

# Halloween: a holiday to celebrate?

*Wise men tell us that to understand an event, one must know what its origin is and what its purpose is. This is also the case with the now widespread phenomenon of Halloween, which rather than a holiday to celebrate is an event to reflect upon. This is to avoid celebrating a culture of death that has nothing to do with Christianity.*

Halloween, as it stands today, is a holiday that has its commercial origins in the United States and has spread throughout the world over the past three decades. It is celebrated on the night between 31 October and 1 November and has some symbols of its own:

- **The costumes:** dressing up in scary clothes to represent fantastic characters or monstrous creatures.
- **Carved pumpkins:** the tradition of carving pumpkins, inserting a light inside to create jack-o'-lanterns.
- **Trick-or-treating:** a custom of knocking on doors of houses and asking for sweets in exchange for a promise not to trick-or-treat.

It seems to be one of the commercial festivals cultivated on purpose by some interested parties to increase their revenue. In fact, in 2023 in the US alone, \$12.2 billion was spent (according to the National Retail Federation) and in the UK about £700 million (according to market analysts). These figures also explain the widespread media coverage, with real strategies to cultivate the event, turning it into a mass phenomenon and presenting it as just a casual amusement, a collective game.

## Origin

If we go looking for the beginnings of *Halloween* – because

every contingent thing has its beginning and its end – we find that it dates back to the polytheistic pagan beliefs of the Celtic world.

The ancient people of the Celts, a nomadic people who spread throughout Europe, were best able to preserve their culture, language and beliefs in the British Isles, moreover in Ireland, in the area where the Roman Empire had never arrived. One of their pagan festivals, called *Samhain*, was celebrated between the last days of October and early November and was the 'new year' that opened the annual cycle. As the length of the day decreased and the length of the night increased at that time, it was believed that the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead became thin, allowing the souls of the dead to return to earth (also in the form of animals) and also allowing evil spirits to enter. That is why they used frightening masks to confuse or drive away the spirits, so as not to be touched by their evil influence. The celebration was compulsory for all, began in the evening and consisted of magic rites, ritual fires, animal sacrifices and probably also human sacrifices. On those nights, their Druid priests went to every house to receive something from the people for their sacrifices, under penalty of curses.

The custom of carving a turnip in the shape of a monstrous face, placing a light inside and placing it on the doorstep of houses, in time gave rise to a legend that better explains the meaning. It is the legend of the Irish blacksmith Stingy Jack, a man who tricks the devil several times and, upon his death, is received neither in heaven nor in hell. Being in darkness and forced to look for a place for his eternal rest, he asked for and received from the devil a burning log, which he stuck inside a turnip he had with him, creating a lantern, the Jack-o'-lantern. But he found no rest and continues to wander to this day. Legend wants to symbolise the damned souls that wander the earth and find no rest. This explains the custom of placing an ugly turnip in front of the house, to instil fear and drive away any wandering souls that might approach on that

night.

The Roman world also had a similar festival, called *Lemuria* or *Lemuralia*, dedicated to keeping the spirits of the dead away from homes; it was celebrated on 9, 11 and 13 May. The spirits were called 'lemurs' (the word 'lemur' comes from the Latin *larva*, meaning 'ghost' or 'mask'). These celebrations were thought to be associated with the figure of Romulus, founder of Rome, who is said to have instituted the rites to appease the spirit of his brother Remus, whom he killed; however, it seems that the holiday was instituted in the first century AD.

This type of pagan celebration, also found in other cultures, reflects the awareness that life continues after death, even if this awareness is mixed with many errors and superstitions. The Church did not want to deny this seed of truth that, in one form or another, was in the soul of the pagans, but sought to correct it.

In the Church, the cult of martyrs has been there from the very beginning. Around the 4th century AD, the commemoration of the martyrs was celebrated on the first Sunday after Pentecost. In 609 A.D., Pope Boniface IV moved this commemoration to the feast of All Saints, on 13 May. In 732 A.D. Pope Gregory III again moved the feast of All Saints (in Old English 'All Hallows') to 1 November, and the preceding day became known as **All Hallows' Eve**, from which the abbreviated form **Halloween** is derived.

The immediate proximity of the dates suggests that the shift in commemoration by the Church was due to a desire to correct ancestor worship. The last shift indicates that the Celtic pagan festival *Samhain* had also remained in the Christian world.

## **Diffusion**

This pagan celebration – a primarily religious festival – preserved in the vaults of Irish culture even after the Christianisation of society, reappeared with the massive

migration of the Irish to the United States following the great famine that hit the country in 1845-1846.

The immigrants, in order to preserve their cultural identity, began to celebrate various festivals of their own as times of gathering and recreation, including All Hallows. Perhaps more than a religious festival, it was a festival without religious references, linked to celebrating the abundance of harvests.

This encouraged the revival of the ancient Celtic use of the lantern, and people began to use not the turnip but the pumpkin for its larger size and softness that favoured carving.

In the first half of the 20th century, the pragmatic spirit of the Americans – seizing the opportunity to make money – extended this holiday nationwide, and Halloween costumes and apparel began to appear in the markets on an industrial scale: ghosts, skeletons, witches, vampires, zombies, etc.

After 1950, the holiday also began to spread to schools and homes. The custom of children going around knocking on houses asking for treats with the expression: 'Trick or treat?' appeared.

Driven by commercial interests, this led to a true national holiday with secular connotations, devoid of religious elements, which would be exported all over the world especially in the last decades.

## **Reflection**

If we look closely, the elements found in the Celtic rites of the pagan festival Samhain have remained. These are clothes, lanterns, threats of curses.

The clothes are monstrous and frightening: ghosts, creepy clowns, witches, zombies, werewolves, vampires, heads pierced by daggers, disfigured corpses, devils.

Hideous pumpkins carved like severed heads with a macabre light inside.

Kids walking around the houses asking 'Trick or treat?'

reminiscent of the 'curse or sacrifice' of Druid priests. We first ask ourselves whether these elements can be considered worthy of cultivation. Since when have the frightening, the macabre, the dark, the horrific, the hopelessly dead defined human dignity? They are indeed outrageously outrageous.

And we wonder whether all this does not contribute to cultivating an occult, esoteric dimension, given that these are the same elements used by the dark world of witchcraft and Satanism. And whether the *dark* and *gothic* fashion, like all the other decorations of macabrely carved pumpkins, cobwebs, bats and skeletons, does not foment an approach to the occult.

Is it by chance that tragic events regularly occur in conjunction with this festival?

Is it by chance that desecrations, grave offences against the Christian religion and even sacrilege occur regularly on these days?

Is it by chance that for Satanists the main holiday, which marks the beginning of the Satanic year, is Halloween?

Does it not produce, especially for young people, a familiarisation with a magical and occult mentality, distant and contrary to Christian faith and culture, especially at this time when Christian praxis is weakened by secularisation and relativism?

Let us look at some testimonies.

An English lady, **Doreen Irvine**, a former Satanist priestess converted to Christianity, warns in her book *From Witchcraft to Christ* that the tactic used to approach occultism consists precisely in proposing the occult in attractive forms, with mysteries that incite, passing everything off as a natural, even sympathetic experience.

The founder of the Church of Satan, **Anton LaVey**, openly declared his joy that the baptised participate in the

Halloween festival: 'I am glad that Christian parents allow their children to **worship the devil at least one night a year.** Welcome to Halloween'.

**Fr Aldo Buonaiuto**, of the Anti-cult Service of the Pope John XXIII Community Association, in his paper, *Halloween. The devil's trick*, warns us that 'Satan's devotees consider the "energies" of all those who, even if only for fun, are evoking the world of darkness in the perverse rites practised in his honour, throughout the month of October and in particular on the night between 31 October and 1 November, to be a gift to him'.

**Fr Francesco Bamonte**, exorcist and vice-president of the International Association of Exorcists (former president of the same for two consecutive terms), warns:

'My experience, together with that of other exorcist priests, shows how Halloween, including the period of time that prepares for it, in fact represents, for many young people, a privileged moment of contact with sectarian realities or in any case linked to the world of occultism, with even serious consequences not only on a spiritual level, but also on that of psychophysical integrity. First of all, it must be said that this feast imprints ugliness at the very least. And by imprinting ugliness on children, the taste for the horrid, the deformed, the monstrous put on the same level as the beautiful, it somehow orients them to evil and despair. In heaven, where only goodness reigns, everything is beautiful. In hell, where only hatred reigns, all is ugly.' [...]

'On the basis of my ministry as an exorcist, I can state that Halloween is, in the calendar of magicians, occult practitioners and Satan worshippers, one of the most important 'holidays'; Consequently, for them, it is a source of great satisfaction that the minds and hearts of so many children, adolescents, young people and not a few adults are directed towards the macabre, the demonic, witchcraft, through the representation of coffins, skulls, skeletons, vampires,

ghosts, thus adhering to the mocking and sinister vision of the most important and decisive moment of a human being's existence: the end of his earthly life. ' [...]

'We exorcists do not tire of warning against this recurrence, which not only through immoral or dangerous conduct, but also through the lightness of entertainment considered harmless (and unfortunately hosted more and more often even in parish spaces) can both prepare the ground for a future disturbing action, even heavy, on the part of the devil, and allow the Evil One to affect and disfigure the souls of the young.'

It is young people in particular who suffer the widespread impact of the Halloween phenomenon. Without serious discernment criteria, they risk being attracted by ugliness and not beauty, by darkness and not light, by wickedness and not goodness.

We need to reflect on whether to continue celebrating the feast of darkness, *Halloween*, or the feast of light, *All Saints*...

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## The safe tradition of Blessed Michael Rua (2/2)

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

### 2. Some traits of the theological virtues in Fr Rua

#### 2.1. Fr Rua man of faith

His love for God was rooted in the fundamental choice for Him: "...he lived in continuous union with God... The very close union with God was matched by complete detachment from the things of the world and disregard for anything that

did not serve to glorify God and save souls... It seems to me that the union with God was so consummate in him that he had nothing but this generous, ardent, continuous thought: to love and make God loved, God always, God in everything, no rest in this, never diversion, always this sublime uniformity. God. Nothing but God." This love for God was the profound motivation of his every action and took the form of doing God's will exactly, promptly, joyfully and perseveringly. The love of God was the motivation for his many actions and actions and sustained his great commitment to the promotion and cultivation of priestly and religious vocations.

The source that nourished this union was prayer: "Fr Rua found his rest in prayer" (Fr Francesia). "Fr Rua in prayer, in contact with God, in rest found renewed strength to implement day by day what was the father's programme made one hundred per cent his own by his most faithful son: I seek souls and only souls." This source was nourished in the Eucharist and in filial love for the Virgin Help of Christians. The life of faith was expressed in the intimate union between prayer and action, nourished by the practice and spirit of mental prayer, which for him was "the essential element of the life of the good religious", to such an extent that even during an earthquake tremor while everyone was fleeing "he alone had not moved and had remained there at his usual place, in his usual attitude." With meditation on the Word, it was the Eucharist that was the animating fire. The Eucharist, celebrated, adored, visited and kept in one's heart: "Let us form a tabernacle in our heart," he would repeat, "and let us always be united to the Blessed Sacrament." He expressed an intense faith and piety for the Eucharist, nourished by a series of recommendations and instructions: visits, adoration, genuflections, recollection.

