

Great saint, great manager

It is not easy to choose, from the hundreds of unpublished letters of Don Bosco that we have recovered in recent decades, the ones that most deserve to be presented and commented on. This time we take a very simple one, but one that in just a few lines summarises an entire project of Salesian educational work and offers us many other interesting facts. It is the one written on 7 May 1877 to a person from Trentino, a certain Daniele Garbari, who had repeatedly asked him on behalf of two brothers how he could found an educational institute in his area, like the ones that Don Bosco was founding throughout Italy, France and Argentina.

Dear Mr Garbari,

My absence from Turin was the cause of the delay in replying to your letters, which I have regularly received. I am very pleased that our institution is well received in these places of yours. The more it is known, the more it will be well-liked by the governments themselves; whether they like it or not, the facts assure us that we must help youngsters at risk in order to make them good citizens or keep them in dishonour in prison.

As for setting up an institute similar to this in the city of Trent or surrounding towns, it does not take much to begin with:

1. A room capable of accommodating a certain number of children, but with their respective workshops inside.
2. Something that can provide a little bread for the Rector and the other people who assist him in the care and management.

The boys are supported

1. by what little monthly boarding fee some of them can pay, or are paid by relatives or other people who recommend them.
2. from the little income the work provides.
3. by grants from municipalities, the government, charitable

congregations, and the donations of private individuals. This is how all our trade houses are run, and with God's help we have progressed well. However, it must be taken as a basis that we have always been, and will always be, uninvolved in anything political.

Our overriding aim is to gather children at risk to make them good Christians and upright citizens. This is the first thing to be made clear to the civil and governmental authorities.

As a priest, then, I must be in full agreement with the ecclesiastical authority; therefore, when it comes to finalising the matter, I would write directly to the Archbishop of Trent, who will certainly not have any difficulties.

Here is my preliminary thought. As the matter continues and more is needed, I will write. Please thank on my behalf all those people who show me kindness.

I wanted to write this myself in my own poor handwriting, but I will hand over the pen to my secretary so that it will be easier to read.

With the greatest esteem and gratitude, I have the honour of being your

Humble servant Fr. Gio Bosco Turin, 7 May 1877

Positive image of Salesian work

First of all, the letter informs us how Don Bosco, after papal approval of the Salesian Congregation (1874), the opening of the first Salesian house in France (1875) and the first missionary expedition to Latin America (1875), was always busy visiting and supporting his already existing works and accepting or not accepting the many that were being proposed to him everywhere over those years. At the time of the letter he had the thought of opening the first houses of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians beyond the one in Mornese – as many as six in the two-year period 1876-1877 – and above all he was interested in establishing himself in Rome, where he had been trying unsuccessfully for more than 10

years to have a place. Nothing came of it. Yet another Piedmontese like Don Bosco, a “priest on the move” like him, was not welcome on the banks of the Tiber, in the capital Rome which was already full of unpopular Piedmontese, certain pontifical authorities and certain Roman clergy. For three years he had to “make do” with being on the outskirts of Rome, i.e. the Castelli Romani and Magliano Sabino.

Paradoxically, the opposite had happened with the city administrations and government authorities of the Kingdom of Italy, where Don Bosco had many, if not friends – their ideas were too far apart, at least great admirers. And for a very simple reason that every government was interested in: to manage the newly-minted country Italy with honest, hard-working, law-abiding citizens, instead of populating the prisons with vagrant “criminals” unable to support themselves and their families with a decent job of their own. Three decades later, in 1900, the famous Jewish anthropologist and criminologist Cesare Lombroso would give Don Bosco full credit when he wrote: “The Salesian institutes represent a colossal and ingeniously organised effort to prevent crime, the only one indeed made in Italy.” As the letter in question well states, the image of Salesian works in which, without taking sides with the various political parties, boys were educated to become “good Christians and upright citizens” was a positive one, even in the Austro-Hungarian Empire to which Trentino and Venezia Giulia belonged at the time.

