A spiritual or temporal favour more or less marked was always the fruit of the petition and recourse made to the pitiful Mother, to the powerful help of Christians. They resorted, they obtained the heavenly favour, they made their offering without being asked for it in any way.

If you, O reader, enter this church, you will see an elegantly built pulpit; it was a gravely ill person who made a promise to Mary Help of Christians; she recovered and fulfilled her vow. The elegant altar in the chapel on the right belongs to a Roman matron who offered it to Mary for

grace received.

If serious reasons, which everyone can lightly surmise, did not prevent me from its publication, I could tell you the country and the names of the people who appealed to Mary from all sides. Indeed, it could be said that every nook and cranny, every brick of this sacred edifice recalls a benefit, a grace obtained from this august Queen of Heaven.

An impartial person will collect these facts, which in due course will serve to make known to posterity the wonders of Mary Help of Christians.

In these last times poverty was making itself felt in an exceptional way, we were also slowing down the work to await better times for its continuation; when other providential means came to the rescue. The deadly cholera that raged among us and in the neighbouring countries moved the most insensitive and unscrupulous hearts.

Among others, a mother, seeing her only son choked by the violence of the disease, urged him to turn to Mary Most Holy for help. In the excess of grief he uttered these words: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis*. With the warmest affection of heart, his mother repeated the same prayer. At that moment, the violence of the illness was mitigated, the sick man perspired profusely, so that in a few hours he was out of danger and almost completely cured. The news of this fact spread, and then others recommended themselves with faith in Almighty God and in the power of Mary Help of Christians with the promise to make some offering to continue the construction of her church. No one is known to have had recourse to Mary in this way without being heard. St Bernard's saying is thus fulfilled, that **it has never been heard of anyone who has confidently had recourse to Mary in vain**. While I was writing (May 1868) I received an offer with a report from a person of great authority, who announced to me how an entire town was in an extraordinary way freed from the cholera infestation thanks to the medal, the recourse and the prayer made to Mary Help of Christians. In this way there were donations from all sides, oblations, it is true, of small

entity, but which together were sufficient for the need.

Nor should another means of charity for this church be passed over in silence, such as the offering of a part of the profit from trade, or the fruit of the countryside. Many, who for many years had received no more fruit from silkworms and harvests, promised to give a tenth of the produce they would receive. They were extraordinarily favoured; content therefore to show their heavenly benefactress special signs of gratitude with their offerings.

Thus we have conducted this majestic edifice for us with an astonishing dispensation without anyone ever making a collection of any kind. Who would believe it? One sixth of the expenditure was covered by donations from devout people; the rest were all donations made for graces received.

Now there are still some details to be settled, some work to be completed, many ornaments and furnishings to be provided, but we have great confidence in this august Queen of Heaven, who will not cease to bless her devotees and grant them special graces, so that out of devotion to her and out of gratitude for the graces received they will continue to lend their beneficent hand to bring the holy undertaking to a complete completion. And so, as the supreme Hierarch of the Church says, may the devotees of Mary increase above the earth and may the number of her fortunate children be greater, who will one day make her glorious crown in the kingdom of heaven to praise, bless and thank her for ever.

Hymn for Vespers of the Feast of Mary Help

Te Redemptoris, Dominique nostri

Dicimus Matrem, speciosa virgo,

Christianorum decus et levamen

Rebus in arctis.

Saeviant portae licet inferorum,

Hostis antiquus fremat, et minaces,

Ut Deo sacrum populetur agmen,

Suscitet iras.

Nil truces possunt furiae nocere

Mentibus castis, prece, quas vocata
Annuens Virgo foveat, et superno
Robore firmat.

Tanta si nobis faveat Patrona
Bellici cessat sceleris tumultus,
Mille sternuntur, fugiuntque turmae,
Mille cohortes.

Tollit ut sancta caput in Sione
Turris, arx firmo fabricata muro,
Civitas David, clypeis, et acri
Milite tuta.

Virgo sic fortis Domini potenti
Dextera, caeli cumulata donis,
A piis longe famulis repellit
Daemonis ictus.

Te per aeternos veneremur annos,
Trinitas, summo celebrando plausu,
Te fide mentes resonoque linguae
Carminibus laudent. Amen.

Hymn for Vespers of the Feast of Mary Help. – *TRANSLATION*

Virgin Mother of the Lord,
Our daughter and our pride,
From the valley of tears
We implore you with faith and love.

From the gates of hell
Frema the host threatening,
Thou pitifully watchest
With thy supernal gaze.

His furies unleashed
Will pass without shame and harm,
If of chaste hearts on the vain
Are the prayers raised to Thee.

Thee Patroness, in every war
We become the heroes of the field;
The lightning of your might
A thousand hosts flee and land.

Thou art the bulwark that surrounds
Of Zion the holy houses;
You are David's sling
That smites the proud giant.
You are the shield that repels
Satan's ignorant swords,
You are the staff that drives him back
Into the abyss from whence it came.

[...]

Hymn for praise

Saepe dum Christi populus cruentis
Hostis infensis premeretur armis,
Venit adiutrix pia Virgo coelo
Lapsa sereno.
Prisca sic Patrum monumenta narrant,
Templa testantur spoliis opimis
Clara, votivo repetita cultu
Festa quotannis.
En novi grates liceat Mariae
Cantici laetis modulis referre
Pro novis donis, resonante plausu,
Urbis et orbis.
O dies felix memoranda fastis,
Qua Petri Sedes fidei Magistrum
Triste post lustrum reducem beata
Sorte recepit!
Virgines castae, puerique puri,
Gestiens Clerus, populusque grato
Corde Reginae celebrare caeli
Munera certent.
Virginum Virgo, benedicta Iesu
Mater, haec auge bona: fac, precamur,
Ut gregem Pastor Pius ad salutis
Pascua ducat.
Te per aeternos veneremur annos,
Trinitas, summo celebrando plausu,

Te fide mentes, resonoque linguae

Carmine laudent. Amen.