Fr Rua as a man of God and faith was distinguished by a testimony that was made credible not so much by eloquence, but by the intimate conviction that transpired from his words and above all from his life. It was nourished by a knowledge of the Scriptures and a great familiarity with the



Church Fathers: sources he drew from in their original Greek and Latin texts. This formation manifested itself as an adolescent in his commitment to teaching catechism and Christian instruction not only in its ordinary forms, but also in missions and spiritual exercises, considering them constitutive elements of the Salesian mission to which all its members were bound, as Fr Amadei testified: “ have found in his letters explicit declarations that all Salesian priests, clerics, and coadjutors should willingly lend their work in catechising because,” he said, “if they neglected catechism classes they would be failing in their vocation.” The work of teaching catechism was the true purpose of the Salesian institution and propagation of oratories, avoiding the risk of reducing them to mere recreation centres or sports centres. This commitment to the propagation of the faith animated the great front of missionary action, another constitutive element of the Salesian charism, which he sustained with intense apostolic ardour and with considerable employment of people and resources. A great instrument for spreading the Salesian spirit and supporting Salesian works, especially in mission lands, was the circulation of the *Salesian Bulletin*.

## **2.2. Man of hope**

The virtue of hope kept the ultimate goal, paradise, alive, and at the same time sustained the daily commitment to do good and fight evil, as he often told young people: “Be good, trust in God and paradise will be yours.” He wanted people to deserve this reward, especially by fleeing guilt and by doing God’s holy will every moment. This hope translated daily into an unconditional trust in divine Providence as Don Bosco’s third successor, Blessed Philip Rinaldi, attested: “Son and follower of the Venerable Don Bosco, the servant of God lived by the day, he did not hoard funds, the founder’s principle being to always trust in Providence, even in material things.” And Fr Barberis said: “In conversations, in admonitions, in the letters he wrote, the most insistent exhortation was trust in divine Providence.

Once I remember him telling us: 'It does not cost the Lord any effort to provide us with the necessary means; He is so good that when He sees the need, He will do it.'" Even in very great hardships, he always maintained an imperturbability and tranquillity that also infected others.

### **2.3. Man of charity**

His love for God was manifested in his love for his neighbour: "He spoke to the lowly as he did to the great, to the poor as he did to the rich, always seeking to do good. Indeed, it seemed that the more lowly a person was, the more affably he treated them and sought their good." This aspect grew in a special way after Don Bosco's death, considering it an inheritance he had received from Don Bosco and wanted to pass on to future generations:

"The great charity that informed the heart of our beloved Don Bosco of holy memory set in motion by example and word the spark of love that God blessed had placed in mine, and I was electrified by his love, so that, if succeeding him I could not inherit the great virtues of our holy founder, his love for his spiritual children I feel the Lord granted me. All the days, all the moments of the day I consecrate to you... therefore I pray for you, I think of you, I act for you like a mother for her only-begotten son." This is a text of great value that reveals how the spiritual inheritance received is the fruit of a profound communion of souls, which sets off that vital spark that unleashes a fire of true charity. Fr Rua is aware of the difference in gifts between himself and Don Bosco, but he truthfully affirms that the core of the spirit has been passed on: a charity communicated vitally and by word that drives to a life offered and consecrated for people with traits of maternal love.

Love of neighbour took concrete form in an ordered, liberal and generous love, with a special predilection for the poorest young people and those at spiritual, moral and material risk, and with a preference for the poorest and most destitute geographical areas such as

southern Italy. Charity was exercised with great dedication in the ministry of reconciliation, to the point of exhaustion, especially during spiritual exercises, because he would say: "These are my harvests." Similarly, he devoted himself to the ministry of advice and consolation. Everyone was the recipient of his love, even enemies and detractors. His concern for his neighbour was inspired by a great kindness and gentleness, typical of the Salesian tradition and aimed at protecting the good reputation of people and neutralising the disruptive expressions of slander and judgement: "In his good manner, without offending, he tried to stifle from the beginning the discourse as soon as he realised it was misdirected. When he then caught some criticism directed at a known person, he never failed, almost as if to destroy the effect of the criticism itself, to point out the good qualities, the works, the merits of the person being criticised."

He had a solicitous and personalised love for every confrere in the Congregation, with the heart of a caring father and the gaze of a true overseer of his flock: "He knew the confreres in the individual houses one by one, even the most distant ones, and was interested in the needs and greatest profit of each one, as if he were under his gaze in the Oratory." A concrete example was the dispatch of spare linen for confreres engaged in military service. This amiable fatherhood excelled in the exercise of spiritual charity: "I found him always ready to listen to me; with a smile he took an interest in what was close to my heart, and he knew how to advise and guide me in such a way that my soul was completely at peace." The example of a life lived in charity led him to write to confreres at odds with one another: "Love one another as confreres, and pray to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to kindle in all of you that sacred fire that he came to bring to earth, the fire of charity."

Such love took the form of predilection for young people: "He was interested in the health and needs of each one.... Fr Rua was for each of us the good father, who lived for us, so that even the humblest and lowliest could freely turn

to Him. "A love that knew no bounds: missionaries, emigrants, people in need, workers, members of the Salesian Family, young workers, distinguishing himself for his active interest in labour disputes: "unemployed workers came to him, and he recommended them according to need to the various industrialists." Every day after hearing so many people in the confessional, he would spend many hours receiving numerous people: "Every day I observed many people whom I myself brought to an audience with the servant of God, people who came to ask for material and moral help, recommendations, etc." The servant of God treated everyone affably, took an interest in their cases, and helped everyone as much as he could." Truly as Fr Saluzzo said, "His heart was open to all good."

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# **Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians (11/13)**

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

## **Appendix**

### **I. Ancient custom of consecrating churches**

Once a church has been built, it is not possible to sing the divine offices, celebrate the holy sacrifice and other ecclesiastical functions in it unless it is first blessed or consecrated. The bishop, with a multiplicity of signs of the cross and the sprinkling of holy water, intends

to purge and sanctify the place through exorcisms against evil spirits. This blessing can be performed by the bishop or a simple priest, but with different rites. Where the anointing of the sacred chrism and holy oils is involved, the blessing is the responsibility of the bishop, and it is called solemn, royal and consecutive because it is the completion of all the others, and even more so because blessed and consecrated things cannot be converted into profane use; hence it is strictly called consecration. If then in such ceremonies only certain prayers are performed with similar rites and ceremonies, the function can be performed by a priest, and it is called a blessing.

The blessing can be performed by any priest, with the permission of the Ordinary, but the consecration belongs to the Pope, and to the bishop alone. The rite of consecrating churches is very ancient and filled with serious mysteries, and Christ as a child sanctified its observance while his cave and crib were changed into a church in the offering made by the Magi. The cave therefore became a church, and the crib an altar. St Cyril tells us that the upper room where they received the Holy Spirit was consecrated by the apostles into a church, a hall that also represented the universal Church. Indeed, according to Nicephorus Calistus, hist. lib. 2, ch. 33, such was the apostles' solicitude that in every place where they preached the gospel they consecrated some church or oratory. The Pontiff St Clement I, Pope in the year 93, successor no less than disciple of St Peter, among his other orders decreed that all places of prayer should be consecrated to God. Certainly in St Paul's time the churches were consecrated, as some of the scholars say, writing to the Corinthians in c. III, *aut Ecclesiam Dei contemnitis?* St. Urban I, elected in the year 226, consecrated the house of St. Cecilia into a church, as Burius *in vita eius* wrote. St. Marcellus I, Pope in the year 304, consecrated the church of St. Lucina, as Pope St. Damasus relates. It is also true that the solemnity with which the consecration is performed today, increased in time, after Constantine, in restoring peace to

the Church, built sumptuous basilicas. Even the temples of the Gentiles, formerly the habitation of false gods and nest of lies, were converted into churches with the approval of the pious emperor, and were consecrated with the sanctity of the venerable relics of the martyrs. Thereupon, according to the prescriptions of his predecessors, Pope St Silvester I established the solemn rite which was expanded and confirmed by other popes, especially by St Felix III. St Innocent I established that churches should not be consecrated more than once. The Pontiff St. John I on his way to Constantinople to deal with the Arian question consecrated the churches of the heretics as Catholic churches, as we read in Bernini<sup>[i]</sup>.

## **II. Explanation of the main ceremonies used in the consecration of churches.**

It would take too long to describe the mystical explanations that the holy Fathers and Doctors give of the rites and ceremonies of church consecration. Cecconi speaks of them in chapters X and XI, and Father Galluzzi in chapter IV, from which we can summarise the following.

The holy Doctors therefore did not hesitate to assert that the consecration of the church is one of the greatest of ecclesiastical sacred functions, as can be deduced from the sermons of the holy Fathers, and from the liturgical treatises of the most famous authors, demonstrating the excellence and nobility that encompasses such a beautiful function, all directed towards making the house of God respected and venerated. The vigils, fasts and prayers are preached in order to prepare for exorcisms against the devil. The relics represent our saints. And so that we always have them in mind and in our hearts, they are placed in a receptacle with three grains of incense. The steps by which the bishop ascends to the anointing of the twelve crosses reminds us that our final and primary goal is Paradise. The sins of the cross and candles signify the twelve Apostles, the twelve Patriarchs, and the twelve Prophets who are the guide

and pillars of the Church.

Furthermore, the consecration involves the anointing of the twelve crosses in as many places distributed on the walls, and the church and its walls are said to be consecrated, as St. Augustine notes, lib. Augustine, lib. 4, *Contra Crescent*. The church is closed to represent the heavenly Sion, where one does not enter unless purged of all imperfection, and the help of the saints and the light of the Holy Spirit is invoked with various prayers. The bishop goes around the church three times, in unity with the clergy, alluding to the turns that the priests made with the ark around the walls of Jericho, not so that the walls of the church might fall, but so that the pride of the devil and his power might be destroyed through the invocation of God, and the repetition of the sacred prayers which are far more effective than the trumpets of the ancient priests or Levites. The three blows that the bishop gives with the tip of his crozier at the threshold on the door show us the power of the Redeemer over his Church, as well as the priestly dignity that the bishop exercises. The Greek and Latin alphabet depicts the ancient union of the two peoples produced by the cross of the Redeemer; and the writing that the bishop does with the tip of the crosier signifies the apostolic doctrine and ministry. The form then of this writing signifies the cross, which must be the ordinary and principal object of all learning of faithful Christians. It signifies also the belief and faith of Christ passed from the Jews to the Gentiles, and transmitted to us from them. All blessings are filled with grave significance, as are all things that are employed in this august service. The sacred anointing with which the altar and the walls of the church are imbued signifies the grace of the Holy Spirit, which cannot enrich the mystical temple of our soul unless it is first cleansed of its stains. The service ends with the blessing in the style of the holy Church, which always begins its actions with the blessing of God and ends them with it, because everything begins with God and ends in God. It is accomplished through the sacrifice not only to fulfil the

pontifical decree of St Hyginus, but because there is no consecration accomplished where the victim is not also entirely consumed in the Mass.

From the grandeur of the sacred rite, from the eloquence of its mystical signification, we can easily see how much importance the holy Church our mother attaches to it, and therefore how much importance we must attach to it. But what must increase our veneration for the house of the Lord is to see how much this rite is founded on and informed by the true spirit of the Lord revealed in the Old Testament. The spirit that guides the Church today to surround the churches of Catholic worship with such veneration is the same spirit that inspired Jacob to sanctify with oil the place where he had the vision of the ladder; it is the same spirit that inspired Moses and David, Solomon and Judas Maccabaeus to honour with special rites the places destined for the divine mysteries. Oh how much this union of spirit of one and the other Testament, of one and the other Church teaches us and comforts us! It shows us how much God likes to be worshipped and invoked in his churches, so how willingly he answers the prayers we address to him in them. How much respect for a place, the profanation of which armed the hand of God with a scourge and changed him from a meek lamb into a severe punisher!