Typology of a Salesian House

In the continuation of the letter Don Bosco went on to present the structure of a house of education: rooms where the boys could be housed (and he implied at least five things: **courtyard** to play in, **classrooms** to study in, **refectory** to eat in, **dormitory** to sleep in, **church** to pray in) and “**a plant or workshops**” where a trade could be taught with which the youngsters could live and have a future once they left the institute. As for economic resources, he indicated

three assets: the minimum monthly boarding fee that the boys' parents or relatives could pay, the small income from the craft workshops, public grants (government, municipalities) and especially private charity. It was precisely the Valdocco experience. But Don Bosco was silent here about one important thing: the total **dedication** to the educational mission by the Rector and his close collaborators, priests and lay people, who for the price of a loaf of bread and a bed spent 24 hours a day in work, prayer, teaching and assistance. At least that was the way it was done in the Salesian houses of the time, highly appreciated by both civil and religious authorities, bishops first and foremost, without whose approval it was evidently not possible to found a house "that educated by evangelising and evangelised by educating" like a Salesian one.

Results

We do not know if there was a follow-up to this letter. Mr Garbari's Salesian foundation project certainly did not go ahead. Nor did dozens of other foundation proposals. But it is historically certain that many other instructors, priests and lay people throughout Italy were inspired by Don Bosco's experience, founding similar works, inspired by his educational model and his preventive system.

Garbari had to consider himself satisfied, however: Don Bosco had suggested a strategy that worked in Turin and elsewhere... and then he had his hand-written letter which, however difficult to 'decipher', was still a letter from a saint. So much so that he jealously preserved it and today it is kept in the Central Salesian Archives in Rome.

An interesting court case at Valdocco

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

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

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

A rather serious incident

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

To the Urban Magistrate of the City of Turin

Having seen the summons to be served on cleric Mazzarello, assistant in the bookbinders’ workshop at the house known as the Oratory of St Francis de Sales; having also seen the

summons to be served on young Federico Parodi, Giovanni Castelli and Giuseppe Guglielmi, and having carefully considered the content of the summons, John Bosco, director of this establishment, in his desire to settle the matter with less disturbance on the part of the authorities of the urban magistrate's office, believes he can intervene on behalf of all concerned in the case concerning the young Carlo Boglietti, and is ready to give whomever the greatest satisfaction.

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

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

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

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

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

-that the costs of this suit be charged to him.

– that neither Carlo Boglietti nor his relative or councillor Mr Caneparo Stefano come to the aforementioned establishment to renew their acts of insubordination and scandals already caused on other occasions.

[Sac. Gio Bosco].

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

The very young Salesian educators of Valdocco were entrusted with the arduous task of re-educating them, and were also authorised to resort to “all means that were deemed appropriate”. Which ones? Certainly, Don Bosco’s Preventive System, whose validity was demonstrated by the experience of two decades at Valdocco. But when the facts were put to the test, “in extreme cases”, for the most incorrigible youngsters, recourse had to be made to the same public force that had brought them there.

In the case in question

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

himself, for families and for society in general, of the rigid, and in his opinion unjustified, application of an article of the penal code.

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

The outcome of the dispute

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

A great collaborator of Don Bosco: Fr Antonio Sala

An important but practically unknown figure in the history of the early years of the Salesian Congregation, he spent his entire Salesian life dealing with financial matters. Dynamic and enterprising, he was a great administrator in the modern

sense. We owe many works that are the current pride of the Congregation to his far-sighted and foresighted vision. But above all his love for Don Bosco was intense.

Childhood and youth

He was born on 29 January 1836 in the Brianza area of Lecco, in Monticello di Olgiate Molgora, diocese of Milan. His father Pietro and his brother, who ran a spinning mill, had married two sisters. They were both very religious families with one son a priest (the Salesian Antonio and his cousin Federico, a theologian and future Auxiliary Bishop in Milan) and one son who was a religious: Ambrogio, Antonio's brother, a Salesian for a few years, and Sister Maria Serafina, Federico's sister, a cloistered religious in Bergamo. Having completed his primary schooling, and a strong and robust teenager, Antonio immediately set to work in the family. As a leader at the parish oratory, he showed an aptitude for priestly life, with his ability to attract boys, organise their entertainment, and take them to church services. Returning from military service in the Austro-Hungarian army, he took responsibility for running the family business, where he revealed excellent administrative skills and great practical sense. When his mother died, young Antonio grew in the desire to become a priest. The parish priest Fr Nava took this on board and wrote to Don Bosco in early 1863, praising the young man's gifts of nature and grace and asking him to accept him at Valdocco. After Don Bosco's immediately positive reply, Fr Nava thanked him and assured him that the very grateful 26-year-old Antonio would arrive at Valdocco as soon as possible. The very generous parish priest undertook to pay in advance for five years, not just the "very modest" school fees requested by Don Bosco, but in the event of his death he would give furniture, silver cutlery and valuables in his possession as collateral.