Hymn for praise – *TRANSLATION*.

When the bitter enemy

To assault was seen
With the most terrible weapons
The people of Christ,
Often to the defences
Mary from heaven descended.

Columns altars and domes

With trophies adorned,
And rites and feasts and canticles
Were dedicated to her.
Oh how many are the memories
Of her many victories!

But new graces be given

To her new favours;
Let all nations unite
And the supernal choirs
In divine harmony
With the Queen City.

The inconsolable Church

Her eyelids are calmed;
On the day that dawned
From long sad exile
Of Peter to the supreme See
The Supreme Heir returned.

The virginal youths

The chaste adolescents
With clergy and people
Cant in such auspicious events:
Gareggino in homage
Of affection and language.

O Virgin of virgins

Mother of the God of peace,
May the Pastor of souls

With lip so true
And her high virtue
Guide us to health.

[...]

Fr PAGNONE

[\(continued\)](#)

St Francis de Sales catechises the children

Formed in Christian doctrine from childhood, in his family environment, then in schools, and finally in contact with the Jesuits, Francis de Sales had perfectly assimilated the content and method of the catechesis of the time.

A catechism experience in Thonon

How to catechise the youth of Thonon who had grown up all steeped in Calvinism, the missionary from Chablais wondered. Authoritarian means were not necessarily the most effective. Was it not better to attract the youth and interest them? This was the method usually followed by the provost of Sales during his time as a missionary in the Chablais.

He had also attempted an experience that deserves to be remembered. On 16 July 1596, taking advantage of the visit of his two young brothers, Jean-François aged eighteen and Bernard aged thirteen, he organised a kind of public recitation of the catechism in order to attract the youth in Thonon. He composed a text himself in the form of questions and answers on the fundamental truths of the faith, and invited his brother Bernard to respond.

The catechist's method is interesting. When reading this little dialogue catechism, one must remember that it is not simply a written text, but a dialogue intended to be performed before an audience of young people in the form of a "little theatre". The "performance" actually took place on a "stage", or podium, as was the custom among the Jesuits in the college of Clermont. In fact, there are stage directions at the beginning:

Francis, speaking first, will say: My brother, are you a Christian?!

Bernard, placed vis-à-vis Francis, will answer: Yes, my brother, by the grace of God.!

Most probably the author envisaged the use of gestures to make the recitation more lively. To the question "How many things must you know to be saved?" the answer reads "As many as there are fingers on one hand!", an expression that Bernard had to pronounce with gestures, i.e. pointing to the five fingers of the hand: the thumb for faith, the index finger for hope, the middle finger for charity, the ring finger for the sacraments, the little finger for good works. Similarly, when dealing with the different anointings of baptism, Bernard had to place his hand first on his chest, to indicate that the first anointing consists in "being embraced by the love of God"; then on his shoulders, because the second anointing is intended to "make us strong in carrying the weight of the divine commandments and precepts"; finally on his forehead to reveal that the purpose of the last anointing is to "make us confess our faith in Our Lord publicly, without fear and without shame."

Great importance is given to the "sign of the cross", normally accompanied by the formula In the name of the Father with which he began the catechism, a sign that with the gesture of the hand follows, on the parts of the body, an inverted path compared to the baptismal anointing: the forehead, the chest and the two shoulders. The sign of the

cross, Bernard was to say, is "the true sign of the Christian", adding that "the Christian must make it in all his prayers and in his principal actions."

It is also worth noting that the systematic use of numbers served as a mnemonic. In this way, the individual learns that there are three baptismal promises (renounce the devil, profess the faith and keep the commandments), twelve articles of the Creed, ten commandments of God, three types of Christians (heretics, bad Christians and true Christians), four parts of the body to be anointed (the breast, the two shoulders and the forehead), three anointings, five things necessary to be saved (faith, hope, charity, sacraments and good works), seven sacraments and three good works (prayer, fasting and almsgiving).

If we carefully examine the content of this dialogical catechism, it is easy to detect its insistence on several points contested by Protestants. The strong tone of certain statements recalls Thonon's proximity to Geneva and the polemical zeal of the time.

From the very beginning there is an invocation to the "blessed Virgin Mary". On the subject of the observance of the Ten Commandments, it is specified that the precepts of "our holy Mother Church" must be added. In the three types of Christians, heretics are those who "have nothing but the name", "being outside the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church". The sacraments are seven in number. The rites and ceremonies of the Church are not just symbolic actions, they produce a real change in the believer's soul due to the efficacy of grace. One also notes the insistence on "good works" to be saved and the practice of the "holy sign of the Cross".

Despite the rather exceptional "staging" involving his younger brother, this type of catechesis had to be repeated often and in fairly similar forms. It is known, in fact, that the Apostle of the Chablais "taught catechism, as often as possible, in public or in some homes."

The catechist bishop

Having become bishop of Geneva, but resident in Annecy, Francis de Sales taught catechism to children himself. He had to set an example to canons and parish priests who hesitated to stoop to this type of ministry: it is well known, he would one day say, that "many want to preach, but few teach catechism." According to one witness, the bishop "took the trouble to teach catechism in person for two years in the city, without being helped by others."

A witness describes him seated "on a small theatre created for the purpose, and, while there, he interrogated, listened, and taught not only his small audience, but also all those who flocked from all sides, welcoming them with an incredible ease and friendliness" His attention was focused on the personal relationships to be established with the children: before questioning them, "he called them all by name, as if he had the list in his hand."

To make himself understood, he used simple language, sometimes drawing the most unexpected comparisons from everyday life, such as that of the little dog: "When we come into the world, how are we born? We are born like little dogs, who, licked by their mother, open their eyes. So, when we are born, our holy mother Church opens our eyes with baptism and the Christian doctrine she teaches us."

