

Luigi Variara the Founder who was himself 'founded'

'Founded' in a glance that marked a lifetime

Louis Variara was born on 15 January 1875 in Viarigi (Asti). Don Bosco had come to this village in 1856 to preach a mission. And it was to Don Bosco that the father, on 1 October 1887, entrusted his son to take him to Valdocco. Don Bosco would die four months later, but the knowledge that Louis had of him was enough to mark him for life. He himself remembered the event as follows: "It was in the winter season and one afternoon we were playing in the large courtyard of the oratory when suddenly there was a shout from one side to the other: 'Don Bosco, Don Bosco!' Instinctively we all rushed towards the spot where our good Father appeared, whom they were taking out for a ride in his carriage. We followed him to the place where he was to get into the vehicle; immediately Don Bosco was surrounded by a crowd of his beloved boys. I was anxiously searching for a way to put myself in a place where I could see him at my leisure, for I longed to meet him. I got as close as I could, and as they helped him into the carriage, he gave me a gently look, and his eyes rested intently on me. I don't know what I felt at that moment... it was something I cannot express! That day was one of the happiest for me; I was sure that I had met a saint, and that that saint had read in my soul something that only God and he could know."

He asked to become a Salesian: he entered the novitiate on 17 August 1891 and completed it on 2 October 1892 with perpetual vows in the hands of Blessed Michael Rua, who whispered in his ear: "Variara, don't vary!" He studied philosophy at Valsalice, where he met the Venerable Fr Andrea Beltrami. Here, in 1894, Fr Michael Unia, the famous missionary who had recently started working among the lepers in Agua de Dios, Colombia, passed by. "What an astonishment and joy" Frn Variara recounts" when, among the 188 companions

who had the same aspiration, fixing his gaze on me, he said 'This one is mine'".

He arrived at Agua de Dios on 6 August 1894. The place had a population of 2,000, 800 of whom were lepers. He immersed himself totally in his mission. Gifted with musical skills, he organised a band that immediately created a festive atmosphere in the "City of Sorrow". He transformed the sadness of the place with Salesian cheerfulness, with music, theatre, sport and the lifestyle of the Salesian oratory.

On 24 April 1898, he was ordained a priest and soon proved to be an excellent spiritual director. Among his penitents were members of the Association of the Daughters of Mary, a group of about 200 girls, many of whom were lepers. It was in the face of this realisation that the first idea of consecrated young women, albeit lepers, was born in him. The Congregation of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary began on 7 May 1905. It was "founded" in full submission to religious obedience and, a unique case in the history of the Church. He founded the first religious community made up of people affected by leprosy or daughters of leprosy sufferers. He wrote: "Never have I felt as happy to be a Salesian as I do this year, and I bless the Lord for sending me to this leprosarium, where I have learnt not to let heaven be stolen from me."

Ten years had passed since he arrived at Agua de Dios: a happy decade full of achievements, including the completion of the "Don Miguel Unia" kindergarten. But now a period of suffering and misunderstandings was beginning for the generous missionary. This period would last 18 years, until his death at Cúcuta in Colombia on 1 February 1923 at 48 years of age and 24 of priesthood.

Fr Variara knew how to combine in himself both fidelity to the work that the Lord asked of him, and submission to the orders that his legitimate superior imposed on him and that seemed to lead him away from the ways willed by God. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 14 April 2002.

Founded in spiritual friendship

In Turin-Valsalice, Fr Variara got to know the Venerable Andrea Beltrami, a Salesian priest stricken with consumption, who had offered himself as a victim to God for the conversion of all sinners in the world. A spiritual friendship was born between Fr Variara and Fr Beltrami, and Fr Variara was to be inspired by him when he founded the Congregation of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in Colombia, to whom he proposed 'victim consecration'.

The Venerable Andrea Beltrami is the forerunner of the victim-oblative dimension of the Salesian charism, "The mission that God entrusts to me is to pray and to suffer" he said. "Neither to heal nor to die, but to live to suffer", was his motto. Very exact in his observance of the Rule, he had a filial openness to his superiors and an ardent love for Don Bosco and the Congregation. His bed became an altar and pulpit, where he immolated himself together with Jesus and from which he taught how to love, how to offer and how to suffer. His little room became his whole world, from which he wrote and in which he celebrated his bloody Mass: "I offer myself as a victim with Him, for the sanctification of priests, for the people of the whole world", he repeated; but his Salesianity also led him to have relationships with the outside world. He offered himself as a victim of love for the conversion of sinners and for the consolation of the suffering. Fr Beltrami fully grasped the sacrificial dimension of the Salesian charism, desired by the founder Don Bosco.