Student-worker and priest-educator

Arriving in Turin on 5 March 1863 Sala began his secondary school studies. He was at ease at Valdocco, and as a "son of

Mary" [late vocation] he not only made up for the school years he had missed, but, easy-going and practical in business affairs, in his free time he helped the sickly bursar Fr Alasonatti, lent a hand to those who worked to keep the house supplied, went to the market himself and assisted in the first construction works on the Church of Mary Help of Christians. The experience would serve him well for the various Salesian churches and buildings he would personally supervise over the following decades.

On 22 May 1869 Fr Sala was ordained priest, having been at the Lanzo house for four years.

Economer at Valdocco (1869-1880)

Even before the end of the school year, on 3 July 1869 Don Bosco asked him confidentially if he would be willing to move to Valdocco for some time because there was an absolute need for a house economer, since the Economer General, Fr Savio, was overworked. Fr Sala accepted and went down to Valdocco. He would stay there for 26 years, until his death.

There he was able to deepen his hasty theological studies by attending moral lessons at the Convitto for three years: they would be very useful to him in the pastoral ministry he would carry out for many years as ordinary confessor in the Church of Mary Help of Christians, chaplain of the Good Shepherd Institute, extraordinary confessor for the Artigianelli college, and later also spiritual assistant to the St Joseph's women's workshops at the Barolo refuge.

At the meeting of the Superior Council on 11 December 1869 Fr Savio was confirmed as Economer General, but Fr Sala also received many votes, and was formally elected economer at the Oratory Chapter the following January. He was to carry out a formidable economic and administrative activity within the mega work of Valdocco, with several hundred young people, divided between students, artisans, oratorians, clerics, with many classrooms, courtyards, workshops, refectories, dormitories, halls, the Church of Mary Help of Christians, chapels; to this must be added lotteries, buildings, general

maintenance, tax problems, notaries... He was not without difficult moments, so much so that on 27 January 1870 from Florence Don Bosco invited Fr Rua to encourage him.

In January 1873, having started a small lottery with the first prize being a precious copy of Raphael's Madonna di Foligno, Don Bosco entrusted him with the sale of the tickets, planned especially in Lombardy. Fr Sala travelled particularly through the provinces of Milan, Como and Varese, where he could offer written material with requests for donations to the most conspicuous families, whom he felt were close to him in some way and who were perhaps already in contact with Don Bosco. He sent out many of these, but many others were returned to him, so he went looking for other benefactors as far as Rome. One of the first Salesians, Fr Sala performed many other humble services, including the classic assistance in the courtyard and in the workshops and some teaching of young brothers. In 1876 in Rome, he took care of housing both the Salesians destined for the new foundations in Albano, Ariccia and Magliano, and the missionaries who had come to receive a mandate from the Pope. On 17 December 1876 he attended the meetings of the Superior Council for the first time: he would do so for almost 20 years. In 1878 he made inspections in Mornese and Chieri to provide for the necessary adaptation of the FMA houses. In October he did the same for the Salesians at Randazzo in Sicily and then at Este and Mogliano Veneto. He did the same for more than fifteen years. Don Bosco trusted him and he returned the trust right up to his deathbed, indeed even afterwards, as we shall see.

The General Chapter in 1880 elected Fr Sala Economer General, but he also remained Economer at Valdocco for another three years. He immediately set to work.