With the help of a few co-workers, the bishop prepared "tickets" on which were written the main points to be learnt by heart during the week in order to be able to recite them on Sundays. But how could this be done if the children could not yet read and their families were also illiterate? It was necessary to count on the help of benevolent people: parish priests, vice-parish priests, schoolteachers, who would be available during the week to tutor them.

As a good educator, he often repeated the same questions with the same explanations. When the child made a mistake reciting his notes or pronouncing difficult words, "he would smile so kindly and, correcting the mistake, would put the questioner back on track in such a lovely way that it

seemed that if he had not made a mistake, he could not have pronounced it so well; which doubled the courage of the little ones and singularly increased the satisfaction of the older ones."

The traditional pedagogy of emulation and reward had its place in the interventions of this former Jesuit pupil. A witness relates this skit: "The little ones ran about, exultant with joy, competing against each other; they were proud when they could receive from the hands of the Blessed some little gift such as little pictures, medals, rosaries and *agnus dei*, which he gave them when they had responded well, and also special caresses that he gave them to encourage them to learn the catechism well and to respond correctly."

Now, this catechesis to children attracted adults, and not only parents, but also great personalities, "doctors, chamber presidents, councillors and masters, religious and superiors of monasteries." All social strata were represented, "nobles, clergymen and ordinary people", and the crowd was so packed that "one could not move." People flocked from the city and the surrounding area.

A movement had therefore been created, a kind of contagious phenomenon. According to some, "it was no longer the catechism of children, but the public education of the entire people." The comparison with the movement created in Rome half a century earlier by the lively and joyful assemblies of St Philip Neri comes spontaneously to mind. In the words of Father Lajeunie, "the Oratory of Saint Philip seemed to be reborn in Annecy."

The bishop was not content with formulas learnt by heart, although it was far from him to deprecate the role of memory. He insisted that children know what they must believe and understand the teaching.

Above all, he wanted the theory learned during catechism to become practical in everyday life. As one of his biographers wrote, "he taught not only what one must believe, but also persuaded one to live according to what one

believes." He encouraged his hearers of all ages "to approach the sacraments of confession and communion frequently", "taught them personally the way to prepare themselves appropriately", and "explained the commandments of the Decalogue and of the Church, the deadly sins, using appropriate examples, similes and exhortations so lovingly engaging, that all felt gently compelled to do their duty and embrace the virtue taught them."

In any case, the catechist bishop was delighted with what he was doing. When he found himself among the children, says one witness, he seemed "to be among his delights." On leaving one of these catechism schools, at carnival time, he took up his pen to describe it to Jeanne de Chantal:

I have just finished the catechism class where I indulged a little in merriment, having fun with masks and dances to make the audience laugh; I was in good humour, and a large audience invited me with its applause to continue being a child with the children. They tell me that I succeed in this, and I believe it!

He liked to recount the beautiful expressions of the children, sometimes astounding in their depth. In the letter just quoted, he related to the Baroness the answer he had just been given to the question: Is Jesus Christ ours? "One should not doubt it in the least: Jesus Christ is ours," a little girl had answered him, who added: "Yes, he is more mine than I am his and more than I am mine myself."

St Francis de Sales and his "little world"

The familiar, warm and joyful atmosphere that reigned during catechism was an important success factor, encouraged by the natural harmony that existed between Francis' limpid loving soul and the children, whom he called his "little world", because he had managed to "win their hearts".

As he walked through the streets, the children ran ahead of him; he was sometimes seen to be so surrounded by them that he could go no further. Far from becoming irritated, he would caress them, entertain himself with them, asking: "Whose son are you? What is your name?"

According to his biographer, he would one day say "that he would like to have the pleasure of seeing and considering how a child's spirit gradually opens and expands."

First missionary dream: Patagonia (1872)

Here is the dream that saw Don Bosco decide to start the missionary apostolate in Patagonia.

He narrated it for the first time to Pius IX in March 1876. Later he repeated the story to some Salesians in private. The first to be admitted to this confidential narration was Fr Francesco Bodrato, on 30 July of the same year. And Fr Bodrato told Fr Giulio Barberis on that same evening in Lanzo, where he had gone to spend a few days of leisure with a group of cleric novices.

Three days later, Fr Barberis went to Turin, and being in the library in conversation with the saint, walking a bit with him, he also heard the story. Fr Giulio was careful not to tell him that he had already heard it, happy to hear it repeated from his own lips, also because Don Bosco, in telling these stories, always had some new interesting detail each time.

Fr Lemoyne also learned it from Don Bosco's lip; and both Fr Barberis and Fr Lemoyne put it in writing. "Don Bosco," Fr Lemoyne said, "told them that they were the first to whom he revealed this kind of vision *in detail*, which we

recount here almost in his own words."

I seemed to be in a wild region I had never before seen, an immense untilled plain, unbroken by hills or mountains, except at the farthest end, where I could see the outline of jagged mountains. Throngs of naked, dark-skinned, fierce-looking, long-haired men of exceptional height and build swarmed all over this plain. Their only garments were hides strung across their shoulders. Their weapons were long spears and slings.

These throngs, scattered about, presented varied sights to the spectator: some men were hunting, others were carrying bloodied chunks of meat at spear point, still others were fighting among themselves or with European soldiers. I shuddered at the sight of corpses lying all over the ground. Just then many people came into sight at the far edge of the plain. Their clothing and demeanor told me they were missionaries of various orders who had come to preach the Christian faith to these barbarians. I stared intently at them but could recognize no one. They strode directly to those savages, but the latter immediately overwhelmed them with fiendish fury and hatred, killing them, ripping them apart, hacking them into pieces, and brandishing chunks of their flesh on the barbs of their long spears. Now and then, fighting broke out again among the savages or against neighboring tribes.