Fr Variara's daughters wrote of Fr Beltrami as follows: "We are poor young people struck down by the terrible disease of leprosy, violently torn and separated from our parents, deprived in a single moment of our liveliest hopes and our most ardent desires... We felt the caressing hand of God in the holy encouragements and pitiful industries of Fr Louis Variara in the face of our acute pains of body and soul. Persuaded that it is the will of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and finding it easy to accomplish, we began to offer ourselves as

victims of expiation, following the example of Fr Andrea Beltrami, a Salesian.”

Founded in the Hearts of Jesus and Mary

Founder ... founded, of the Institute of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. In his life he encountered great difficulties, such as in 1901 when the “Don Miguel Unia” house was being built, but he entrusted himself to the Virgin, writing: “Now more than ever I have confidence in the success of this work, Mary Help of Christians will help me”; “I only have money to pay for one week, so ... it is up to Mary Help of Christians, because the work is in her hands.” In painful moments, Father Variara renewed his devotion to the Virgin, thus finding the serenity and trust in God to continue his mission.

In the great obstacles he encountered in founding the Congregation of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts, Father Variara acted in the same way as at other times. At the time he had to leave Agua de Dios. In the same way he acted when he was told he had contracted leprosy. “Some days” he confessed, “despair assails me, with thoughts that I hasten to banish by invoking the Virgin.” And to his spiritual daughters, far away and removed from his paternal guidance, he wrote: “... Jesus will be your strength, and Mary Help of Christians will spread her mantle over you.” “I have no illusions” he wrote on another occasion, “I leave everything in the hands of the Virgin.” “May Jesus and Mary be blessed a thousand times over, live always in our hearts.”

The Don Bosco of Naples. The

oratory of a thousand trades

The origin of the Salesian presence in Naples goes back to Don Bosco himself; Naples was the southernmost city visited by Don Bosco between 29 and 31 March 1880. On this occasion Don Bosco celebrated the Eucharist in the church of St Joseph in Via Medina, assisted by a young altar server called Peppino Brancati. A few years later the Neapolitan boy went to Valdocco to Don Bosco and became the first Salesian from southern Italy; a family home in Torre Annunziata was also dedicated to him.

On the outskirts of Naples, in a district called Doganella, the sons of Don Bosco began their activities in 1934 in poor premises that were insufficient to accommodate the large numbers of young people who flocked around them.

Twenty years later, after the terrible storm of the war had passed, in 1954 they set to work on the large Institute that exists today, built with conspicuous contributions from private benefactors and organisations.

On 28 May 1959, it was opened by the President of the Republic, Giovanni Gronchi. In the centenary year of Don Bosco's death, on 21 October 1988, the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganò opened the Don Bosco Social Centre in which the Institute was redesigned according to the needs of the times and in dynamic fidelity to the Founder.

Today the Don Bosco of Naples presents itself as a dynamic reality open to its local area. In accordance with the charism of Don Bosco, it responds to the new educational poverty found in the city.

Naples is a beautiful and complex city that generates complex problems, and it is for this reason that our Salesian house has developed in such a way that it responds to a simple unifying criterion: the oratory criterion, the Oratory of a Thousand Trades!