In April 1881 he had the work on the Church of the Sacred Heart and the Salesian residence resumed in Rome. Then he became interested in the new building in Mogliano Veneto and examined the project for an extensive renovation of the house in La Navarra (France). At the beginning of April the

following year he was back in Mestre to negotiate with the benefactress Astori and to make an inspection of the agricultural school being built at Mogliano; in November he accompanied the first four Salesians there. On 8 July 1883 he signed the specifications for the construction work of the Hospice of St John the Evangelist in Turin and in the autumn he had the rooms of the printing house at Valdocco tidied up, including the director's office, decorating it with curtains on the windows, "deserving" a kindly rebuke from Don Bosco for such "superfluous refinements". In mid-January 1884, for the National Exhibition of Science and Technology in Turin, it was decided to install the complex machine (purchased for the Salesian paper mill in Mathi), which churned out bound books from rags. It was a tough task for Fr Sala to get properly trained Salesian pupils to operate it. It was a resounding success with the public and Don Bosco allowed himself to refuse any prize other than first prize. Shortly afterwards Fr Sala went to Rome to accelerate the work at Sacred Heart so that at the beginning of May Don Bosco could lay the foundation stone of the Hospice, together with Count Colle (who would bring with him an offering of no less than 50,000 lira).

Obviously Fr Sala attended the meetings of the General Council to give his enlightened opinion especially on matters he was interested in: acceptance of works, foundation of a house in Paris, specifications for the one in Lucca, replacement of an old oven with a new one from Vienna at a favourable price, adoption of a "guest house" for the female staff at Valdocco, estimates for lighting costs for the houses in Vienna, Nice and Milan. On 12 September he presented the draft of the official coat of arms of the Salesian Congregation, which, once discussed and corrected, was approved by the Council. At the same meeting he was charged with resolving the dispute over the land in Chieri and the strip of municipal land in Turin used for the Church of Mary Help of Christians, but already compensated for by an exchange. Numerous meetings followed in September and October with the occasional presence

of Fr Sala. On 9 December he dealt with the economic problems of various houses, including those in Sampierdarena, Naples and Schio.

The three years from 1885-1887

For the whole of the following year (1885) he was interested in the house at Faenza for which he “deserved” another fatherly reprimand from Don Bosco for excessive expenditure on the foundations. In April he attended a survey carried out at the College in Lanzo by order of the Civil Court of Turin. On 22 June he presented and had approved the plan to raise the FMA house in Nice by one storey. For the house to be erected in Trent he ensured the availability of adequate local economic resources, confident of the collaboration of the Municipality, but put on alert by Don Bosco who, ever vigilant, reminded him that often “the Municipalities promise then forget”. On 20 September 1885 Fr Sala reported to the Council about the land for the Salesian cemetery that could be purchased for 14,000 lire. He was authorised to try to lower the price and see that the project presented was accomplished. There followed two more years of General Council meetings, of trips to help houses in difficulty due to building, administrative and economic problems. Meanwhile he had been re-elected Economer General (September 1886; he would be re-elected again six years later) and was preparing everything for the solemn consecration of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome (14 May). There, a few months later, at the express invitation of the Pope, a new Procurator and a new Parish Priest were appointed to replace Fr F. Dalmazzo, and Fr Sala had a thousand headaches to unravel the tangled skein of an unsustainable economic-financial situation.

With Don Bosco as he lay dying (January 1888)

Urgently summoned from Rome on 30 December, he was already at Don Bosco's bedside on New Year's morning. For the whole month he alternated with the young secretary Viglietti in assisting the sick man.

When Don Bosco died on 31 January, the same evening the General Council “promised the Lord that if Our Lady gives us the grace of being able to bury Don Bosco under the Church of Mary Help of Christians or at least in our house in Valsalice it would begin work on the decoration of his church this year or at least as soon as possible.” The formal request made by Fr Sala to the city authorities was rejected. He then appealed to Rome and the Prime Minister, F. Crispi, mindful of the help given him by Don Bosco when he was an exile in Turin, granted the burial outside the city at the Salesian College at Valsalice. In the meantime Don Bosco’s body was beside Fr Sala’s room. On the evening of 4 February he was transported to Valsalice. In the tiny procession up the hill Fr Sala wept: he had lost the dearest person he still had on earth. For another six years, however, he would continue to carry out with great competence the arduous field of work that Don Bosco had first entrusted to him. On 21 May 1895 he would join him in heaven, struck down by a heart attack.

How to find the resources to build a church

A secret to be found

It is well known that Don Bosco’s reputation for getting things done had spread throughout Italy. Since he succeeded in so many enterprises, many people asked him for advice on how to do the same.