After witnessing this horrible bloodshed, I said to myself: How can one convert so brutal a people? Then I saw a small band of other missionaries, led by a number of young boys, advance cheerfully toward those savages.

I feared for them, thinking, They are walking to their death. I went to meet them; they were clerics and priests. When I looked closely at them, I recognized them as our own Salesians. I personally knew only those in front, but I could see that the others too were Salesians.

How can this be? I exclaimed. I did not want them to advance any further because I feared that soon their fate would be

that of the former missionaries. I was about to force them back when I saw that the barbarians seemed pleased by their arrival. Lowering their spears, they warmly welcomed them. In utter amazement I said to myself: let's see how things will turn out! I saw that our missionaries mingled with them and taught them, and they docilely listened and learned quickly. They readily accepted the missionaries' admonitions and put them into practice.

As I stood watching, I noticed that the missionaries were reciting the rosary as they advanced, and that the savages, closing in from all sides, made way for them and joined in the prayers.

After a while, our Salesians moved into the center of the throng and knelt. Encircling them, the barbarians also knelt, laying their weapons at the missionaries' feet. Then a missionary intoned: *Praise Mary, Ye Faithful Tongues*, and, as with one voice, the song swelled in such unison and power that I awoke, partly frightened.

I had this same dream four or five years ago, and it sharply impressed me because I took it as a heavenly sign. Though I did not thoroughly grasp its specific meaning, I understood that it referred to the foreign missions, which even at that time were one of my most fervent aspirations.

I understood that it referred to the foreign missions, which even at that time were one of my most fervent aspirations.

Thus the dream dated back to about 1872. At first Don Bosco believed that it referred to the tribes of Ethiopia, later to the regions around Hong Kong. and finally to the aborigines of Australia and of the [East] Indies. It was only in 1874, when, as we shall see, he received most pressing requests to send Salesians to Argentina, that he clearly understood that the natives he had seen in his dream lived in Patagonia, an immense region then almost entirely unknown.

(BM X, 46-48)

A truly blind man

An ancient Persian fable tells of a man who had only one thought: to possess gold, all the gold possible.

It was a voracious thought that devoured his brain and heart. He could thus have no other thought, no other desire for anything but gold.

When he walked past the shop windows in his town, he only saw the goldsmiths' windows. He did not notice so many other wonderful things.

He did not notice the people, did not pay attention to the blue sky or the scent of the flowers.

One day he couldn't resist: he ran into a jeweller's shop and started filling his pockets with gold bracelets, rings and brooches.

Of course, on his way out of the shop, he was arrested. The police asked him, "But how did you think you could get away with it? The shop was full of people."

"Really?" the astonished man said. "I didn't notice. I only saw the gold."

"They have eyes and do not see," the Bible says about false idols. It can be said of so many people today. They are dazzled by the glitter of the things that shine the brightest: those that the daily advertisements slide before our eyes, as if they were a hypnotist's pendulum.

Once, a teacher made a black speck in the centre of a beautiful white sheet of paper and then showed it to his pupils.

"What do you see?" he asked.

"A black spot!" they replied in chorus.

"You have all seen the black spot that is tiny," retorted the teacher, "and no one has seen the big white sheet."

In the Talmud, which brings together the wisdom of the Jewish teachers of the first five centuries, it is written: "In the world to come, each one of us will be called to account for all the beautiful things that God has put on earth and that we have refused to see."

Life is a series of moments: true success lies in living them all.

Don't risk losing the big white paper to chase a black speck.

An interesting court case at Valdocco

A letter to the magistrate of the City of Turin dated 18 April 1865 opens up an interesting and previously unpublished glimpse into daily life in Valdocco at the time.

Among the young people taken in at Valdocco in the 1860s, when almost all the workshops for the working boys, often orphans, had been opened, there were some sent there by public security. So, the Oratory did not only accept good and lively young men, good-hearted young fellows, but also difficult, problematic young men with decidedly negative experiences behind them.

We are perhaps used to thinking that things always went well at Valdocco, with the presence of Don Bosco, especially in the 1850s and early 1860s when Salesian work had not yet spread and Don Bosco lived in direct and constant contact with the boys. But later, with a large and mixed group of young people, educators, apprentice tradesmen, young academic students, novices, philosophy and theology students, evening school students, and "external" workers, difficulties had arisen in

the disciplinary management of the Valdocco community.

A rather serious incident

A letter to the magistrate of the City of Turin dated 18 April 1865 opens an interesting and unpublished glimpse into the daily life of Valdocco at the time. We reproduce it here and then comment on it.

To the Urban Magistrate of the City of Turin

Having seen the summons to be served on cleric Mazzarello, assistant in the bookbinders' workshop at the house known as the Oratory of St Francis de Sales; having also seen the summons to be served on young Federico Parodi, Giovanni Castelli and Giuseppe Guglielmi, and having carefully considered the content of the summons, John Bosco, director of this establishment, in his desire to settle the matter with less disturbance on the part of the authorities of the urban magistrate's office, believes he can intervene on behalf of all concerned in the case concerning the young Carlo Boglietti, and is ready to give whomever the greatest satisfaction.

Before mentioning the fact in question, it seems appropriate to note that Article 650 of the penal code seems entirely extraneous to the matter at hand, because if it were interpreted in the way the urban magistrate's court would wish, it would introduce itself into the domestic regime of families, and parents and guardians would no longer be able to correct their children, not even to prevent insolence and insubordination, [which would] be to the serious detriment of public and private morality.

Furthermore, in order to restrain certain youngsters, most of whom were sent by the government authority, they had the power to use all means deemed appropriate, and in extreme cases to ask them to send the arm of public safety, as has been done several times.