A house that welcomes

Over the years, the Salesians have been able to reinvent its call to be welcoming, from the large boarding schools of the 1960s to family communities, more child-friendly structures with individualised educational projects. In our house we have three of them! The first is the "Il Sogno" (The Dream) family community, run by the Salesian APS "Piccoli Passi grandi sogni" (Small Steps, Big Dreams), founded in 2007. In its 15 years of existence it has welcomed 120 youngsters, mostly from Naples and the province, from both penal and administrative areas. In 2017, Naples experienced the refugee landings emergency and the Salesians responded: the community for unaccompanied foreign minors, known as "Il Ponte" was born. These are children who have faced endless journeys amidst a thousand dangers to come to Europe. For most of them, Libya was the most traumatic stage. But that is not enough... in 2018, faced with the dramatic situation of minors abandoned on the streets, especially around the railway station, the rapid reception "La zattera" community was set up. It is a 24-hour educational emergency room to which the police, social workers or citizens can always turn to provide a roof, a meal, clothes but above all the chance to start again. More than 250 young people from 32 countries around the world have passed through these two communities! Among the stories of redemption and rebirth of these young people, I like to tell Mustafà's story, a 17-year-old from Somalia. He was found by the police lying on the ground at central station. I remember the evening when he arrived in the porter's lodge of our centre accompanied by the social worker, welcomed by Pietro and Fr Vanni. He looked terrified, but above all I noticed that he could not walk; in Libyan prisons they had broken his hip. It has been three years since Mustafà took the third grade with us, had surgery, and now walks quite well; he has enrolled in the first year of our Vocational Training Centre. Every time I see him I think back to that evening in the porter's lodge and I think of Don Bosco's miracles.

School that prepares for life

Don Bosco used to say, my boys have “intelligence in their hands” and this applies all the more to Neapolitan boys. Naples, however, is also the city in Italy with the highest school drop-out rate. How can we combat early school leaving by leveraging the intelligence in the hands of Neapolitan girls and boys? Vocational training! In 2018 we inaugurated a new Vocational Training Centre together with other partners who share this great educational mission: the *San Gennaro Foundation*, the *Franca and Alberto Riva Foundation*, *IF learn and do*, *Cooperativa il Millepiedi*, *Cometa Formazione*. The *School of Doing* was born, an innovative, beautiful school that makes educational focus and the relationship with companies its hallmark. With the two “logistics systems and services operator” and “motor vehicle repair operator” courses, we are giving a concrete response to local young people.

Alongside these two structured three-year courses, the Oratory of a Thousand Trades offers many workshops in which to practise, experiment, learn a trade, find one’s own place in the world: the “Anem e Pizza” pizzeria workshop, the “Cap Appost” hairdresser’s workshop, the “Le Ali” centre with the possibility it offers of qualifying as a cook, waiter and bar tender, the Don Bosco band that offers the opportunity for young people to learn and play an instrument, and many other possibilities, many other trades.

A Church that evangelises

Our Salesian community runs the Don Bosco Parish in the Amicizia district. It is an evangelising presence in an area that sees in us Salesians a point of reference, a constant presence that accompanies in all seasons of life and all situations of life, given that our community also takes care of the pastoral care of St John Bosco Hospital.

The central moment of oratory life is prayer with the Salesian good night, when all sectors and all projects stop to dedicate a few minutes to converse with God in simple

words close to each day. So it is that the children who attend the day centre, the street education workshops, the territorial projects with the schools, the boys in the football school and the youngsters who freely enter the oratory recognise themselves as belonging to the same big Salesian family. Fr Michael's "call" to prayer at 5.30 p.m. represents an essential educational rite for our work, because education also needs its rites!

A playground to meet as friends

The playground is the geographical and charismatic centre of our work. Don Bosco has a beautiful and spacious courtyard/playground with many fields, a large portico, a "square" on the scale of young people, the square of joy. This space is all the more precious because it is located in a part of the city that has no space dedicated to young people, who are often forced to stay on the streets with all the dangers that entails. I still remember one sunny afternoon in the courtyard when a mother arrived, almost with tears in her eyes, leaving her children in the oratory, saying "thank goodness you Salesians are here". A few minutes earlier in a nearby square, a little girl walking with her grandmother had been stuck by a bullet. Aware that we cannot educate alone, we have built a network with other agencies in the area, family, school, social services, parishes, associations.

The courtyard/playground is inhabited daily by hundreds of children and dozens of educators who make it an educational space to meet as friends. Sport open to all, then allows us to engage with hundreds of boys and girls with their families.

Over these years I have become more and more convinced that Don Bosco with his educational style, his loving-kindness has so much to give to Naples, but also that Naples with its beauty, its brilliance, enriches Don Bosco, makes him more likeable, in short they are a winning couple!