How to find the funds to build a church? Mrs Marianna Moschetti of Castagneto di Pisa (today Castagneto Carducci-Livorno) expressly asked him in 1877. Don Bosco’s answer on 11 April, in its brevity and simplicity, is admirable.

Starting point: get to know the situation

With the practical wisdom that came to him from his family upbringing and from his experience as founder-builder-realiser of so many projects, Don Bosco took up his pen and wrote, intelligently, that “there is a need for us to talk to each other to examine what projects can be done and what probability there is of being able to carry them out.” Without healthy realism the best projects remain a dream. The saint, however, does not want to discourage his correspondent right away, so he immediately adds “[carry out] what seems good to me in the Lord.”

In nomine Domini

He begins well, one might say, with this “in the Lord”. In fact, the first, and therefore the most important advice he gives to the lady, is to “pray and invite others to pray and go to communion often, as a most effective way of deserving his graces. The church is the house of the Lord, who will not fail to bless a church project if it is advanced by those who trust in him, pray to him, live a Christian life and make use of the indispensable means. A life of grace certainly deserves the Lord’s graces (Don Bosco is convinced of this), even if everything is grace: “If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do the builders labour in it.”

Collaboration with everyone

The church is everyone’s home; certainly the parish priest is primarily responsible, but not the only one. Therefore the laity must have a sense of shared responsibility, including the most sensitive, the most available, perhaps the most capable among them (those who today could be part of the pastoral council of each parish). Here then is Don Bosco’s second piece of advice: “Invite the parish priest to put himself at the head of two committees with as many members as possible. One of men, the other of women. Let each member of this committee sign up for a donation divided into three instalments, one for each year.”

Note: two committees, one male and one female. Of course, at the time the men's and women's associations in a parish were normally separate; but why not also see it as fair and loyal "competition" in doing good, in managing a project with their own strength, each group "in its own way", with its own strategies? Don Bosco knew how much he himself was financially indebted to the female world, to the marquises, countesses, aristocratic women in general: they were usually more religious than their husbands, more generous in works of charity, more willing "to help the needs of the Church". It was wise to rely on them.

Widening the circle

In fact Don Bosco immediately added: "At the same time each one should seek donors who will give money, work or materials. For example, invite those who will have an altar made, the pulpit, the candlesticks, a bell, the window frames, the main door, smaller doors, glass etc. But only one thing each." Beautiful. Everyone had to commit to something that they could rightly consider their own personal gift to the church under construction.

Don Bosco had not studied psychology, but he knew – as all parish priests, and not just them, know – that by tickling people's legitimate pride one can also achieve a great deal in terms of generosity, solidarity, altruism. Moreover, throughout his life he had needed others: to study as a child, to go to the Chieri school as a young man, to enter the seminary as a cleric, to begin his work as a priest, to develop it as a founder.

A secret

Don Bosco then acts a bit mysteriously with his correspondent: "If I could speak to the parish priest I could suggest another means in confidence; but I hesitate to entrust it to paper." What was that all about? Hard to say. One could think of the promise of special indulgences for such benefactors, but it would have been necessary to go to Rome and Don Bosco knew how

much difficulty this could cause with the bishop and other parish priests also involved in similar building projects. More likely it was a confidential invitation to seek the support of political authorities so that they might support the cause. The suggestion, however, would be better made *viva voce*, so as not to compromise himself before either civil or religious authorities, at a time of fierce opposition between them, with the historical Left in power, more anticlerical than the previous Right.

What more could he say? One thing that was important to both: prayer. And indeed this is how he bids farewell to his correspondent: "I will pray that everything goes well. My only support has always been to have recourse to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and to Mary Help of Christians. God bless you and pray for me who will always be with you in J.C.".

Edmond Obrecht. I had lunch with a saint

In the biography of a famous abbot, the emotion of meeting Don Bosco.

Today it is quite easy to meet a Saint, as has happened to me several times. I have met several: the Cardinal of Milan Ildefonso Schuster (who confirmed me) and Popes John XXIII and Paul VI; I spoke with Mother Teresa, and even had lunch with Pope John Paul II. But a century ago it was not so easy, so to have personally approached a saint was an experience that remained etched in the mind and heart of the lucky person. Such was the case with the French Trappist abbot Dom Edmond Obrecht (1852-1935). Way back in 1934, when Don Bosco was canonised, three days after the solemn ceremony he confided to

the editor of the US Catholic weekly, the *Louisville Record*, his great satisfaction at having personally met the new saint, having shaken his hand, indeed having had lunch with him. What had happened? The episode is recounted in his biography.