Let us therefore come to the holy church but frequently, for the need we have of God is a daily one. Let us go there, but with confidence and with religious fear. With confidence since we find there a Father ready to hear us, to multiply the bread of his graces to us as on the mountain, to embrace us like the prodigal son, to console us like the Canaanite woman, in temporal needs as at the wedding in Cana, in spiritual needs as on Calvary; with fear, for the Father does not cease to be our judge, and if he has ears to hear our prayers, he also has eyes to see our offences, and if he is silent now as a patient lamb in his tabernacle, he will speak with a terrible voice on the great day of judgement. If we offend him outside the church, we shall still have the church to escape to for forgiveness; but if we offend him within the



church, where shall we go to be forgiven?

In the church divine justice is appeased, divine mercy is received, *suscepimus divinam misericordiam tuam in medio templi tui*. In the church Mary and Joseph found Jesus when they had lost him, in the church we shall find him if we seek him with that spirit of holy trust and holy fear with which Mary and Joseph sought him.

Copy of the inscription sealed in the corner stone of the church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco.

D. O. M.

UT VOLUNTATIS ET PIETATIS NOSTRAE  
SOLEMNE TESTIMONIUM POSTERIS EXTARET  
IN MARIAM AGUSTAM GENITRICEM  
CHRISTIANI NOMINIS POTENTEM  
TEMPLUM HOC AB INCHOATO EXTRUERE  
DIVINA PROVIDENTIA UNICE FRETIS  
IN ANIMO FUIT  
QUINTA TANDEM CAL. MAI. AN. MDCCCLXV  
DUM NOMEN CHRISTIANUM REGERET  
SAPIENTIA AC FORTITUDINE  
PIUS PAPA IX PONTIFEX MAXIMUS  
ANGULAREM AEDIS LAPIDEM  
IOAN. ANT. ODO EPISCOPUS SEGUSINORUM  
DEUM PRECATUS AQUA LUSTRALI  
RITE EXPIAVIT  
ET AMADEUS ALLOBROGICUS V. EMM. II FILIUS  
EAM PRIMUM IN LOCO SUO CONDIDIT  
MAGNO APPARATU AC FREQUENTI CIVIUM CONCURSU  
HELLO O VIRGO PARENS  
VOLENS PROPITIA TUOS CLIENTES  
MAIESTATI TUAE DEVOTOS  
E SUPERIS PRAESENTI SOSPITES AUXILIO.

I. B. Francesia scripsit.

Translation.

As a solemn testimony for posterity of our benevolence and religion regarding the august Mother of God, Mary Help of Christians, we resolved to build this church from its foundations on 27 April of the year MDCCCLXV, when the Catholic Church was governed with wisdom and fortitude by the Supreme Pontiff Pius IX . The cornerstone of the church was blessed according to the religious rites by Giovanni Antonio Odone bishop of Susa, and Amedeo of Savoy son of Vittorio E. II put it in place for the first time amidst great pomp and large crowds of people. Hail, O Virgin Mother, graciously succour those devoted to your majesty and defend them from heaven with efficacious help.

Hymn read during the solemn blessing of the cornerstone.

When the worshipper of idols

Moved to wage war on Jesus,  
Oh how many fearless thousands  
Stained the earth with blood!  
From fierce battles unscathed,  
the Church of God came out  
spreading still its life,  
from one sea to the other.

And it boasts its own martyrs

in this humble valley,  
Ottavio died here,  
and Solutor fell.  
Beautiful immortal victory!  
Rises on the bloody ground  
Of the Martyrs  
perhaps the divine altar.

And here the afflicted youth

opens his sighs,  
Finding solace for his soul

in his martyrs;  
Here the scorned widow  
with a devout and holy heart  
Places her humble tears  
in the bosom of the King of Kings,

And to you who often conquer  
More than a thousand swords,  
To You who boast glories  
In all lands,  
To You powerful and humble  
OF whom Your name speaks,  
MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS,  
we build a church to You.

So, O merciful Virgin,  
So great to your devotees,  
Above them in abundance  
Ah! pour out your favours.  
Already with tender pupil  
Keep the youth in mind,  
Who aspires to your laurels,  
Oh Mother of the Redeemer!

He, of mind and nature,  
of noble feeling,  
gives himself to You, O Virgin,  
in flourishing of his youth;  
he, with constant devotion  
hears sacred songs to You,  
and now desires the  
usual sound of arms.

The glory of Amedeo,  
The great virtues of Umberto  
Nourish in the heart, and remember  
Their heavenly garland;  
And from the white clouds,

From the heavenly hosts  
Of the blessed Mother  
He listens to the pious speech.

Dear and beloved Prince,  
A host of holy heroes,  
What beneficent thought  
Brings you here among us?  
Use to the aurate royalty,  
Of the world's lofty splendour  
Of miserable squalor  
Did you deign to visit?

Beautiful hope to the people,  
In whose midst thou comest,  
May your days live  
Calm, sweet and serene:  
Never on thy young head  
On thy secure soul  
Let not misfortune shriek,  
Let no bitter day dawn.

Wise and zealous prelate,  
And noble lords,  
How much does the Eternal One like  
Your holy ardours?  
Blessed life and placid  
He lives who for the decorum  
Of the Temple his treasure  
Or the work he lavished.

O sweet and pious spectacle!  
O memorable day!  
Most beautiful and noble day!  
What was ever seen and when?  
Well you speak to my soul:  
Of this even more beautiful  
The day will surely be

That the Temple opens to heaven.

In the difficult work

Gilded benefits,  
And soon come to an end,  
With joy in God you rest;  
And then melting fervently  
On my zither a song:  
Praise we will say to the Holy One  
To the Fortress of Israel.

[\(continued\)](#)

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[\[i\]](#) Compendium of Heresies p. 170. On temples of Gentiles converted into churches, see Butler Lives, November, p. 10.

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## **St Francis de Sales at the service of education**

Francis de Sales was convinced that 'on the good or bad education of the youth depends radically the well-being or malaise of society and the state'; he also believed 'that colleges are like nurseries and seminaries, from which come out those who will later fill offices and hold positions, destined to be administered well or badly to the extent that previously the grafts have been well or badly cultivated'. He therefore wanted 'youth to be educated equally in piety and morals, as in letters and sciences.

### **School, boarding school and vocational training in Thonon**

The formation of youth in studies and the Catholic

faith was particularly urgent in Thonon, a town near Geneva. Several projects occupied the spirit of Francis de Sales for many years, at the time when he was provost and later as bishop.

Before the town's return to Catholicism, there was a school in Thonon founded thanks to a bequest that ensured sufficient resources for the education of twelve schoolchildren. In 1579, education was provided there by two or three governesses. With the restoration of Catholicism in Thonon in 1598, the provost de Sales asked that the bequest be used for twelve pupils 'who were Catholics'.

But the project that was closest to the provost's heart was to bring the fathers of the Society of Jesus to Thonon: 'Whoever would add to this a Jesuit college in this town, would make the whole of the surrounding area, which, as far as religion is concerned, is almost completely indifferent, participate in this good. The provost prepared a *Memoir* in which he strongly affirmed the general conviction: 'There is nothing more useful for this province of Chablais than to build a college of the Society of Jesus in the town of Thonon'.

At the end of October 1599 the first Jesuit arrived, at the end of November a second and the others were on their way from Avignon. Towards the end of the year, the Jesuits who arrived in Thonon began with a 'little school', which would have one hundred and twenty pupils the following year. As a result of the turmoil in 1600, they were dispersed for several months, after which they started schools again with about three hundred pupils.

But what use would grammar schools be if, for humanity's sake, pupils were forced to attend Protestant colleges? There was an urgent need to create secondary and higher classes in philosophy, theology, Holy Scripture and law. At the beginning of December 1602, everything seemed ready for the opening of the college and future university of Thonon. Now, a few days later, the failed attempt by the Duke of Savoy to retake Geneva caused the Jesuits to leave again.

They were soon forced to withdraw permanently.

After the Jesuits' departure, the school was revived with the help of local staff. The college of Thonon would not see any real development until late 1615, when the bishop called on the congregation of Barnabites, already established in the college of Annecy.

While literary studies were being provided for, another project mobilised the energies of the provost and his collaborators. In 1599, François de Sales advocated the foundation of a 'residence of all sciences and arts', i.e. a kind of professional school with a printing press, a paper factory, a mechanics workshop, a passementerie and an armoury.

The idea of an institution for training in the 'arts and crafts' should be emphasised, because learning normally took place at home, with the father teaching his trade to the son destined to succeed him, or with a craftsman. On the other hand, it can be seen that Francis de Sales and his collaborators were interested in manual trades considered vile, which the majority of humanists seemed to ignore. Promoting the 'mechanical arts' also meant valuing the craftsmen that the elites tended to despise.

### **The small schools in the diocese**

In 1606, there were fifteen boys' schools in the diocese, where grammar, literature and catechism were taught. On the surface, this was little. In reality, literacy was fairly widespread in the parishes; short courses were organised at certain times of the year, especially in the winter season, thanks to temporary agreements with teachers and especially thanks to the goodwill of the parish priests and assistant priests.

Teaching was elementary and consisted first of all in learning to read by means of a spelling book. The teacher usually did not have his own room, but used any room, a stable or a stable. Sometimes 'his lessons, held in the open air, even at an altitude of 1500 or 2000 metres, with pupils sitting on a stone, a cart, a fir-tree trunk or on the arms of

a plough, were not without charm and picturesqueness'.

As one can guess, the teachers were generally recruited from among the diocesan clergy and religious. In the will of a certain Nicolas Clerc, it is stipulated that the parish service 'shall be performed by a rector capable of instructing the youth up to and including grammar'; should he 'digress and neglect the divine office or the instruction of the youth, after being admonished three times' and 'referred to the bishop', he shall be deprived of his income and replaced by another clergyman.

In 1616, the bishop accepted the request of the principals of the town of Bonne, who begged him to provide them with a monk from a neighbouring convent, entrusting him with 'instructing the youth in letters and piety', 'in view of the great fruit and usefulness that can be derived from it in view of the good instruction that he has begun to give to the youth of the said town and its neighbourhood, who intend to send their own children there'.

### **The boarding schools**

Secondary education provided in boarding schools in Savoy originated mostly through the development of primary schools, which, thanks to donations, were able to add Latin, grammar and fine arts classes.

The bishop intervened to save the college of La Roche, where he had done his first grammar studies. The college did not always enjoy quiet days. In 1605, Francis de Sales wrote to the canons of the collegiate church to silence 'the personal opinion' of some, begging them to 'again secure the general consensus': 'you can and must contribute,' he wrote them, 'not only with your voices, but also with your warnings and the work of conviction, since the erection and preservation of this college will serve the glory of God and the Church', and will also procure 'the good of this city'. The spiritual purpose was, yes, in first place, but the temporal good was not forgotten.

In Annecy, the bishop followed closely the life of



the college founded by Eustache Chappuis, in which he himself had studied from 1575 to 1578. The difficulties he was experiencing probably led him to visit this institute frequently. Moreover, the presence of the bishop was a sought-after honour, especially on the occasion of philosophical disputes, to which 'Monsignor, the most reverend bishop of Geneva' was invited.

The records of the college's decisions indicate his presence on the occasion of discussions as well as interventions to support requests or to draw up contracts with professors. According to one witness, the bishop went there early in the morning to attend 'public events, disputes, performances of historical events and other exercises, to encourage the youth, and, in particular, public disputes in philosophy at the end of the courses'. The same witness adds: 'I often saw him personally take part in philosophical disputes'.

In reality, according to one of the professors of the time, 'fine literature as well as healthy morals had lost much of their lustre' and income had declined. The administration was experiencing shocks. The bishop dreamed of a new and stable direction for the college, which appeared to him 'almost like a wasteland'.