Fabio Bellino

Blessed Titus Zeman, martyr for vocations

A man destined for elimination

Titus Zeman was born in Vajnory, near Bratislava (in Slovakia), on 4 January 1915, the first of ten children in a simple family. At the age of 10, he was suddenly healed through Our Lady's intercession and promised to "be her son forever" and become a Salesian priest. He began to realise this dream in 1927, after overcoming opposition from his family for two years. He had asked the family to sell a field to be able to pay for his studies, and had added, "If I had died, you would well have found the money for my funeral. Please use that money to pay for my studies."

The same determination constantly returns in Zeman: when the communist regime established itself in Czechoslovakia and persecuted the Church, Father Titus defended the crucifix symbol (1946), paying with his dismissal from the school where he taught. Having providentially escaped the dramatic "Night of the Barbarians" and the deportation of religious (13-14 April 1950), he decided to cross the Iron Curtain with the young Salesians to Turin, where he was welcomed by the Rector Major Fr Peter Ricaldone. After two successful crossings (summer and autumn 1950), the expedition failed in April 1951. Fr Zeman faced an initial week of torture and another ten months of preventive detention, with further heavy torture, until the trial on 20-22 February 1952. He would then undergo 12 years in detention (1952-1964) and almost five years on parole, always spied on and persecuted (1964-1969).

In February 1952, the Prosecutor General demanded the death penalty for him for espionage, high treason and

illegal border crossing, which was commuted to 25 years in hard prison without parole. However, Fr Zeman was branded a "man destined for elimination" and experienced life in forced labour camps. He was forced to grind radioactive uranium by hand and without protection; he spent long periods in solitary confinement, with a food ration six times less than that of the others. He becomes seriously ill with heart, lung and neurological diseases. On 10 March 1964, having served half his sentence, he was released from prison on parole for seven years. He was physically unrecognisable and experienced a period of intense suffering, also spiritual, due to the ban on publicly exercising his priestly ministry. He died, after receiving amnesty, on 8 January 1969.

Saviour of vocations to the point of martyrdom

Fr Titus lived his vocation and the special mission to which he felt called to work for the salvation of vocations with a great spirit of faith, embracing the hour of "ordeal" and "sacrifice" and testifying to his ability, also due to the grace received from God, to face the offering of his life, the passion of imprisonment and torture and finally death with a Christian, consecrated and priestly conscience. This is attested by the rosary of 58 beads, one for each period of torture, which he made of bread and thread, and above all the reference to *Ecce homo*, as the One who kept him company in his sufferings, and without Whom he would not have been able to face them. He guarded and defended the faith of young people in times of persecution, to oppose the communist re-education and ideological redevelopment. His journey of faith was a continuous "shining forth" of virtues, the fruit of an intense interior life, which translates into a courageous mission, in a country where Communism intended to wipe out every trace of Christian life. Fr Titus' entire life was summed up in encouraging others to that "fidelity in vocation" with which he decisively followed his own. His was a total love for the Church and his own religious vocation and apostolic mission. His bold undertakings flow from this

unified and unifying love.

Witness of hope

The heroic witness of Blessed Titus Zeman is one of the most beautiful pages of faith that the Christian communities of Eastern Europe and the Salesian Congregation wrote during the harsh years of religious persecution by communist regimes in the last century. Particularly resplendent was his commitment to young consecrated and priestly vocations, decisive for the future of the faith in those territories.

With his life, Fr Titus showed himself to be a man of unity, who broke down barriers, mediated in conflicts, always looked to the integral good of the person; moreover, he always considered an alternative, a better solution, a non-surrender to unfavourable circumstances to be possible. In the same years in which some apostatised or betrayed, and others became discouraged, he strengthened the hope of young men called to the priesthood. His obedience was creative, not formal. He acted not only for the good of his neighbour, but in the best possible way. Thus, he did not limit himself to organising the clerics' escapes abroad, but accompanied them by paying in person, allowing them to reach Turin, in the conviction that 'at Don Bosco's house' they would have an experience destined to mark their entire lives. At the root of this was the awareness that to save a vocation is to save many lives: first of all that of the one called, then those that an obeyed vocation reaches, in this case through religious and priestly life.

It is significant that the martyrdom of Fr Titus Zeman was recognised in the wake of the bicentenary of the birth of St John Bosco. His testimony is the incarnation of Jesus' vocational call and pastoral predilection for children and young people, especially for his young Salesian confreres, a predilection that manifested itself, as in Don Bosco, in a true 'passion', seeking their good, putting all his energies,

all his strength, all his life into this in a spirit of sacrifice and offering, “Even were I to lose my life, I would not consider it wasted, knowing that at least one of those I had helped has become a priest in my place.”