Turning now to the case of Carlo Boglietti, we must

regretfully but frankly state that he was given a fatherly warning several times in vain, and that he not only proved to be incorrigible, but insulted, threatened and swore at his assistant, cleric Mazzarello in front of his companions. This assistant, who was of a very meek and mild disposition, was so frightened by this that from then on he was always ill without ever having been able to resume his duties, and he continues to be sick.

After this event, Boglietti fled the house without telling his superiors in charge of him, and only made his escape known through his sister, when she learned that he wanted to surrender to the police. This was not done in order to preserve his honour.

In the meantime, a request is made to repair the damage that the assistant has suffered to his honour and person, at least until he can resume his ordinary occupations, and:

- that the costs of this suit be charged to him.*
- that neither Carlo Boglietti nor his relative or councillor Mr Caneparo Stefano come to the aforementioned establishment to renew their acts of insubordination and scandals already caused on other occasions.*

[Sac. Gio Bosco].

What can we say? First of all, that the letter documents how there were some young men sent by public security among the young men taken in at Valdocco in the sixties, when by then almost all the workshops for the working boys, often orphans, had been opened. So, the Oratory did not only accept boys like Dominic Savio or Francis Besucco or even Michael Magone, that is to say, good, lively and good-hearted youngsters, but also difficult, problematic youngsters with decidedly negative experiences behind them.

The very young Salesian educators of Valdocco were entrusted with the arduous task of re-educating them, and were also authorised to resort to “all means that were deemed appropriate”. Which ones? Certainly, Don Bosco’s Preventive System, whose validity was demonstrated by the experience of

two decades at Valdocco. But when the facts were put to the test, "in extreme cases", for the most incorrigible youngsters, recourse had to be made to the same public force that had brought them there.

In the case in question

Don Bosco, faced with a summons to appear in court because of one of his young clerics and some boys from the Oratory, felt it his duty to intervene directly with the constituted authority to defend his young teacher, to safeguard the positive image of his Oratory and to protect his own educational authority. With extreme clarity he pointed out to the magistrate the possible negative consequences, for himself, for families and for society in general, of the rigid, and in his opinion unjustified, application of an article of the penal code.

As an excellent lawyer, Don Bosco's defence became a legal and educational harangue, thus turning into it into an accusation, and the accuser into the accused, to the point of immediately petitioning for compensation for the physical and moral damage caused to the young assistant Mazzarello, who fell ill and was forced to rest.

The outcome of the dispute

It is not known; it probably ended in deadlock. But the whole affair reveals to us a series of attitudes and behaviours that are not only little known about Don Bosco, but in some ways always relevant. We come to know that even under Don Bosco's watchful eyes the Preventive System could sometimes fail. The first interest to be safeguarded was always that of the individual youngster, obviously on condition that it was not in conflict with the higher interests of other school mates. In addition, the positive image of the Salesian work was also to be defended in the appropriate judicial forums. In which case, however, the possible consequences had to be wisely taken into account so as not to result in unpleasant surprises.

A Blessed in Chambéry. Camille Costa de Beauregard, Founder of “Le Bocage”

Camille Costa de Beauregard (1841-1910), a Savoyard priest born in Chambéry, could have taken advantage of his high social status. Instead, he gave his life for the most disadvantaged, dedicating himself to orphans and the poorest of the poor, to the young and their education. He founded an orphanage for boys at Le Bocage (Chambéry). He will be beatified on 17 May 2025.

Camille Costa de Beauregard was born on 17 February 1841. A marble plaque on the main façade of a building in rue Jean-Pierre Veyrat (then rue Royale) in Chambéry recalls the event.

It was the family's winter residence. They spent the rest of the year in the Chateau at La Motte-Servolex.

His father, the Marquis Pantaléon Costa de Beauregard, a senior member of parliament in Turin, a man of letters, art and science (he had been appointed president of the Academy of Savoy three times); he was also a fervent Christian who had never compromised his faith. Despite being very close to King Charles Albert, when Savoy was annexed to France (1860) he did not hesitate to side with Napoleon III and for his regime, more favourable to the Church than that of Cavour.

The renunciation of his brilliant career in Turin was compensated by his appointment as President of the General Council of Savoy and a member of the *Legion de Honeur*. His faith, which led him to reject any compromise, was nourished by regular religious practice and made practical in numerous

charitable actions.

Camille's mother, Marthe de Saint Georges de Verac, had been marked by the death of three of her grandmothers on the gallows. This gave her a strong sense of life's brevity and the ephemeral nature of earthly things. A spiritual level that was reflected in the way she raised her children: six males and three females (two others died at an early age). She educated them according to their rank, but with a rather constraining rigour and a disinterest in any well-being or pleasure she did not consider essential. As time went on and she grew in motherhood, she became more gentle and more understanding.

Like her husband, the marchioness was very attentive to human misery. She had accustomed her children to giving a coin to any poor man they met or to share a snack with the sick in the small hospital built by the Marquis on the estate.

After three years of studies with the De La Salle Brothers at the College de la Motte-Servolex, the young Camille, fifth son of a family of brothers, continued his education in the Jesuit schools in France and Belgium until the end of secondary school. At the age of sixteen he was stricken with typhoid, aggravated by serious lung complications. His parents recalled him to the castle to continue his studies under the guidance of a tutor, Father Chenal, from September 1857.

A renowned teacher at Rumilly College, Father Chenal adapted to the rhythms of his pupil, because he was able to discern the severity of the crisis his pupil was going through physically, morally, and spiritually. He waited until he had overcome his extreme weakness (three months in bed), then accompanied him to thermal treatments in Aix-les-Bains, in Biarritz...