In 1613, while passing through Turin, he was suggested the name of a new congregation that was sailing with the wind in its sails: the Barnabites. In Milan, he met their superior general and the deal was concluded. In December 1614, he signed the contract for the Barnabites to enter the Chappuis college.

Francis de Sales was so pleased with the Barnabites that, as we have said, he called them without delay to Thonon. In April 1615, he was able to write to a friend of his: 'Certainly, our good Barnabites are really very good people: sweeter than can be said, compliant, humble and gentle far more than is fashionable in their country'. Consequently, he suggested that they should also come to France:

*'For me, I think that, one day, they will be of great service to France, because they do good not only by the instruction of the youth (which is not excessively necessary in a country where the Jesuit fathers do it so excellently), but they sing in choir, hear confessions, give catechism even in the villages to which they are sent, preach; in a word, they do all that can be desired, they do it very cordially, and they do not ask much for their livelihood.*

In 1619 he was involved in negotiations to have the Barnabites take charge of the college in Beaune, Burgundy. Since this deal failed, they were able to settle in Montargis the following year.

### **Higher studies**

The Duchy of Savoy, being unable to count on large cities and seeing its stability often threatened, did not have its own university. Students who were able to do so went to study abroad. Francis de Sales' brother Louis was sent to Rome to study law there. In France, there were Savoyard students in Montpellier, where they went to study medicine, and in Toulouse, where they went to study law.

In Avignon, the Savoyard Cardinal de Brogny had founded a college in his palace to receive twenty-four law students free of charge, sixteen of whom were from Savoy. Unfortunately, the Savoyards lost the places reserved for them. In October 1616, Francis de Sales made several attempts with the Duke of Savoy and also in Rome to find 'some effective remedy against the disorders that, in the same college, have occurred' and so that the seats in the college would be returned to 'Your Highness' subjects'. On the occasion of his last journey, which took him to Avignon in November 1621 and before he finally ended it in Lyons, he spoke at length with the pope's vice-legat to once again defend the Savoyard interests of the college.

Savoyard students were even to be found in Louvain, where Eustache Chappuis had founded a college for

Savoyards attending the university. The Bishop of Geneva was in constant and friendly contact with Jacques de Bay, president of the college; on several occasions Francis de Sales wrote to him to recommend those who went there to place themselves, as he said, 'under your wings'. In cases where parents encountered difficulties in bearing the costs, he said he was ready to reimburse them. He followed his students: 'Study more and more,' he wrote to one of them, 'with a spirit of diligence and humility'. We also possess a letter from 1616 to the new president of the college, Jean Massen, in favour of a theology student, his own relative, whose 'progress in letters and virtue' he hoped for.

### **Schools for girls?**

All that has been said so far only concerns the education of boys. It was only for them that schools existed. And for girls? At the time of François de Sales, the only institutions that could offer help to families in this respect were women's monasteries, which were, however, primarily concerned with recruitment. Jeanne de Sales, the last daughter of Madame de Boisy, was sent to the monastery in 1605, 'to give her a change of air and give her a taste for devotion'. She entered at the age of twelve, but as she felt no attraction for religious life, it is not reasonable, asserted Francis de Sales, 'to leave a young girl who does not intend to stay there forever for so long in a monastery'. She withdrew already in her second year.

But what to do if the monastery was closed to them? There was the solution of the Ursulines, who were beginning to be known as a congregation for the education of young women. They had been present in the French capital since 1608. The bishop encouraged their coming to Chambéry, writing in 1612 that 'it would be a great good thing if, in Chambéry, there were Ursulines, and I would like to contribute by doing something for this'; 'three daughters or courageous women would be enough,' he added, 'to begin'. The foundation would not take place in the ancient capital of Savoy until 1625.

In 1614, he was able to rejoice at the recent arrival of the Ursulines in Lyon, 'one of the congregations,' he said, 'that my spirit loves most'. He also wanted them in his diocese, particularly in Thonon. In January 1621, he wrote to the superior of the Ursulines of Besançon to try to encourage this project, because, he wrote, 'I have always loved, esteemed and honoured those works of great charity that your congregation uses to practise, and therefore, I have always deeply desired its diffusion also in this province of Savoy'. The project, however, could only be implemented in 1634.

### **The education of young girls in the Visitation monasteries**

When, starting in 1610, Francis de Sales founded with Jeanne de Chantal what was to become the Order of the Visitation, the question of the admission and education of young women destined or not destined for religious life soon arose. We know the case of the daughter of the Lady of Chantal, the cheerful and coquettish *Franceschetta*, who was only eleven years old when her mother, wanting her to become a religious, took her with her into the house that was to become the home of the first Visitandine. But the young girl had to take another path. Girls sent to monasteries unwillingly had no choice but to make themselves unbearable.

In 1614, a nine-year-old girl, daughter of the guardian of the castle of Annecy, was accepted at the first Visitation monastery. At the age of fourteen, by dint of insistence, she was allowed to wear the religious habit, but without having the requisites to be a novice. Sick with lung disease, she aroused the admiration of the founder, who felt 'an incredible consolation, finding her indifferent to death and life, in a gentle attitude of patience and with a smiling face, in spite of the very high fever and the many pains she suffered. As her only consolation, she asked to be allowed to make her profession before she died'. Very different, however, was another companion, a young woman from Lyons, daughter of the chief merchant and great benefactor, who made herself

unbearable in the community to the point that Chantal's mother had to correct her.

At the Visitation in Grenoble, a twelve-year-old girl asked to live with the religious. To the superior, who hesitated to accept this 'rose' who might bear some thorns, the founder advised with a smile and a hint of cunning:

*'It is true that these young girls do give some thorns; but what should one do? In this world, I have never found a good that did not cost something. We must arrange our wills in such a way that they do not seek comforts, or, if they seek them and desire them, know how to adapt themselves serenely to the difficulties that are always inseparable from comforts. In this world, we have no wine without a bottom. We must therefore calculate well. Is it better that we have thorns in our garden so that we can have roses, or that we have no roses so that we do not have thorns? If it brings more good than evil, it will be good to admit it; if it brings more evil than good, it should not be admitted.'*

In the end, the founder was very circumspect about admitting young girls into the Visitation monasteries, because of the incompatibility with the way of life of religious women.

In fact, the Visitation had not been conceived and desired for such a work: 'God,' the founder wrote to the superior of Nevers, 'has not chosen your institute for the education of little girls, but for the perfection of the women and young ladies who are called to it at the age when they are already able to answer for what they do'. He was well aware that monastery life could hardly provide a suitable environment for the development of girls: 'Not only experience, but also reason teaches us that girls so young, placed under the discipline of a monastery, generally disproportionate for their age, begin to detest and hate it'.

Despite some regrets, Francis de Sales did not become the founder of an institute dedicated to education.

However, it is a fact that his efforts in favour of the education and upbringing of boys and girls, in all its forms, were numerous and burdensome. The overriding motive that guided him was spiritual, especially when it came to keeping the youth away from the 'poison of heresy', and in this regard he succeeded rather well, as the Catholic Reformation gained ground; however, he did not neglect the temporal good of educating the youth for the benefit of society.

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## **The second missionary dream: across America (1883)**

Don Bosco told this dream on September 4, at the morning session of the general chapter. Father Lemoyne immediately put it into writing, which Don Bosco critically read from beginning to end, making some additions and modifications. We will record in italics those words which are in Don Bosco's hand in the original; we shall enclose in brackets some passages introduced later by Father Lemoyne as reflections based upon further explanations given him by Don Bosco.

On the night before the feast of St. Rose of Lima [August 30], I had a dream. I was aware that I was sleeping, and at the same time I seemed to be running very, very much, so much that I was exhausted with running, talking, writing, and wearing myself out in carrying out the rest of my other regular responsibilities. While I was deliberating whether this was a dream or reality, I seemed to enter a recreation hall where I found many people standing about and discussing various topics.

*A lengthy conversation centered on the hordes of*

savages in Australia, the Indies, China, Africa, and more especially America, who in countless numbers are presently entombed in the darkness of death.

"Europe," said one of the speakers with much conviction, "Christian Europe, the great mistress of civilization and Catholicism, seems to have lost all interest in the foreign missions. Few are those who have enough enthusiasm to brave long journeys and unknown lands to save the souls of millions of people redeemed by the Son of God, Jesus Christ."

Another said, "How many idolaters in America alone live miserably outside the Church, far from the knowledge of the Gospel. People keep thinking (and geographers keep deceiving them) that the American Cordillera<sup>31</sup> is like a wall blocking off that huge section of the world. It is not so. That interminable chain of lofty mountains contains many plains a six hundred and more miles in length alone. In them are forests as yet unexplored. plants, and animals. and also ores rarely found elsewhere. Coal, oil, lead, copper, iron, silver, and gold lie hidden in those mountains where they were secreted by the all-powerful hand of the Creator for the good of humanity. O Andes, Andes, how steeped in wealth is your eastern flank!"

At that moment I felt an urgent desire to ask for an explanation of many things and to find out who those persons gathered there were, and where I was.

But I said to myself, Before speaking you must find out what kind of people these are. In all curiosity I gazed about at them. Practically all of these people were total strangers to me. In the meantime, as though they were seeing me for the first time, they invited me to step forward and welcomed me kindly.

I asked them, "Please tell me where we are. Are we in Turin, London, Madrid, or Paris? Where are we? Who are you? With whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?" But they all gave me vague answers while they kept talking about the missions.

During this time I was approached by a young man of about

sixteen, fascinating for his superhuman beauty and aglow with a brilliance more intense than that of the sun. His garment was woven with heavenly richness, and on his head he wore a cap shaped like a crown studded with the most sparkling precious stones. Fixing his kindly gaze upon me, he showed keen interest in me. His smile reflected a love that had its own irresistible attraction. He called me by name, then took my hand and began speaking to me about the Salesian Congregation.

I was thrilled by the sound of his voice. At one point I interrupted him and asked, "With whom do I have the honor of speaking? Do me the kindness of telling me your name."

The young man replied, "Don't be worried. Speak with utter trust. You are with a friend."

"But what is your name?"

"I would tell you my name if it were necessary, but I don't have to because you should know me." Saying this he smiled.

I took a better look at that countenance flooded with light. How handsome a face! And then I recognized the son of Count Fiorito Colle of Toulon, a distinguished benefactor of our house and especially of our American missions. This young man had died a short time before.

"Oh, it is you!" I exclaimed. "Louis! And who are all these others?"

"They are friends of your Salesians, and as your friend, I would like *in God's name* to give you a bit of work."

"Let's see what you mean. What is this work?"

"Sit at this table and pull this rope."

In the middle of *that vast hall* stood a table on which lay a coil of rope; it resembled a tape measure marked with lines and numbers. Later I also came to

realize that the hall itself was situated in South America, straddling the equator, and that the numbers marked on the rope corresponded to degrees of *latitude*.

I therefore took the end of the rope, looked at it, and saw that the tip was marked zero.

I smiled.



That angelic lad remarked, "This is no time to smile. Look carefully. What is written on the rope?"

"Zero."

"Pull it a bit."

I pulled it a little and up came the number one.

"Pull more and wrap the rope into a big coil."

I did so, and out came the numbers 2, 3, 4, up to 20.

"Is that enough?" I asked.

"No, pull more, pull more! Pull until you find a knot," the lad answered.

I pulled up to the number 47, where I came across a big knot. From this knot the rope continued, but it was split into smaller strands that fanned out to the east and west and south.

"Is that enough?" I asked.

"What is the number?" the youth answered.

"It's 47."

"What is 47 plus 3?"

"50."

"And add 5 more?"

"55."

"Take note: 55."

He then told me, "Pull some more."

"I've reached the end," I replied.

"Now then, reverse the process and pull the rope from the other end."