A year of dreams from above

Dear friends: we are on the threshold of a new year, 2024, a very special year because we are commemorating the bicentenary of Don Bosco's dream when he was 9. This dream was much more than a charming episode of a 9-year-old boy; it was like a vision and a premonition of what he was to do in the course of his life.

62 years later, celebrating his first and last Mass in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome, consecrated two days earlier, Don Bosco burst into tears more than 15 times because, like in a film in rapid succession, he saw all the scenes of his life unfold, realising that he had always been guided by Divine Providence and in particular led by the hand of Her, the Help of Christians, to the point of saying: “She did everything.”

That New Year's Eve in 1862

This commemoration leads me to think of a significant New Year's Eve in Don Bosco's life. It was the first of January 1862.

The *Biographical Memoirs* recount that Don Bosco, ill until the day before, announced that he had important news to give to all those at the Oratory, young and old. “It is impossible to describe the emotion, caused by Don Bosco's promise, which in the meantime stirred up all the youngsters. With what impatience they spent the night from 31 December to 1 January,

and the following day! With what anxiety they waited for the evening to hear what the good father would tell them!" recounts Fr Lemoyne. "Finally, after the prayers, the young men waited in profound silence for Don Bosco, who raised his chair and revealed the mystery and said: – the strenna I am giving you is not mine. What would you say if Our Lady herself came in person to say a word to each one of you? If she had prepared for each one a note of her own to show him what he most needed, or what she wanted from him? Well, this is exactly how it is. Our Lady gives each one a gift! I see that some will want to know and will ask: – How did this happen? Did Our Lady write the notes? Did Our Lady herself speak to Don Bosco? Is Don Bosco Our Lady's secretary? – I answer: I tell you nothing more than that. I wrote the notes, but how this came about I cannot say, nor is there anyone who would take it upon themselves to question me, for that would put me in the wrong. Let everyone be content to know that the note came from Our Lady. It is something unique! I have been asking for this grace for several years and I have finally obtained it. Each of you therefore consider the item as if it came from the mouth of the Virgin Mary herself. Come therefore to my room and I will give each of you your own note." Don Bosco could say this because he himself had received from Our Lady, at the age of nine, the message that would mark the whole course of his life.

Then, continuing the narrative of that very evening, the Salesians began to pass by Don Bosco's room to collect their note. Many revealed what it said. The one made out to Fr Bonetti, who wrote the daily chronicle, said: *Increase the number of my children.* The good priest wrote this recommendation in his chronicle and added: "In the meantime, my sweetest Mother, you who have given me such dear advice, give me the means to put it into practice, and see to it that I truly increase this beautiful number, but that I also be included in it."

Fr Rua's said: "Have recourse to me with confidence in the needs of your soul."

The next morning, the young men crowded around the door of Don Bosco's room to receive their note. I can easily imagine how Don Bosco knew how to get to the heart of every Salesian and every boy in the Oratory, not with an invention but with the profound conviction of what Our Lady wanted for each one of them, and at the same time he managed to do it in that way in which Don Bosco was always a true master and a true genius: I am referring to the art of personal encounter, dialogue, of the gaze that reaches deep into the heart.

And as I read this, I wondered if it might not happen to us. We sent greeting cards to many people. If Mary had sent a card to the Salesian Congregation and to each one of us, to the beautiful and great Salesian Family, Don Bosco's family, what would she have written?

Walking like Don Bosco

It is nice to imagine it. I assure you that in my imagination there are so many beautiful things that Our Lady could ask of us both personally and as the family of Don Bosco, born to accompany the boys and girls of the world – especially the poorest and neediest – in their process of growth, maturation, transformation...

The mystery of the New Year, which at bottom develops the mystery of Christmas, tells us, "You are not conditioned by the past. You can start afresh today, because there is something new in you. Take the divine Child in your arms, who brings you into contact with all the new that is available, genuine and intact, in your soul. Start again with the little ones, the young ones. Trust the new in you! Every day is the first day."