Four hours with Don Bosco

Born in Alsace in 1852, Edmond Obrecht had become a Trappist monk at the age of 23. As soon as he was ordained a priest in 1879, Father Edmond was sent to Rome as secretary to the Procurator General of the three Trappist Observances, which in 1892 were to be united into a single Order with the General House the Trappa delle Tre Fontane in the Italian capital.

During his stay in Rome he had Sunday off and took advantage of it to go and celebrate with his Cistercian brethren in the basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. The titular celebrant was the Vicar of Rome, Cardinal Lucido Maria Parocchi, so Father Edmond had the opportunity to serve him several times at solemn pontifical services and to get to know him well.

Now on 14 May 1887 the consecration of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, next to what is now Termini station, was scheduled: a magnificent church that had cost Don Bosco a fortune and for which he had given "body and soul" in order to succeed in completing it. He succeeded and in spite of his health, by then decidedly compromised (he would die eight months later), he wanted to attend the solemn consecration ceremony.

For this very long celebration (five hours behind closed doors), Card. Parocchi was accompanied by Father Edmond. It was a decidedly unforgettable experience for him. He would write 50 years later: "During that long ceremony I had the pleasure and honour of sitting next to Don Bosco in the sanctuary of the church and after the consecration I was admitted to the same table as him and the Cardinal. It was the only time in my life that I came into close contact with a canonised saint and the deep impression he made on me has lingered in my mind for all these long years." Father Edmond had heard a lot about Don Bosco, who, at a time when the Holy

See's diplomatic relations with the new Kingdom of Italy were breaking down, was held in high esteem and high regard by the politicians of the time: Zanardelli, Depretis, Nicotera. The newspapers had spoken of his interventions to settle some serious questions concerning the appointment of new bishops and the taking possession of the property of individual dioceses.

Dom Edmond was not content with that unforgettable experience. Later on a trip he passed through Turin and wanted to stop and visit the great Salesian work of Don Bosco. He admired it and could only rejoice on the day of his beatification (2 June 1929).

Post Scriptum

The day before the consecration of the Sacred Heart Church, 13 May 1887, Pope Leo XIII had given Don Bosco an audience for an hour in the Vatican. He had been very warm with him and had even joked that Don Bosco, given his age, was close to death (but he was younger than the pope!), but Don Bosco had a thought that perhaps he did not dare express to the pope himself. He did so a few days later, on 17 May, on his departure from Rome: he asked him if he could pay all or part of the cost of the church façade: a handsome sum, 51,000 lire [230,000 euro]. Courage or impudence? Extreme confidence or simple impudence? The fact remains that a few months later, on 6 November, Don Bosco returned to the task and asked for the intervention of Monsignor Francesco della Volpe, the Pope's domestic prelate, to obtain – he wrote – “the sum of 51,000 francs, which the Holy Father's charity made him hope to pay himself... our Bursar is going to Rome to settle the expenses of this construction; he will come to you for the best answer he can get.” He guaranteed that “Our over three hundred thousand orphans pray every day for His Holiness.” And he concluded: “Please forgive this poor and ugly writing of mine. I can no longer write.”

Poor Don Bosco: in May in that church, celebrating in front of the altar of Mary Help of Christians, he had wept several

times because he saw his dream when he was nine come true; but six months later his heart was still in anguish because at the death he felt was near he left a heavy debt to close the accounts of that same church.

He truly spent several years, “until his last breath” doing it. Very few of the tens of thousands of people who pass by it every day on their way out of Termini station on Via Marsala know this.

Don Bosco's wandering books

In a circular letter Don Bosco wrote in July 1885: “The good book even enters homes where the priest cannot enter... Sometimes it remains covered in dust on a table or in a library. No one thinks of it. But the hour of loneliness, or sadness, or pain, or boredom, or the need for recreation, or anxiety about the future comes, and this faithful friend dusts himself off, opens his pages and...”