I did so until I reached the number 10.

"Pull more," the lad told me.

"There's nothing left!"

"What? Nothing? Take a closer look. What do you see?"

"I see water," I replied.

Indeed, at that moment I felt something very strange happening to me which I cannot explain. I was present in that hall, I was pulling that rope, and at the same time I saw unfolding before my eyes the vision of an immense country over which I was hovering like a bird in flight, and the more the cord was pulled the farther out did the view stretch.

From zero to 55 I saw a vast mainland, *the end of which*, after a stretch of water, broke up into a hundred islands, *one of them very much larger than the others*.

It seemed that the strands which came from the big knot of the rope stretched out to these islands, so that every strand was anchored to an island. Some of these islands were inhabited by fairly large numbers of natives; others were barren, empty, rocky, uninhabited; others were all blanketed in snow and ice. Toward the west were numerous groups of islands inhabited by many savages.

[It would appear that the knot situated at the number or degree of 47 symbolized the point of departure, the Salesian center, the principal mission from which our missionaries branched out to the Falkland Islands, Tierra del Fuego, and the other islands of those American countries.]

That same mainland stretched out from the opposite end of the rope, that is from zero to ten, until it reached the body of water which was as far as I could see. *I thought* that was the Caribbean Sea, *which* I was then gazing upon in a way so wondrous that I cannot describe the way I saw it.

As soon as I said, "I see water," the young man replied, "Now add 55 and 10. What is the sum?"

"65," I answered.

"Now join all together and you will make just one single rope."

"And now?"

"From this side what do you see?" And he pointed to a spot on the panorama.

"To the west I see very lofty mountains, and to the east there is the sea!"

[Please note that I was then seeing a summary, in miniature as it were, of what I later saw in its real grandeur and extent, as I shall narrate. The marks numbered on the rope, each corresponding precisely to the degrees of latitude, were those which allowed me to keep in memory for several years the successive localities I visited as I travelled in the second part of this same dream.]

My young friend continued: "Very well. These mountains form a ridge or boundary. From here to there is the harvest assigned to the Salesians. Thousands and millions of people are awaiting your help, *waiting for the faith.*"

Those mountains were the South American Andes and that ocean was the Atlantic.

"How will we manage?" I asked. "How will we succeed in bringing all these people into the flock of Christ?"

"How will you manage? Watch!"

And in came Father Lago, who was carrying a basket of small, green figs.

"Take some, Don Bosco," he said.

"What are you bringing me," I replied, looking at the contents of the basket.

"I was told to bring them to you."

"But these figs are not ready to eat; they are not ripe."

Then my young friend took the basket, which was very broad but shallow, and gave it to me, saying, "Here is my gift to you!"

"And what am I to do with these figs?"

"These figs are unripe, but they belong to the great fig tree of life. You must find a way to make them ripen."

"How? If they were a little bigger, ... they could mature under straw, as other fruits do, but they are so small ... so green. It's impossible."

"Well then, know that to make them ripen you have to find some way of reattaching these figs to the tree."

"Impossible! How can it be done?"

"Watch!" And he took a fig, dipped it into a basin of blood, then immediately dipped it into another basin full of water, and said, "With sweat and blood the savages will turn back and be re-attached to the plant, thus becoming pleasing to the master of life."

But to accomplish this will take time, I thought to myself. Then I said aloud, "I don't know what else I can say."

That dear youth, reading my mind, continued, "This success will take place before the second generation comes to an end."

"Which will be the second generation?"

"Don't count the present generation. There shall be another, and then another."

I spoke in utter confusion, baffled, spluttering, as I heard the magnificent destiny awaiting our Congregation, and I asked, "But how many years does each of these generations include?"

"Sixty."

"And then?"

"Do you wish to see what will happen then? Come!"

Without my knowing how, I found myself in a railroad station. A huge crowd was gathered there. We boarded a train.

I asked where we were. The young man replied, "Take notice! Watch carefully! We are traveling along the Andes. You have your road also open to the east all the way to the sea. It is another of the Lord's gifts."

"And when shall we go to Boston, where they're waiting for us?"

"Everything at its own time." Saying this, he took out a map in which the diocese of Cartagena stood out prominently. [This was the point of departure.]

As I was studying the map, the engine blew its whistle and the train began to move. As we went along my friend kept talking much, but, because of the train's noise, I could not fully hear him. Nevertheless, I learned many very wonderful and new things about astronomy, navigation, meteorology, minerals, fauna and flora, the topography of those areas which he explained to me with marvellous precision. Meanwhile he seasoned his speech with a courteous and at the same time gentle familiarity which showed his love for me. From the very start he took my hand and kept me always very affectionately in his tight clasp to the very end of the dream. I placed my other hand lightly on his, but his hand seemed to disappear under mine as though it had evaporated, and my left hand held merely my right. The young man smiled at my useless efforts.

In the meantime I was looking out the carriage window, and I saw whiz before me various astonishing regions: forests, mountains, plains, very long majestic rivers which I could not

believe to be so wide at points so far from their mouths. For more than a thousand miles we skirted the edge of a virgin forest which has not been explored even today. My gaze took on a marvellous power of vision. There were no obstacles that could block its view. I don't know how to explain what strange phenomenon took place in my eyes. I felt like someone standing on a hilltop who sees stretching out before him a vast panorama; if he holds even a tiny strip of paper close to his eyes, he can see little or nothing, but if he drops it or moves it up or down, his gaze can reach out to the farthest horizon. This is what happened to me because of the extraordinary insight that was given to me, but the difference was this: every now and then as I set my gaze upon one spot and that one spot whizzed past me, it was as if a series of curtains were being raised and I saw stretching out before me interminable distances. Not only did I see the Andes when I was a long distance from them, but that chain of mountains even stood out in those immeasurable plains and was clearly visible to me in every tiny detail. [The mountain ranges of Colombia, Venezuela, the three Guyanas, Brazil, and Bolivia, even to their farthest boundaries.]

I was then able to verify the correctness of the words I had heard at the beginning of my dream in the grand hall straddling the equator. I could see into the very bowels of the mountains and into the remotest hidden recesses of the plains. Before my eyes lay the incomparable riches of those countries, which will one day be discovered. I saw countless mines of precious metals, inexhaustible caverns of coal, oil deposits so abundant as have never yet been discovered elsewhere. But that was not all. Between 15- and 20-degrees latitude lay a very broad and very lengthy body of water that had its origin from the end of a lake. Then a voice kept repeating to me, "When the mines hidden in the midst of these mountains will eventually be dug out, here will appear the promised land flowing with milk and honey. Its wealth will defy belief."

But that was not all. My greatest surprise was to see how the

Andes in several places reverted upon themselves and formed valleys of whose existence present day geographers have not even an idea. They think that in those areas the mountainsides are sheer walls. In those valleys and hollows, some of which extended as much as six hundred miles, lived crowded countless peoples who have not yet come in contact with Europeans, entire nations completely unknown to us.

The train kept rushing along, turning here and there and finally coming to a halt. A fair number of passengers got off at this point to continue their journey through the Andes to the west.

[Don Bosco indicated Bolivia. The station was probably La Paz, where a tunnel could open the way to the Pacific coast and link Brazil with Lima by means of a junction with another railroad.]

The train began to move again, heading always forward. As on the first leg of our journey, we traversed forests, drove through tunnels, passed over gigantic viaducts, plunged into narrow mountain gorges, skirted lakes and marshes on bridges, forded wide rivers, hurtled over grasslands and prairies. We passed along the banks of the Uruguay River. I always thought it was a short river, but instead it is very long. At one point I saw the Parana River wending its way to the Uruguay as though it were bringing it the tribute of its waters; but, after somewhat paralleling it for a stretch, it pulled away, forming a huge elbow.

Both these rivers were enormous. [From these sketchy descriptions it would seem that this future railroad line would go from La Paz to Santa Cruz, then head through the only opening which is to be found in the Cruz della Sierra mountains and is crossed by the Guapay River; it will ford the River Parapetf in the Chiquitos plains of Bolivia, then cut across the extreme northern limit of the Republic of Paraguay; thence it will enter the Province of Sao Paulo in Brazil and then head for Rio de Janeiro. From some intermediate station in the Sao Paulo Province, the railroad line will then probably go between the Parana and Uruguay Rivers and connect

Brazil's capital with the Republic of Uruguay and the Republic of Argentina.]

The train kept forging its way, turning here and there, and after a long time it made a second stop. Another large number of people got off there and made their way westward through the Andes. [Don Bosco indicated the province of Mendoza in Argentina. Hence the station was probably Mendoza, and the tunnel led to Santiago, capital of the Republic of Chile.]

The train resumed its journey across the Pampas and Patagonia. The cultivated fields and the few homes scattered here and there showed that civilization was overtaking the wilderness.

At the entrance of Patagonia we passed over a branch of the Colorado River or the Chubut River [or perhaps the Rio Negro?]. I could not ascertain its flow of current or its direction, whether toward the Andes or toward the Atlantic. I kept trying to solve this puzzle but could not orient myself.

Finally we reached the Strait of Magellan. I looked all about me. We alighted. Before me lay Punta Arenas. For several miles the ground was cluttered with mounds of coal, boards, railroad ties, huge piles of minerals; the fields were partially covered with flocks, partially tilled. Long lines of freight cars filled the railroad tracks.

My friend pointed all these things out to me. Then I asked, "And now what are you trying to tell me with all this?"

He answered: "What is now merely a project will one day be reality. In time to come these savages will be so domesticated that they shall willingly come for instruction, religion, civilization, and trading. What elsewhere excites wonder among people will here assume such stupendous proportions as to arouse more astonishment than does anything else now."

"I've seen enough," I replied. "Now take me to see my Salesians in Patagonia."

We turned back to the station and reboarded the train to return. After traveling a very long distance, the train stopped before a town of considerable size.

[Possibly on the 47th parallel, where at the very beginning of the dream I had seen the big knot in the rope.] There was no

one at the station to meet me. I got off the train and immediately found the Salesians. I saw many houses with many people in them; more churches, schools, various hospices for children and youths, artisans and farmers, and a school for girls which taught a variety of domestic arts. Our missionaries were caring for both the young and the adults.

I walked into their midst. They were many, but I did not recognize them, and none of my old sons were among them. All were looking at me in bewilderment, as though I were new to them, and I asked them, "Don't you know me? Don't you know Don Bosco?"

"Oh, Don Bosco! We know him by reputation, but we have only seen him in photographs. Do we know him personally? Certainly not."

"And Father Fagnano, Father Costamagna, Father Lasagna, Father Milanesio – where are they?"

"We did not know them. They are the ones who came here long ago in the past, the first Salesians to come to these lands from Europe. But so many years have gone by since they died."

I gasped in wonder at their reply. "But is this a dream or reality?" I clapped my hands, I felt my arms, I shook myself, and I really heard the sound of my clapping and I could feel my body, and I kept telling myself I was not asleep.

This visit was but the matter of an instant. Having witnessed the marvellous progress of the Catholic Church, of our Congregation, and of civilization in those lands, I thanked Divine Providence for graciously using me as an instrument of His divine glory and the salvation of so many souls.

Young Colle meanwhile signalled me that it was time to go back. So, we said good-bye to my Salesians and returned to the station, where the train was ready to depart. We boarded, the whistle blew, and away we headed northward.

Something new struck my sight and made me wonder. The region of Patagonia closest to the Strait of Magellan, between the Andes and the Atlantic, is not as wide as geographers claim it to be.



The train rushed along at breakneck speed, and I thought we were crossing the provinces of the Republic of Argentina which already had been civilized.