Perhaps it would be enough to make our own the words Mary says to John Bosco in her dream: "Here is the field of your work. Make yourself humble, strong and energetic." Perhaps a more "spiritual" advice was expected, but only those who are humble can be kind because they can enjoy the presence of others. Humility is the door of love towards the little ones, the helpless, the wounded by life.

Only people who are solid and strong can walk behind Jesus today in spite of everything. For we want to see the prisoners free, and the oppressed no longer oppressed; a message even the poor can still believe in.

It means listening to the voice of the burning bush that will never be consumed: "I will break your chains and make you walk tall." Mary wants the Salesians, and all her Family, the beautiful family of Don Bosco of all times to walk like Don Bosco. And for this the best guarantee will always be to have Her as the true Teacher who is above all Mother. A true grace for our family.

This is how the Rectors Major have expressed it throughout our history. As did my predecessor Fr Ziggiotti: "I will give you a Teacher under whose discipline you can become wise, and without whom all wisdom becomes foolishness" is the fateful word of the first dream, pronounced by the mysterious character, 'the Son of She whom your mother has taught you to greet three times a day.' So, it is Jesus who gives Don Bosco his Mother as his Teacher and infallible guide on the hard path of his entire life. How can we be thankful enough for this extraordinary gift from Heaven to our Family?".

Happy New Year 2024 with my best wishes for each of you and your families. May it be a beautiful year for all of us and a year of Peace for this still suffering humanity.

**Wonders of the Mother of God
invoked under the title of
Mary Help of Christians**

(1/13)

In 1868 St John Bosco printed a publication entitled 'Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians'. It was his contribution to making the Virgin Mary known not only under the most important title, that of "Mother of God", but also as "Help of Christians". It was She who had asked: "Our Lady wants us to honour her under the title of Mary Help of Christians". We begin today to present this work of hers.

Aedificavit sibi domum. (Prov. IX,1).

Mary built herself a house.

To the reader

The title of *Auxilium Christianorum* attributed to the august Mother of the Saviour is not a new thing in the Church of Jesus Christ. In the holy books of the Old Testament Mary is called the Queen who stands at the right hand of her Divine Son clothed in gold and surrounded by variety. *Adstitit Regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato, circumdata varietate*: Psalm 44. This mantle gilded and encircled with various gems and diamonds are like the many gems and diamonds, or titles by which Mary is usually called. Therefore, when we call the Blessed Virgin the Help of Christians, it is but to name a special title which befits Mary like a diamond above her gilded garments. In this sense Mary was hailed as the Help of Christians from the earliest days of Christianity.

A very special reason why the Church in recent times wants to mention the title of *Auxilium Christianorum* is given by Archbishop Parisis in the following words: "Almost always, when the human race has found itself in extraordinary crises, it has been made worthy, in order to come out of them, to recognise and bless a new perfection in this admirable creature, Mary Most Holy, who is the most magnificent reflection of the Creator's perfections here below." (Nicolas, page 121).

Today's universally felt need to invoke Mary is not particular, but general; no longer are the lukewarm to be inflamed, sinners to be converted, innocents to be preserved. These things are always useful anywhere, with any person. But it is the Catholic Church itself that is assailed. It is assailed in its functions, in its sacred institutions, in its Head, in its doctrine, in its discipline; it is assailed as the Catholic Church, as the centre of truth, as the teacher of all the faithful.

And it is precisely in order to merit special protection from Heaven that Mary is invoked, as the common Mother, as the special Helper of Kings, and of Catholic peoples, as Catholics throughout the world!

Thus the true God was called the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, and such an appellation was directed to invoke divine mercy on behalf of all Israel, and God enjoyed being prayed to in this way, and brought ready succour to his people in their afflictions.

In the course of this booklet we shall see how Mary has truly been established by God as the help of Christians; and how at all times she has shown herself to be such in public calamities, especially in favour of those peoples, sovereigns and armies that suffered or fought for the Faith.

The Church therefore, after having honoured Mary several centuries with the title of *Auxilium Christianorum*, finally instituted a special solemnity in which all Catholics unite with one voice to repeat the beautiful words with which this august Mother of the Saviour is greeted: *Terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata, tu cunctas haereses sola interemisti in universo mundo.*

May the Blessed Virgin help us all to live attached to the doctrine and faith of which the Roman Pontiff, Vicar of Jesus Christ, is the head, and obtain for us the grace to persevere in holy divine service on earth so that we may one day join her in the kingdom of glory in heaven.