Camille thus spent two or three years alternating work, reading, train journeys, piano or painting sessions, walks in the surrounding hills and, later, a long trek around Mont Blanc... and even attending parties hosted by the young nobles

and bourgeois of Chambéry, where he shone for his courtesy, his humour, the charm of his conversation and his elegance in dress... which earned him the nickname: "Beautiful Knight".

At that time, religious laxity led him to lose faith to the point of no longer setting foot in the church. However, on the advice of Father Chenal, he remained faithful to the daily recitation of a prayer to Mary, the "Memorare".

And then the day came when everything changed, because the Lord from whom he had fled for so long had never stopped waiting for him. In fact, he was waiting for him in the cathedral in Chambéry, where he felt drawn to enter in spite of himself. This was the moment his soul was illuminated. Behind the pillar against which he had hidden himself, he suddenly rediscovered the faith of his childhood and felt the call to the priesthood, to which he decided to respond.

"I still see the pillar in the cathedral behind which I knelt... and where I cried sweet tears, because that was the day I came back to God... On that day, my soul took possession of my God forever, and I believe that was the origin of my vocation to the priesthood."

In September 1863, Camille entered the French seminary in Rome, accompanied by Father Chenal. His years in the seminary, he would later say, were the best of his life.

He was ordained a priest in the Basilica of Saint John Lateran on 26 May 1866.

Refusing the high ecclesiastical office that was reserved for him, he returned to Chambéry in June 1867.

His bishop, Bishop Billiet, offered him an honorary position, which he refused.

At his request, he was entrusted with the post of vicar of the cathedral of Chambéry, without accommodation or remuneration.

This allowed him to take care of the workers who were working hard on the construction of the cathedral, who earned little and had no social security.

He set up a mutual aid fund for them under the name of "Saint François de Sales". Bishop Billiet added the functions of confessor and preacher to his ministry.

1867 CHOLERA

In August 1867, cholera struck the city, killing 135 people until autumn. Father Costa took pity on all the orphans who were without parents, without a roof over their heads, without money. He took in a half-dozen of them in the two-room apartment he had rented on rue Saint-Réal. But their numbers soon grew and he needed a home to house them. To this end, the Count of Boigne, a great benefactor of the city of Chambéry, granted him the former customs building on one hectare of land: this was Le Bocage.

Father Camille was looking for an assistant to help him start his work. Father Chenal, his former tutor, responded favourably to his request.

This is how the Le Bocage Orphanage was founded **in March 1868**.

Thanks to his own funds, a substantial contribution from the Count of Boigne and regular payments from his family (especially his mother), the Carthusian Fathers and other donors, Camille was able to renovate the premises, expand them and build a chapel... The number of pupils rose to 135.

Fathers Costa and Chenal had to surround themselves with people who took care of them: after the De La Salle Brothers for the first years, they appealed to the Daughters of Charity who played the multiple roles of teachers, supervisors, nurses, cooks and surrogate mothers, especially for the youngest children...

From the age of thirteen, the boys learned the gardening trade in greenhouses built on land purchased from year to year. For

the older ones, Father Costa bought the La Villette estate in La Ravoire in 1875 (thanks to funds donated by his mother and sister Félicie), where they practised growing vegetables, fruit trees, working in the vegetable garden and fish farming as well. Camille moved with them to La Villette and entrusted the management of Le Bocage to Father Chenal.

This experiment ended ten years later, with the death of Father Chenal. Father Costa returned to Le Bocage with his older apprentices, for whom he built a new wing parallel to the first.

Over the years he was assisted by a group of priests formed in the Le Bocage spirit, including his nephew Ernest Costa de Beauregard.

But what is this Le Bocage spirit?

It is an education based on that of Saint Francis de Sales, similar to that of Don Bosco, whom Father Costa met in Turin in 1879. It was a preventive education, as opposed to that of the educational systems of the time, made of obligations and prohibitions, with a heavy dose of punishment for those who transgressed the rules.

An education based on trust and affection, on a deep family spirit, on appreciation of effort, on the appeal to reason and on listening. All in an atmosphere of faith that is passed on and lived every day.

To make working hours more efficient, Camille Costa de Beauregard gave ample space to leisure activities: walks, theatre, music (singing, brass band), swimming, festive meals on the occasion of liturgical festivals, where the older ones were invited to meet their families.

As soon as someone finished their apprenticeship, Father Costa found them a job as gardeners and kept in close contact with each of them. In this way, Camille achieved his goal of forming "good Christians, good workers, and good fathers."

Despite poor health throughout his life, Father Costa continued to lead Le Bocage until his death on 25 March 1910. It was Good Friday, which that year coincided with the Feast of the Annunciation.

He was buried in Paradis Cemetery; a year later, in 1911, his body was returned to Le Bocage. It is said that the elders and young people of the orphanage detached the horses and pulled the hearse themselves to Le Bocage, where the body was laid in a specially prepared tomb.

The next generation was assured

By the will of the Founder, his nephew Ernest Costa de Beauregard succeeded him as head of the association. He was the son of his brother Josselin. After becoming a priest a few years before, he joined his uncle at Le Bocage and became one of his closest collaborators.

For 44 years, assisted in particular by Father François Blanchard, who had been one of the orphans taken in by Camille, he carried on the work of his uncle, making sure that the spirit of the founder lived on and perpetuating his memory.

Before his death, in 1954, Father Ernest handed the work over to the Salesians of Don Bosco, who remained until 2016, maintaining the same spirit. They continue to supervise the two establishments that are still very much alive today:

- the Children's House
- the Horticultural Vocation High School (agricultural professions, personal assistance).

2012-2024 – Towards beatification

As soon as the founder died, his reputation for holiness spread to Chambéry.

In 1913, Ernest Costa de Beauregard published the first biography of his uncle, entitled “Une âme de saint – Le Serviteur de Dieu, Camille Costa de Beauregard”, which was reprinted several times.