Our journey took us through a virgin forest, interminably broad and interminably long. At a certain point the train stopped and our gaze fell upon a very sorry sight indeed. A huge crowd of savages was gathered in a forest clearing.

Their faces were deformed and dirty, their bodies covered with what seemed to be animal skins sewed together. They surrounded a man who was bound and seated on a rock. He was very obese, having been deliberately fattened by the natives. The poor fellow had been taken prisoner and from the sharpness of his features seemed to belong to a different race. Hordes of savages were interrogating him, and he was telling them of the adventures he had encountered in his travels. Suddenly one of the natives arose, brandishing a shaft of iron which was well sharpened, though not a sword; he threw himself upon the prisoner and with one blow cut off his head. All the train passengers crowded at the doors and windows gazing upon the scene in horror. Colle himself was looking in silence. The victim uttered a shrill scream as he was struck. Those cannibals then threw themselves upon the body bathed in a lake of blood and, slicing it up, threw chunks of warm and still quivering flesh upon nearby fires, let them roast awhile, and then ate them half cooked. At that poor man's scream, the train began to move and gradually resumed its breakneck speed. For hours at a stretch it skirted the shores of a huge river. At times it was on the right bank, at times on the left. I could not tell through the window what bridges

we used to make these frequent crossings. Meanwhile along the banks here and there we spotted numerous tribes of savages. Each time we saw them, young Colle kept saying, "This is the Salesian harvest! This is the Salesian harvest!"

We then entered a region packed with wild animals and poisonous snakes of bizarre and horrifying shapes. They swarmed over the mountainsides and hill slopes; they blanketed the hilltops, the lakeshores, the riverbanks, the plains, the

gullies, the cliffs. Some looked like dogs with wings and were extraordinarily bloated [gluttony, impurity, pride]. Others were gigantic toads eating frogs. We could see certain lairs full of animals different in shape from ours. All three species of animals were mixed together and snarled dully as though about to devour each other. We could also see tigers, hyenas, lions, but they were not the same as those of Asia and Africa. My companion then spoke to me. Pointing out those animals to me, he exclaimed, "The Salesians will tame them!"

The train was now approaching its starting point, and we were not far from it. Young Colle then drew out a map of astounding beauty and told me, "Would you like to see the journey you have just made? The regions we have traversed?"

"Yes, of course," I answered.

He then explained the map on which all South America was detailed with marvellous exactness. More than that, it showed all that had been, what then was, and what would be in those regions, but without confusion, rather with such a clarity that one could instantly see all at one glance. I immediately understood everything, but, due to the onrush of so many things, that clarity lasted but an hour, and now my mind is just one big jumble.

While I was looking at that map and waiting for the youth to offer me some explanation – I was overwhelmed by the astounding things I was looking at – I thought I heard our Coadjutor Quirino ring the morning *Angelus*, but, on awakening, I realized I was hearing the bell strokes of the parish church of San Benigno. The dream had taken the entire night.

Don Bosco concluded his account with these words: "The Salesians will draw the people of [South] America to Jesus Christ by the sweetness of St. Francis de Sales. It will be a most difficult task to teach the savages a moral way of life, but their children will easily yield to the words of the missionaries and live in towns with them; civilization will supplant savagery, and thus many Indians will enter the flock of Jesus Christ."

## Remember the sermon

One Sunday, around noon, a young woman was washing salad in the kitchen, when she was approached by her husband who asked her teasingly:

“Could you tell me what the pastor said in this morning’s sermon?”

“I don’t remember any more,” the woman confessed.

“Why then do you go to church to hear sermons if you don’t remember them?”

“You see, dear: the water washes my salad and yet it does not remain in the colander; yet my salad is completely washed.

*It is not important to take notes. It is important to let oneself be “washed” by the Word of God.*

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## The safe tradition of Blessed Michael Rua (1/2)

*“Be good, trust in God and paradise will be yours” (Blessed Michael RUA)*

*Blessed Michael Rua (1837-1910), Don Bosco’s first successor, as studies, research and conferences held on the occasion of the centenary of his death have shown, goes beyond the traditional cliché of being a ‘copy of Don Bosco’,*

sometimes with less attractive traits or even in opposition to the founder, to release a more complete, harmonious and sympathetic figure.

Fr Rua is the consecration and exaltation of Salesian origins. It was testified during the process: 'Fr Rua is not to be placed in the ranks of Don Bosco's ordinary followers, even the most fervent, because he precedes them all as a perfect exemplar, and for this reason all those who want to know Don Bosco well must also study him, because the servant of God made a study on Don Bosco that no one else can make.' No one like him understood and interpreted the founder in his educational and ecclesial action and spirituality. Fr Rua's vocation and ideal were the life, intentions, works, virtues, holiness of the father and guide of his youthful, priestly and religious existence. Frn Rua always remains of vital relevance to the Salesian world.

When it came to finding the rector for the first house outside Turin, at Mirabello Monferrato in 1863, Don Bosco chose Fr Rua "admiring in him, in addition to his exemplary conduct, his indefatigable work, his great experience and spirit of sacrifice that one would say was unspeakable, as well as his good manners, so much so that he was loved by all." More directly Fr Cerruti, after affirming that he had found in the young rector the portrait and image of the Father (Don Bosco), testifies: "I always remember that tireless industriousness of his, that prudence so fine and delicate of government, that zeal for the good not only religious and moral, but intellectual and physical of the brothers and young people entrusted to him. These aspects summarise and embody the Salesian motto 'work and temperance'. A true disciple of Don Bosco *verbo et opere*, in an admirable synthesis of prayer and work. A disciple who followed his master from his earliest childhood, doing everything by halves, assimilating in a vital form the spirit of his charismatic origins; a son who felt generated by a unique love, like so many of the first boys of the Valdocco Oratory,

who decided to 'stay with Don Bosco'" and among whom the first three successors of the father and teacher of the young excelled in a paradigmatic way: Fr Michael Rua, Fr Paul Albera, Fr Philip Rinaldi.

### **1. Some of the traits of Fr Rua's virtuous life, an expression of continuity and fidelity**

It is a matter of the tradition of one who receives a gift and in turn passes it on, trying not to lose the dynamism and apostolic, spiritual and affective vitality that must permeate institutions and works. Don Bosco had already intuited this: "If God told me: Prepare yourself that you must die and choose a successor because I don't want the Work you started to fail and ask for this successor as many graces, virtues, gifts and charisms as you think necessary, so that he can carry out his office well, which I will give him all, I assure you that I wouldn't know what to ask the Lord for for this purpose, because I already see that Fr Rua already possesses everything." This was the fruit of assiduous frequentation, of treasuring every piece of advice, of continuous study in observing and noting every act, every word, every ideal of Don Bosco.

### **Exemplary Conduct**

The testimony of Salesian Brother Giuseppe Balestra, Fr Rua's personal assistant, is significant. Balestra was very attentive to the aspects of daily life and in them he was able to grasp the traits of a holiness to the full that would also mark his religious journey. Even today in Don Bosco's rooms one can see the sofa that was Blessed Michael Rua's bed for 20 years. Having succeeded Don Bosco, and taken his place in this room, Fr Rua never wanted his own bed. In the evening, Brother Balestra spread two sheets on that sofa, which Fr Rua used to sleep on. In the morning, the sheets were folded and the sofa resumed its usual shape. "I have the conviction that the servant of God was a saint, because in the 11 years that I had the good fortune to live

right next to him and to observe him continually, I have always and in all things found the greatest perfection; hence my conviction that he was most faithful in the fulfilment of all his duties and therefore in the most exact observance of all the Commandments of God, of the Church and the obligations of his own state.”.

## **1.2. Tireless work, tireless industriousness and extraordinary activity**

It seems incredible that a man with such a frail body, with health that was anything but florid, could have been able to undertake such an intense and untiring activity, so vast, taking an interest in the most diverse sectors of the Salesian apostolate, promoting and implementing initiatives that if they appeared extraordinary and daring at the time, are also a very valid indication and spur today. This untiring industriousness, a typical trait of Salesian spirituality, was recognised in Fr Rua by Don Bosco from his youth, as Fr Lemoyne attested: “It is true, in the oratory one works a lot, but it is not work that is the cause of death. There is only one here in the Oratory who should, without God’s help, die of fatigue, and that is Fr Rua, who always continues to work harder than the others.”

This dedication to work was an expression of the spirit and practice of poverty that singularly distinguished Fr Rua’s life and actions: “He loved poverty immensely, which was a most welcome companion to him from childhood and he possessed the spirit of it perfectly... He practised it with joy.” The practice of poverty, expressed in many forms, emphasised the value of the example of life and of taking divine Providence into account. He admonished: “Persuade yourselves that to a much higher end my exhortations tend, it is a matter of ensuring that the true spirit of poverty, to which we are obliged by vow, reigns among us. If economy is not taken care of, and too much is given to our bodies in treatment, in clothing, in travel, in comfort, how can we have fervour in the practices of piety? How can we be disposed to

those sacrifices that are inherent to Salesian life? It would be impossible to make any real progress in perfection, impossible to be true sons of Don Bosco.”

### **1.3. Great experience and prudence of governance**

Prudence defines better than any other quality the virtuous profile of Blessed Michael Rua: from his earliest childhood he set out to follow St John Bosco, hastening under his guidance to embrace the religious state; he formed himself through assiduous meditation and diligent examination of conscience; he eschewed idleness, worked tirelessly for good and led an irreproachable life. And as an adolescent he remained so as a priest, educator, vicar superior and successor of Don Bosco.

In the sphere of a Congregation dedicated to the education of the young he introduced into the formation process the practice of practical training, a period of three years during which the young Salesians “were sent to the houses to carry out different tasks, but mostly as assistants or teachers, for the main purpose that they might live together with the young, study their mentality, grow with them, and this under the guidance and supervision of the catechist and Rector.” He also offered precise indications and clear directives in the most varied fields of the Salesian mission, with a spirit of evangelical vigilance.

This exercise of prudence was characterised by a docility to the Spirit and a marked capacity for discernment regarding the persons called to hold positions of responsibility, especially in the field of formation and governance of the houses and provinces, regarding the works and the different situations; as when, for example, he chose Fr Paul Albera as Visitor of the houses in America or Fr Philip Rinaldi as Prefect General. “He inculcated in all the confreres, especially the rectors and provincials, the exact observance of the Rules, the exemplary fulfilment of practices of piety and always the exercise of charity; and he himself preceded them all by example, saying: ‘A means of gaining the

confidence of those under us is to never neglect one's duties.'"

The practice of prudence, especially in the exercise of government, produced as its fruit the filial confidence the confreres had in him, considering him as an expert counsellor and spiritual director, not only for matters of the soul, but also for material things: "The prudence of the servant of God shone in an extraordinary way in jealously preserving the confidential secret which he buried in his soul. He observed with the greatest caution the secrecy of personal correspondence: this was a general confession, and therefore the confreres approached him with great confidence because he answered everyone in the most delicate way."

#### **1.4. "Priest of the Pope".**

This expression of Pope John XXIII in front of Don Bosco's casket in 1959, expresses very well how Fr Rua, following Don Bosco in his daily journey, saw and found in the pope the light and the guide for his action. "Providence reserved even harder and I would say heroic trials of this fidelity and docility for Fr Rua than for Don Bosco. During his time as Rector Major, various decrees came from the Holy See that seemed to break traditions considered important and characteristic of our spirit in the Congregation. Fr Rua, while deeply feeling the blow of the sudden measures and being afflicted by them, immediately made himself a champion of obedience to the Holy See's dispositions, inviting the Salesians, as true sons of the Church and of Don Bosco, to accept them serenely and with confidence."