Chapter I. Mary recognised with symbols as help of the human race.

Among the means God employs to prepare human beings to receive some great good, it is chiefly that of announcing it long beforehand. For this reason the coming of the Messiah was announced four thousand years beforehand and preceded by many symbols and prophecies.

Now Mary, the august Mother of the Saviour, the true helper of Christians, was too great a blessing not to be pronounced equally with figures representing to human beings the various favours she would do to the world.

Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Mary sister of Moses, Deborah, Susanna, Esther, Judith represent in special ways the glories of Mary as the distinguished benefactress of the chosen people, or as a rare model of all virtues.

The tree of life, Noah's ark, Jacob's ladder, the burning bush, the ark of the covenant, David's tower, the fortress of Jerusalem, Solomon's well-guarded garden and sealed fountain, the rose of Jericho, the star of Jacob, the morning sunrise, the aqueduct of clear waters, are some of the many symbols that the Catholic Church applies to Mary and with which it is customary to explain some of her heavenly privileges or heroic virtues. We will choose only some of these symbols with the application that the Church or the most accredited writers of Mary's glories usually give to them.

We therefore read in the book of Ecclesiasticus that the Holy Spirit puts these words into Mary's mouth: "*Sicut aquaeductus exivi de Paradiso*" like an aqueduct I came out of Paradise. (Eccl. 24:41).

An aqueduct is a channel that serves to receive the waters of the spring and lead them according to the distribution of the rivulets and the need of the flowers to irrigate the land. And in order for the aqueduct to serve its purpose, St Bernard says, it must be long to receive the waters on one side and convey them to the flowers; and Mary is a very long and abundant aqueduct because above all other creatures she was able to ascend to the throne of the Most

High and draw from the fountain of heavenly graces and spread them abundantly among men. That is why, St Bernard continues, people lacked the torrents of graces for so long. It is because they lacked an aqueduct capable of communicating with God as the true source of graces and spreading them over the earth. But Mary was precisely this channel that was unblemished by inviolate trust, most humble by virginity, hidden by love of solitude, admirable by true humility, diffusive by piety, abundant in waters by fullness of grace, defended by the custody of the senses, not of lead, but rather of gold by royal nobility and sublime charity.

Through this aqueduct, says Cardinal Ugo, the waters of grace are transmitted to the Church; hence it is that the devil, the enemy of all our good, seeks to impede the course of these salutary waters by making war on the devotion of Mary; in the same way that Holofernes, not being able to conquer the city of Bethulia otherwise, ordered the course of the river that introduced the waters into the city to be cut off and diverted.

The most blessed Virgin Mary is also figured under the type of a great queen, saying King David in his psalms: *Adstitit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato, circumdata varietate* (Ps. 44). And why is Mary queen? Why stand at the right hand of Jesus in a golden robe, surrounded by variety? She is queen because of the great power she has in heaven as Mother of God; she sits at the right hand of Jesus to appease his indignation, to help us in our miseries, to be our helper, our sovereign advocate.

A good lawyer must have diligence, power with the judge, authority with the royal court, and knowledge in handling cases. And David in that text encloses precisely these four gifts in Mary in the most eminent degree. She stands at the right hand of the judge, *adstitit a dextris* almost to check that divine justice does not overcome mercy, this is supreme diligence. *Adstitit regina*, now everyone knows that the queen undoubtedly has great power over the judge's soul, interceding before the sentence is passed, and obtaining

pardon if the sentence is already pronounced. *In vestitu deaurato*, the golden robe is an image of Mary's wisdom, because gold represents wisdom. *Circumdata varietate*, surrounded by variety, that is, endowed with the multiplicity of the merits and glories of the saints. For in Mary is found the gold colour of the Apostles, the red of the martyrs, the blue of the confessors and the white of the virgins. All these saints surround Mary and proclaim her their queen because she possessed in the highest degree the various virtues that these saints in particular possessed.

That if we consider Mary already seated in heaven upon a throne of glory, we find her raised to the highest dignity to which any creature can rise. For we do not find Mary in the class of virgins, in the order of confessors, in the ranks of the martyrs, in the sacred college of the Apostles, in the choir of the Patriarchs and Prophets as a mere member almost one of them. She surpasses in excellence all the heavenly hierarchies and sits upon a throne of most precious workmanship at the right hand of the King of heaven Jesus Christ her Son as true Queen and Lady of all Paradise.