In 1925, a petition from the priests of the diocese was sent to Bishop Castellan, Bishop of Chambéry, asking him to take steps for his beatification. The first diocesan process was held in 1926-1927; in 1956 the "Positio Super Introductione Causae" was published; in January 1961 Pope John XXIII issued the "Decree of Introduction of the Cause" in 1965 the apostolic process followed, during which the body of the founder was exhumed; the "Positio Super Virtutibus" was published in 1982.

In 1991, Camille Costa de Beauregard was **proclaimed Venerable by Pope John Paul II**, who thus recognised his heroic virtues (decree of 22 January 1991).

In 1997, Father **Robert FRITSCH**, a Salesian from the Bocage community, published "Camille Costa De Beauregard. Fondateur de L'Œuvre des Jeunes du Bocage à Chambéry, 1841-1910, Chronique d'une Œuvre Sociale et éducative dans la Savoie du XIXeme Siecle", an historical chronicle of 371 pages, (La Fontaine de Siloé).

It was then that Bishop Ulrich, Archbishop of Chambéry, sought to relaunch the process of beatification of the founder of Le Bocage. He asked **Françoise Bouchard** to write a biography that was published in 2010 by Salvator entitled "Camille Costa de Beauregard – La Noblesse du Cœur".

Since then **the Costa de Beauregard Committee**, established in 2012 by Bishop Ballot, and the **Association of the Friends of Camille Costa de Beauregard**, established in 2017 to support the Committee, have been actively working to advance the Cause of Beatification.

In particular, the goal is to document and promote the recognition of an alleged miracle due to the intercession of Camille: the healing in 1910 of young René Jacquemond who recovered from a serious eye injury. A dossier has been compiled and sent to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints in Rome through **Father Pierluigi Cameroni**, postulator of the

Cause.

Five reports – drawn up between 2015 and 2018 in the Savoy region and in France by recognised ophthalmologists – have stated that the condition suffered by the child “could only progress towards no recovery or even the loss of the eye”, and that the suddenness of the healing was inexplicable.

The culmination of a long process

At the end of October 2021, Bishop Ballot convened a diocesan tribunal at the Myans Shrine to conclude the investigation into the alleged miracle. A detailed case would be sent to Rome.

On March 30, 2023, experts convened in Rome by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints unanimously recognised the scientifically inexplicable nature of a healing attributed to the intercession of Camille. There are still several stages to go, but this recognition paved the way for beatification.

On 19 October 2023, the college of theologians issued a positive verdict on the cause for beatification of Camille Costa de Beauregard. The next stage, in 2024, would be the opinion given to the Pope by a college of cardinals...

On 27 February 2024, the Dicastery (cardinals and bishops) unanimously ruled in favour of the inexplicability of the miracle attributed to the intercession of Camille Costa de Beauregard.

On 14 March 2024, Pope Francis authorised the publication of the decree recognising the miracle attributed to the intercession of Camille Costa de Beauregard, paving the way for his beatification.

The beatification rite will take place in Chambéry, in the diocese that promoted the cause of the new blessed, on 17 May 2025.

The miracle attributed to the intercession of Camille Costa de Beauregard

Here are some explanations for this miracle, which occurred in 1910, a few months after the founder's death:

"On 5 November 1910, ophthalmologist Amédée Dénarié, who had visited and treated the child, said "I do not hesitate to declare that the healing took place outside the laws of nature and in an extraordinary way."

Little René, 10, an inmate at the orphanage, had been **seriously injured in the eye** by a burdock root thrown at him during a walk. At first the children said that it was a stone thrown by a passing car, but soon after they admitted that they were playing at throwing burdock roots (these are well-known plants that are found along the edges of roads and that many children use to throw). René got one in his eye: it had been thrown forcefully. Because of the pain, he tried to remove it, tearing the cornea... The wound worsened from day to day, so much so that after a few weeks all hope of recovery was lost. But the child's eye healed overnight, without any medication, after the Sister, a nurse, applied a cloth belonging to Camille Costa de Beauregard on the last day of the novena with the child.

The dossier of testimonies collected at the time was carefully preserved in the archives, although for many years it was somewhat forgotten. Only when it was rediscovered in 2011 was it decided, with these new elements, to relaunch the cause of beatification of the founder of Le Bocage.

Beatification: with the act of beatification, the Pope decides that a person – lay or religious – can be venerated publicly and is therefore designated by the Church as "Blessed". There are two kinds of beatification: martyrdom or heroic virtues.

The two acts of beatification and canonisation differ in the degree of extension of public worship. Veneration of the

Blessed is limited to an area designated by the Holy See. Veneration of the Saint is authorised, or even prescribed, everywhere in the universal Church.

Camille summed up in a few dates

Birth

Birth: 17 February 1841

Baptised the following day in the church of Notre Dame

Young priest

Ordination: 26 May 1866

Return to Chambéry: 1867, vicar of the cathedral

The Bocage

Creation of the Le Bocage Orphanage: May 1868

His death, which took place on 25.03.1910

Servant of God

Opening of the diocesan process: 1926

Venerable

Apostolic process: 1965 – 1966

Decree of Venerability: 22.01.1991

Blessed

Recognition of miracle: 14.03.2024

The celebration of the beatification is scheduled for Saturday, 17 May 2025.

An example of a dedicated and luminous life to be known and imitated.

Françoise Bouchard

Spreading Don Bosco's missionary spirit

We are approaching the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the First Salesian Missionary Expedition (1875-2025). The missionary dimension of the Salesian Society is part of its 'DNA'. It was so desired by Don Bosco from the very beginning, and today the Congregation is in 136 countries. This initial impetus continues today and is supported by the Missions Sector. Let us briefly present their activities and organisation.

Although Don Bosco never set out for distant lands as a missionary *ad gentes*, he always had a missionary heart and an ardent desire to share the Salesian charism in order to reach all the borders of the world and contribute to the salvation of the young.