This is one of the maturing elements of the Salesian charism in obedience to the Church and in fidelity to the founder. Certainly, it was a very demanding ordeal, but one that forged both the holiness of Fr Rua and the *sentire cum ecclesia* and that fidelity to the Pope of the entire Congregation and Salesian Family which were characteristic and indispensable features in Don Bosco. Obedience made of faith, of love, translated into humble but cordial service, in a



spirit of filial docility and fidelity to the teachings and directives of the Holy Father.

It is interesting to note how even in the process of beatification Fr Rua went halfway with Don Bosco, but not according to a repetitive stereotype, but with originality, highlighting precisely those aspects that in Don Bosco's process had aroused the most controversial *animadversiones*: "Some surprise and perplexity may arise from the most obvious conclusion reached by comparing the two *Positiones*, that is the fact that the same virtues most frequently invoked to delineate Fr Rua's holiness are those constantly set out to challenge Don Bosco's holiness. It is true in fact that it is precisely prudence, temperance and poverty that are in the forefront of the *animadversiones* collected in the Founder's *Positio*."

[\(continued\)](#)

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## **John Lee Tae Seok (1962-2010), a Salesian who will be spoken of again**

*John Lee Tae Seok, also known as 'Fr. Jolly', was a Korean Salesian who dedicated his life to caring for the poorest and most suffering, especially in South Sudan. Although his life was unfortunately short, he left an indelible mark on the hearts of the people he met through his commitment as a doctor, educator and man of faith. His legacy continues to inspire thousands of people around the world.*

### **Childhood and roots of vocation**

Yohan Lee Tae Seok (John Lee) was born on 19 September 1962 in

[Busan](#), a southern city in South Korea. He was the ninth of ten children, four boys and six girls, in a deeply Catholic family (one brother, Tae-Young Lee, became a Franciscan friar and one sister, Cristina, consecrated in the Focolare Movement).

Even as a young man, he showed signs of extraordinary leadership and an inclination towards service to others. He attended daily Mass and was gifted for music. At the age of ten, he lost his father, and his mother became his point of reference, supporting him in his faith journey and studies.

Despite his desire to become a priest at the age of fifteen, his mother convinced him to continue studying medicine.

In 1987, after graduating with honours from [Inje University Medical School](#), John started working as a military doctor during his compulsory military service. It was during this time that he met the Salesians through a military chaplain, an encounter that would change his life forever. Determined to follow the Salesian vocation, John tried for months to communicate his decision to his mother, without success.

He himself recounts:

*'It was Mary Help of Christians who took matters into her own hands. I had decided to embark on Salesian life with great joy, but I was anxious to communicate my decision to my mother. Since my father had passed away when I was ten years old, my mother had had to work hard to get me to study medicine. And thanks to her many sacrifices, I had been able to become a doctor. I should have started helping my mother to reward her for the sacrifices she had made without ever holding anything against me. That was why it was so difficult for me to tell her my decision. It was almost impossible for me to tell her.*

*I had tried many times, but had never succeeded because looking at her, I lacked courage. I even tried to tell one of my sisters with whom I talked about everything without problems and to whom I confided everything. But I just couldn't. So months passed without me being able to say anything.*

*But a beautiful day came. I went to my sister for another try, but I was speechless: my sister already knew everything about my decision. A dream the night before had explained everything to her. I would like to tell you the content of the dream, but I cannot without the bishop's permission. Anyway, my sister told my mother about her dream and all my difficulties melted away in an instant.*

*I had not thought of direct help from Mary Help of Christians until I heard, for the first time, from the novice master that all Salesian vocations are linked to Mary Help of Christians. I had not asked Mary for help. Mary had noticed my difficulty and helped me in a silent and discreet way. This was the first experience of Mary that I was able to have. For me, this experience was invaluable because it enabled me to understand the reality of 'Mary help of Christians' and to **learn the attitude we must have when helping others: that is, being attentive to the needs of others and being ready to give them the help they need.** From then on I could speak to the boys with certainty about the presence of Mary Help of Christians'.*

### **The Salesian vocation and service to the poor**

He began his novitiate on 24 January 1993 and made his first profession on 30 January 1994.

After completing his two-year philosophy course at [Gwangju Catholic University](#), he did his practical training at the [Salesian House in Dae Rim Dong](#), Seoul. There he looked after some 80 at-risk boys, with a lot of creativity in the classroom and in the playground. He taught this class of difficult boys, who learned – at the age of 18 – to write the Korean alphabet. With his musical talents he made these boys sing a *Tantum Ergo* in Latin every Sunday evening, to a pop rhythm composed by him. He himself had composed.

### **He continued his theological studies.**

Sent to Rome to study at the Pontifical Salesian University in 1997, he met a missionary, Brother Comino, who had served for 20 years in South Korea and then was sent to Sudan in 1991, at

which time he was on holiday. By recounting his missionary experience, he strengthened John Lee's desire to become a missionary.

Watching the film '[Molokai](#)', a biographical film about Father Damian, a Belgian missionary who worked at the Kalaupapa Leprosy Settlement on the Hawaiian island of Molokai, motivated him even more to commit himself to living as Father Damian.

During the 1999 holidays he did a missionary experience in Kenya and met Fr James Pulickal, a Salesian of Indian origin working in Tonj, South Sudan. He visited Tonj when the war was still going on, was deeply impressed and decided to dedicate his life to the poor children of Tonj. This small village in South Sudan, destroyed by the civil war, where he met lepers and the poor, changed his life forever.

After being ordained a priest in 2001, John Lee returned to Tonj, determined to serve the local population as a doctor, priest and Salesian, and to treat the sick as if they were Jesus. He joined the Salesian community in Tonj, made up of brothers of different nationalities, with the aim of rebuilding – after the war – the Christian community, the oratory, schools and mission stations in the surrounding villages.

### **The mission in South Sudan: Tonj, a small miracle**

The conditions after the war were very bad. This prompted Fr John Lee Tae Seok to work to improve the lives of the villagers. First of all, he opened a small clinic, which quickly became the only medical centre available in a large area. He treated all kinds of illnesses, often with limited means, but with immense dedication. In addition to providing immediate medical care, he made a long-term commitment to educating the local population about disease prevention and hygiene, topics of which the locals were largely unaware due to their lack of education.

In addition to his work as a doctor, Lee Tae Seok was a

tireless educator. He founded a school for the village children, where he taught not only school subjects, but also values of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect, which are essential in a post-conflict context like South Sudan. Thanks to his passion for music, he also taught children to play musical instruments, creating a band that became famous in the region. The band not only offered young people a way to express themselves, but also helped to build a sense of community and hope for the future.

### **A doctor with a priest's heart**

John Lee Tae Seok's work was not limited to medicine and education. As a priest, his main goal was to bring spiritual hope to a population that had experienced years of suffering. He celebrated Mass regularly, administered the sacraments and offered spiritual comfort to those who had lost everything due to the war. His deep faith was evident in every aspect of his work, and his presence brought a sense of peace and hope even in the most difficult times.

One of the most admirable aspects of his mission was his ability to see the dignity in every person, regardless of their social status or state of health. He treated the sick with immense respect and devoted his time to anyone who needed help, even when exhausted by long hours in the clinic or lack of resources. This deep compassion did not go unnoticed: the people of the village regarded him not only as a doctor and a priest, but as a true friend and brother.

### **The fight against the disease and his legacy**

Despite his tireless work and the love he gave to others, John Lee Tae Seok himself was afflicted by a serious illness. During his stay in South Sudan, he began to show signs of an advanced illness, which later turned out to be colon cancer. When the disease was diagnosed, it was already in an advanced stage, but Lee Tae Seok continued his work as long as possible, refusing to abandon the people who depended on him. On 14 January 2010, aged only 47, John Lee Tae Seok died in

Seoul, South Korea, after a thirteen-month battle with cancer. The news of his death left a deep void in the Tonj community and among all those who had known him. His funeral was a moving event, with thousands of people attending to honour a man who had dedicated his life to the service of others.

Despite his untimely death, the legacy of John Lee Tae Seok lives on. His last words were an invitation to pursue his dreams for Tonj: 'I will not be able to realise my dreams for Tonj, but please pursue them'. The clinic he founded in Tonj continues its activities, and many of the people he trained, both in the medical and educational fields, are continuing his work. The band he created continues to play and bring joy into people's lives.

## **Testimonials**

Fr Václav Klement, a Salesian who was his superior (missionary in South Korea from 1986-2002), tells us:

"During the last 22 years, since obedience has taken me to so many countries in East Asia-Oceania and all over the Salesian world, I have seen so many small 'miracles' that Fr John Lee has worked through the film (*'Don't Cry for Me, Sudan'* and others), his writings (*'The Rays of the Sun in Africa are still sad'* and *'Will you be my Friend?'*) or the various publications that tell his life story.

A young high school student in Japan took the step towards the catechumenate after seeing the film *'Don't Cry for Me, Sudan'*, a Thai catechumen – on his way to baptism – was 'confirmed' in his faith thanks to the witness of Fr John Lee's joyfully sacrificed life. A young Vietnamese Salesian, enjoying all the happiness in his 'comfort zone', was awakened and motivated for missionary life by the very film *'Don't Cry for Me, Sudan'*. Yes, there are many Christians and non-Christians who have been awakened, confirmed in the faith or inspired for a vocational journey thanks to Fr John Lee.

The Salesians of the Korean Province have started a new Salesian presence in Busan, Fr John Lee's hometown. In 2020 they opened a new community based in the *'Fr John Lee Memorial*

*Hall*’ in [Busan](#), right in the neighbourhood where John was born in 1962. The four-storey building constructed by the Busan – Seogu local government is entrusted to the Salesians of Don Bosco. Thus the story of Fr John Lee is told by his Salesian confreres immersed in the life of the neighbourhood who welcome many young people and faithful to bring them closer to the radiant witness of missionary life.”

### **International impact and spiritual legacy**

Fr John Lee’s spirituality was deeply linked to Mary Help of Christians. He interpreted many events in his life as signs of Mary’s motherly presence. This devotion also influenced his approach to service: helping others quietly and discreetly, being attentive to the needs of others and ready to offer support.

Fr John Lee Tae Seok fully embodied the Salesian spirit, dedicating his life to the young and the poor, following Don Bosco’s example. His ability to combine medicine, education and spirituality made him a unique figure, capable of leaving a lasting imprint in a land marked by suffering.

His work continues in the ‘John Lee Foundation’, which continues to support Salesian works in Sudan.

His memory has been immortalised in numerous international awards and documentaries.

In 2011, after his death, the Ministry of Public Administration and Security of South Korea – on the recommendation of the public – presented him with an award, together with other people who contributed to society through voluntary work, donations and good deeds against all odds. The award is the highest, that of the Mugunghwa Order.

On 9 September 2010, the Korean television station KBS made a film about his work in Tonj, entitled ‘[Don’t Cry For Me Sudan](#)’. The documentary touched the hearts of hundreds of thousands of people and helped raise awareness of Fr John Lee and his mission around the world.

In 2018, the Minister of Education of South Sudan, Deng Deng Hoc Yai, introduced the study of Fr John Lee’s life in social

studies textbooks for primary schools and in two pages of the citizenship textbook for middle schools. This is the first time that textbooks in South Sudan have included the story of a foreigner for his voluntary service in the country.

The success of the documentary film 'Don't Cry for Me, Sudan' prompted the producers to continue. On 9 September 2020, director Soo-Hwan Goo launched a new documentary entitled '[Resurrection](#)' which follows the story of Lee's students a decade after his death and features around seventy of them, both in the Republic of South Sudan and Ethiopia.

John Lee Tae Seok was a living example of Christian love and solidarity. His life teaches us that even in the most difficult circumstances, with faith and dedication, we can make a difference in the world. John's dreams for Tonj continue to live on thanks to those who, inspired by his figure, work to build a better future for the poorest and most needy.