Daniel Agricola in the work known as *De corona duodecim stellarum*, explaining this text of David, says that Mary stands at the right hand of Christians to help them, because the Latin word *adstare* means to stand by one to assist him. The same author also continues to unfold the text and observes that the Latin word *adstare* in this place also means to stand in defence, and Mary stands at our right hand to defend us from the constant assaults of the demons.

St Jerome, when the word *varietate* is found in the Latin text, explains that while the other princesses and queens go dressed in sumptuous garments, Mary is girded and covered with shields with which she defends her children. This sense seems to agree with the other in scripture: *Mille clypei pendent ex ea, omnis armatura fortium*.

The prophet David, narrating the exit of the Hebrew people from Egypt says that they had a cloud that guided their steps by day, and a pillar of fire that lightened

their path by night. St Bernard applying the properties of that cloud and pillar to Mary, says that as the clouds defend us from the excessive ardour of the sun, so Mary protects us from the fire of heavenly vengeance and the flames of concupiscence. Now as the pillar of fire shed light upon the steps of the people of Israel, so does Mary illumine the world with the rays of her mercy and the multiplicity of her graces. What would we blinded wretches do in the darkness of this century if we did not have this beneficent light, this luminous pillar? (D. Ber. Serm. de Nativ. B. M.).

But for all other miseries does not the sweetest Queen of Heaven give us help? Blessed James of Varazze applying to her the words of the Ecclesiasticus: *In Jerusalem potestas mea*, says that Mary offers us her help in life, in death and after death. Such is Mary's power that she can extend it to these three times. If we have a friend (this writer argues) who benefits us in life, it is certainly a good thing for us; but if he is such as to benefit us even at the point of death, it is a greater good; if then his power comes to help us even after death, then it is a greater good. Now Mary bestows on us precisely this threefold good. In fact, the holy Church, in the praises that she has the faithful sing in honour of Mary, includes these three aids and exclaims: *Maria mater gratiae, dulcis parens clementiae; Tu nos ab hoste protege, et mortis hora suscipe*. First, she helps us in life; for in this life others are righteous and others sinners; now Mary helps the righteous because she preserves God's grace in them, hence she is called *Mater gratiae* mother of grace; she helps sinners because she imparts divine mercy to them, hence she is called *dulcis parens clementiae*.

Secondly, she helps us in death, because she defends us there from the wiles of the devil; for this enemy is so audacious that he not only comes to the bed of dying sinners, but to that of the saints, even using all malice to make them fall. But when one of her devotees dies, the Blessed Virgin hastens with motherly solicitude, protects and defends him, so she prays to the Church: *Tu nos ab hoste protege*,

protect us from the enemy.

Thirdly, she does not abandon us even after death. It sometimes happens that at the death of some saints the Angels come and lead their souls to heaven, but when the true devotees of Mary die she comes in person and receives their souls and introduces them into the beautiful paradise. Then he adds *Et mortis hora suscipe*.

We read in Book III of Kings that Bathsheba mother of Solomon was begged by her son Adonijah to intercede with the king for a grace. Bathsheba was moved by that prayer and presented herself to the king. As soon as Solomon saw her appear, he descended from the throne, went to receive her, and even made her ascend to the royal seat and sit at his right hand, saying to her: *Pete, mater mea, neque enim fas est ut avertam faciem tuam*. Now who would dare to think that Jesus on the throne of glory, at the prayers that Mary presents to him, should be any less generous towards her than Solomon was towards his mother?

Indeed, the learned Mendoza observes here that Mary's grace and authority is so great that not only for Jesus' brothers does she intercede, but also for his enemies, and all that she asks she certainly obtains.

Moses recounts in the book of Numbers that when Mary his sister died, the waters failed. Moses tells Moses in the book of Numbers that when Mary, his sister, died, the waters ceased to abound in the desert for forty years, because of the merits of that holy woman; and applying this to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he says that if the graces of the Church will never again fail to come to men, it is due to Mary, who first on earth and then in heaven interposed her merits before the Most High.

[\(continued\)](#)