This has been possible thanks to the availability of so many Salesians sent on missionary expeditions (at the end of September this year the 155th will be celebrated) who, working with locals and lay people, have allowed the Salesian charism to be spread and inculturated. Compared to the first 'pioneers', today the figure of the missionary must respond to different challenges, and the missionary paradigm has been updated to be an effective vehicle of evangelisation in today's world. First of all, as Fr Alfred Maravilla, General Councillor for the Missions, reminds us (in 2021 he wrote a letter, "[The Salesian missionary vocation](#)"), missions no longer respond to geographical criteria as they once did, and today's missionaries come from and are sent to the five continents, so there is no longer a clear separation between "mission lands" and other Salesian presences. Furthermore, there is the very important distinction between the [Salesian missionary vocation](#), i.e. the call that some Salesians receive to be sent for a lifetime in another place as missionaries,

and the missionary spirit, typical of all Salesians and of all members of an educative-pastoral community, which manifests itself in the oratorian heart and in the drive for the evangelisation of the young.

The task of promoting the missionary spirit and keeping it alive in the Salesians and the laity is entrusted above all to the “[Provincial Delegates for Missionary Animation](#)” (DIAM), i.e. those Salesians, or lay people, who receive from the Inspector, the Salesian superior of the province in question, the task of taking care of missionary animation. The DIAM has a very important role, he is the “missionary sentinel” who, through his sensitivity and experience, is committed to spreading missionary culture at various levels (see [Salesian Missionary Animation. Handbook of the Provincial Delegate, Rome, 2019](#)).

The DIAM triggers missionary sensitivity in all the communities of the Province and works in synergy with the leaders of the other areas to testify to the importance of this dimension, common to every Christian. On a practical level, it organises a number of initiatives, promotes prayer for the missions on the 11th of the month, in memory of the first missionary expedition on 11th November 1875, promotes “Salesian Mission Day” in the Province every year, disseminates the materials prepared by the Congregation on missionary themes, such as the “Cagliero11” bulletin or the “CaglieroLife” video. Salesian Mission Day, which has been recurring since 1988, is a beautiful occasion to stop and reflect and relaunch missionary animation. It does not necessarily have to be a day, it can be an itinerary of several days, and it does not have a fixed date, so that everyone can choose the best time of the year that suits the rhythm and calendar of the Province. Each year a common theme is chosen and some animation materials are prepared as food for thought and activities, which can be adapted and modified. This year the theme is “builders of dialogue”, while in 2025

the focus will be on the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition according to the three verbs "Give Thanks, Rethink, Relaunch". "[Cagliero11](#)", on the other hand, is a simple missionary animation bulletin, created in 2009 and published every month, two pages containing missionary reflections, interviews, news, curiosities and the monthly prayer that is proposed. "CaglieroLife" is a one-minute video based on the missionary prayer of the month (in turn based on the monthly intention proposed by the Pope), that helps to reflect on the theme. These are all tools that enable DIAM to carry out its task of promoting the missionary spirit well, in line with today's times.

The DIAM collaborates or coordinates the Salesian Missionary Volunteer Service, that is, youth experiences of solidarity and free service in a community other than one's own for a continuous period of time (in summer, for several months, a year...), motivated by faith, with a missionary style and according to the pedagogy and spirituality of Don Bosco (*The Volunteer Service in the Salesian Mission. Identity and Orientations of Salesian Missionary Volunteering*, Rome, 2019).

This year, in March, a first meeting of MissionVolunteering coordinators was held in Rome, attended by about fifty participants, including lay people and Salesians, under the guidance of a mixed team that took care of the organisation. Among the salient points that came out of the meeting, which was very rich especially in terms of sharing experiences, were the exploration of the identity of the Salesian missionary volunteer, the training of volunteers and coordinators, collaboration between lay and religious, accompaniment at all levels, and networking. A new symbolic cross was presented, which can be used by all volunteers in the various experiences around the world, and the draft of a new website, which will serve as a data and networking platform.

The DIAM also visits the communities of the province and accompanies them from a missionary point of view, taking care especially of Salesians who are seeing if they are

called to become missionaries *ad gentes*.

Obviously, all this work cannot be done by a single person. Teamwork and project mentality are important. Each Province has a missionary animation commission made up of Salesians, lay people and young people, which formulates proposals, creative suggestions and coordinates activities. It also draws up the provincial missionary animation project, to be presented to the Provincial, which is the compass to be followed with objectives, timetables, resources and concrete steps. In this way, improvisation is avoided and action is taken following a structured and strategic plan on the basis of the broader Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan (SEPP), promoting a shared vision of missionary animation. In the Province times for ongoing formation, reflection and discussion are organised, and a missionary culture is promoted at various levels. These structures that have been created over time enable more effective animation and coordination, with a view to always giving the best for the good of the young.

Another important aspect is the sharing between DIAMs from different countries and provinces. Each Region (there are seven: America South Cone, Interamerica, Central-Northern Europe, Mediterranean, Africa – Madagascar, East Asia – Oceania and South Asia) meet regularly, in person once a year and on-line about every three months, to pool their riches, share challenges and work out a regional path. The on-line meetings, which began a few years ago, allow greater knowledge of the DIAMs and the contexts in which they operate, continuous quality updating, and a fruitful exchange that enriches everyone. In each Region there is a coordinator who convenes the meetings, promotes the regional journey and moderates the common processes, together with the Salesian contact person of the central team of the Sector for the Missions, who represents the General Councillor for the Missions, bringing ideas, insights and suggestions to the

group.

This great commitment, tiring but very useful and full of true joy, is one of the pieces that joins the many pieces of the Salesian mosaic, and ensures that Don Bosco's dream can continue today.

Marco Fulgaro