A Salesian who will be spoken of again.

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## **What is the ordinary activity of the devil and how to counter it**

*The devil's temptation does not produce its devastating consequences if our human will, with God's help, strives to resist it. We, in fact, are free to accept or reject the devil's suggestions. And God, for his part, among the various aids, gives us the possibility of knowing how to distinguish between what he suggests to us and what the devil suggests to us.*



Pope Francis' catechesis offers us the opportunity to reflect on the ordinary activity of the devil. It corresponds to temptation and involves everyone, no one excluded. His extraordinary activity, such as vexation or possession, certainly impresses with its manifestations, but it is the ordinary type that is the most dangerous diabolic activity because it seeks to lead us to the definitive and absolute prospect of eternal suffering. The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* at No. 74 is clear: 'They try to associate human beings with their revolt against God.'

*To this end, Satan and the demons study in depth the weaknesses of each of us by acting through temptation on our psychic sphere with the intention of altering the judgement of our intellect and obtaining the consent of our will. To tempt us, they use two powerful allies: the 'flesh' and the 'world'.*

The flesh is our human nature that was wounded by original sin and remains vulnerable even after baptism, because it is inclined to evil by what traditional language refers to as concupiscence. The world is not simply the environment in which we live or the human race in general, but, as the evangelist John writes, those who, with varying degrees of consciousness, live separated from God, forming the group of those who, in effect, serve the 'prince of this world', that is, Satan, spreading sin in society.

As the Pope reminded us, the world, including the technological means created and managed by man, continually presents us with opportunities for sin, instigating us to do the opposite of what Jesus taught us.

*So it is that the devil, through the world, suggests scandals and bad example, corrupt shows, refined and immoral pleasures and amusements to us as lovable and imitable.*

And at the same time he sows discord, stirs up wars, creates divisions, confuses minds even through ideologies clothed in false humanitarianism. Today, he uses the powerful means of

social communication, media and social media, to orient and condition humanity's thinking against God, separating it from his Love.

A temptation with which Satan has always undermined human beings, and which Pope Francis pointed out in his catechesis, is that of esotericism, occultism, witchcraft and Satanism. Satan strives to make people believe that through these practices one can obtain spiritual elevation, extraordinary powers, self-realisation and the fulfilment of one's desires and happiness. In reality, it is exactly the opposite.

By adhering to magic and occult practices human beings treads the path indicated by Satan, as they grow more and more in their desire to want to become like God, taking up the ancient challenge of the rebellious angels, and deceptively putting themselves in the place of God. Their downfall at that point is inevitable.

In conclusion, it must never be forgotten that the devilish temptation does not produce its devastating consequences if our human will, with God's help, strives to resist it.

*We, in fact, are free to accept or reject the devil's suggestions.*

And God, for his part, among the various aids, gives us the ability to know how to distinguish between what he suggests to us and what the devil suggests to us.

St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians teaches us how to repel the devil: 'Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil' (Eph 6:11) and then adds 'be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power' (Eph 6:10).

We must be vigilant in prayer, assiduous in the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, frequently spending time with Jesus in Eucharistic adoration. In particular, we must cultivate a true Marian devotion, lovingly praying the Rosary and, united with Our Lady, perform our daily duties well in a spirit of faith and love for all.

If then, through lack of vigilance or otherwise, temptation should sometimes prevail and we should fall into sin, we must not lose hope. The Lord is always ready to forgive his children who, sincerely repentant, knock at the door of his mercy. To this end, he instituted the sacrament of Confession, which, let us remember, not only serves to forgive sins, but is also a means of bringing about the ongoing conversion that we need.

*Father Francesco Bamonte, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (I.C.S.M.), exorcist and vice-president of [the International Exorcist Association](#) ( former president for two consecutive terms from 2012 to 2023), author of several books.  
Source: agensir.it, with permission of the author*

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## **The new rooms of the Salesian General Postulation**

*On 4 June 2024, the new rooms of the Salesian General Postulation located at the Zeffirino Namuncurà community in Via della Bufalotta in Rome were opened and blessed by the then Rector Major, Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime. In the plan to restructure the headquarters, the Rector Major with his Council decided to locate the rooms relating to the Salesian General Postulation in this new Salesian presence in Rome.*

From Don Bosco to the present day we recognise a tradition of holiness that deserves attention, because it is the embodiment of the charism that originated with him and that has been expressed in a plurality of states of life and forms. We are talking about men and women, young people and adults, consecrated and lay people, bishops and missionaries

who in different historical, cultural and social contexts in time and space have made the Salesian charism shine with special light, representing a heritage that plays an effective role in the life and community of believers and for people of good will. The Postulation accompanies **64 Causes of Beatification and Canonisation concerning 179 Saints, Blesseds, Venerables, Servants of God**. It is worth noting that about half of the Salesian Family groups (15 out of 32) have at least one Cause of Beatification and Canonisation underway.

The **plans for the work** were drawn up and supervised by architect Toti Cameroni. Having identified the space for the location of the Postulation rooms, which originally comprised a long and wide corridor and a large hall, it then went on to the study of their distribution based on the requirements. The final solution was thus designed and realised:

**The library** with full-height bookcases divided into 40×40 cm squares that completely cover the walls. The purpose is to collect and store the various publications on saintly figures, in the knowledge that the lives and writings of the saints have, since ancient times, constituted frequent reading among the faithful, arousing conversion and a desire for a better life: they reflect the splendour of Christ's goodness, truth and charity. In addition, this space is also well suited for personal research, hosting groups and meetings.

From here we move on to **the reception** area, which is intended to be a space for spirituality and meditation, as in the visits to the monasteries of Mount Athos, where the guest was first introduced to the chapel of the relics of the saints: that is where the heart of the monastery was located and from there came the incitement to holiness for the monks. In this space there is a series of small **showcases** illuminating reliquaries or valuables related to Salesian holiness. The right-hand wall is lined with wooden **panelling** with replaceable panels depicting some of the Salesian

Family's saints, blessed, venerable and servants of God.

A door leads into the largest room of the postulation: **the archives**. A 640 linear metre compactor allows for the archiving of a large number of documents relating to the various processes of Beatification and Canonisation. A long chest of drawers is located under the windows: there are liturgical images and vestments.

A small corridor from the reception area, where canvases and paintings can be admired on the walls, leads first into **two brightly lit offices** with furnishings and then into the **relics case**. Also in this space, furniture fills the walls, cabinets and drawers accommodate the relics and liturgical vestments.

**A storage room and a small room used as a rest area** complete the postulation rooms.

The opening and blessing of these rooms reminds us that we are custodians of a precious heritage that deserves to be known and valued. In addition to the liturgical-celebratory aspect, the spiritual, pastoral, ecclesial, educational, cultural, historical, social, missionary... potential of the Causes must be fully valorised. Holiness recognised, or in the process of being recognised, on the one hand is already a realisation of evangelical radicalism and fidelity to Don Bosco's apostolic project, to be looked to as a spiritual and pastoral resource; on the other hand it is a provocation to live one's vocation faithfully in order to be available to bear witness to love to the extreme. Our Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God are the authentic incarnation of the Salesian charism and the Constitutions or Regulations of our Institutes and Groups in the most diverse times and situations, overcoming that worldliness and spiritual superficiality which undermine our credibility and fruitfulness at the root.

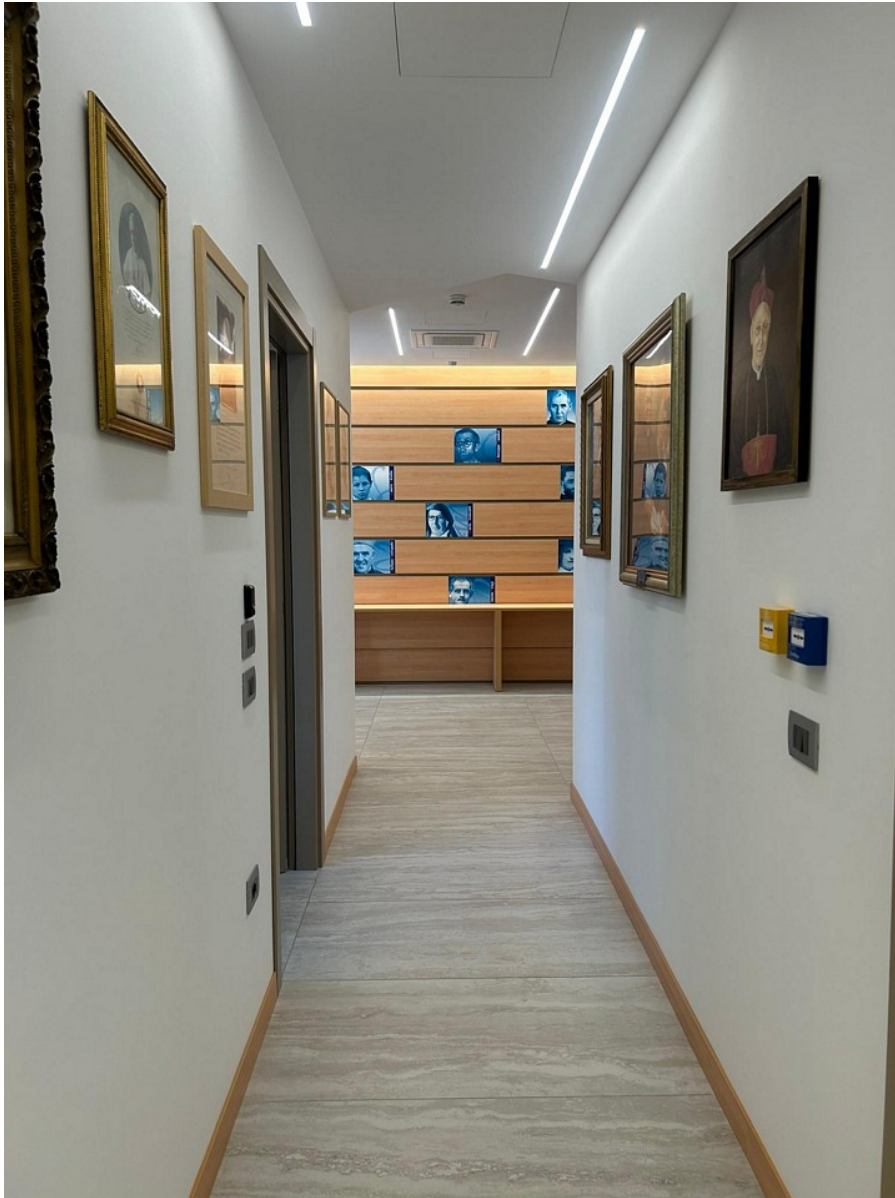
Experience confirms more and more that the promotion and care of the Causes of Beatification and Canonisation of our Family, the celebration together of events

related to holiness, are dynamics of grace that give rise to gospel joy and a sense of charismatic belonging, renewing intentions and commitments of fidelity to the call received and generating apostolic and vocational fruitfulness. The saints are true mystics of the primacy of God in the generous gift of self, prophets of evangelical fraternity, servants of their brothers and sisters with creativity.

In order to promote the Causes of Beatification and Canonisation of the Salesian Family and to get to know at first hand the heritage of holiness that flourished from Don Bosco, the Postulation is available to **welcome people and groups who wish to get to know and visit these environments**, also offering the possibility of mini-retirements with itineraries on specific themes and the presentation of documents, relics, significant objects. **For information write to [postulatore@sdb.org](mailto:postulatore@sdb.org).**

## **Photo gallery – The new rooms of the Salesian General Postulation**































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# 2023

Santidad en la Familia Salesiana  
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La Santità dans la Famille Salesienne  
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