“Without books there is no reading and without reading there is no knowledge; without knowledge there is no freedom”, I read on the internet, not sure whether written by some nostalgic or a book lover or by a good connoisseur of Cicero. Don Bosco for his part, as soon as he finished his studies, immediately became a writer and some of his books became genuine best sellers with dozens and dozens of editions and reprints. Once the Congregation was founded, he invited his young collaborators to do the same, using his own print shop set up in the same house in Valdocco. At a time when three quarters of Italians were illiterate, he wrote in the above-mentioned circular: “A book in a family, if not read by the one for whom it is intended or given, is read by the son or daughter, friend or neighbour. A book in a town sometimes

passes into the hands of a hundred people. God alone knows the good that a book produces in a town, in a mobile library, in a workers' society, in a hospital, donated as a pledge of friendship." And he added: "In less than thirty years, the number of pamphlets or volumes we have distributed among the people adds up to some twenty million. While some books may have remained neglected, others will each have had a hundred readers, and thus the number of those to whom our books have done some good can be believed with certainty to be far greater than the number of volumes published."

With a bit of imagination, we could say that in some way Don Bosco's publishing network heralded both today's online book, which is there for everyone to read, walking alone, almost wandering, and the ebook, the only one that in the continuing crisis of reading in Italy in recent years is attracting new buyers and new readers thanks also to its low cost.

Competition

The competition involved in reading a book is strong: today people spend hours and hours with their eyes fixed on Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, blogs and platforms of all kinds to send and receive messages, to see and send photos, to watch films and listen to music. In themselves they might all be wonderful, good and correct, but can they replace reading a good book?

Some doubt is legitimate. For the most part, social media are promoters of a sort of culture of the ephemeral, the transitory, the fragmentary – even without immediately thinking of the flood of fake news – where each new communication eliminates the previous one. The names themselves say it: SMS "short message service" or Twitter, a bird tweeting, Instagram, i.e., quick picture posted on the spot. They convey quick information, very brief sharing of experiences and moods with people you are already in touch with. Books, good books on the other hand, the ones that are thought through and pondered, are able to provoke questions, help us deeply perceive the beauty that is found in nature and

art in all its forms, in the solidarity between people, in the passion and heart that we put into everything we do. And not only that, because it is precisely a broad general culture, provided by history books in particular, that offers the ruling classes the flexibility, the ability to orientate, the breadth of horizons that when combined with competence are needed to make the choices of a general and comprehensive nature that are theirs to make. We are becoming aware of the deficit of such a culture in these very days.

Don Bosco's library

Don Bosco helped thousands of young people grow up as "good Christians and upright citizens" through the dissemination of his books, with his library at Valdocco containing 15,000 books, his print shop, the libraries in individual Salesian houses, with a host of Salesians who wrote books for youth. How melancholic sad it is today to learn that around half a million children in Italy attend schools without a library! Of course, it is easier and more immediately profitable to build new supermarkets, new shopping centres, state-of-the-art cinemas, multinational chains dealing in technology and innovation.

Paper books or online books – today's libraries, thanks to technology, offer interesting remote services of various kinds – it makes no difference: as long as they make people grow in humanity. On one condition, however: that they are readable and available to everyone, even to non-digital natives, even to those who do not have the latest generation of tools, even to those who live in disadvantaged situations. Don Bosco wrote in the aforementioned letter: "Remember that St Augustine, who became a bishop, though an exalted master of fine letters and an eloquent orator, preferred inaccuracies in language and no elegance of style to the risk of not being understood by the people." This is what the sons of Don Bosco continue to do today with books, with popular pamphlets, with videos and materials posted on the web which continue to circulate, today as yesterday, in all languages everywhere, to the ends of the

earth.

Souls and horsepower

Don Bosco wrote at night by candlelight, after a day spent in prayer, talks, meetings, study, courtesy visits. Always practical, tenacious, with a prodigious vision of the future.

“Da mihi animas, cetera tolle” is the motto that inspired all of Don Bosco’s life and action from time of the wandering Oratory in Turin (1844) to his final initiatives on his deathbed (January 1888) for the Salesians to go to England and Ecuador. But for him souls were not separated from bodies, so much so that since the 1950s he had proposed to dedicate his life so that young people would be “happy on earth and then in heaven.” Earthly happiness for his “poor and abandoned” young people consisted in having a roof, a family, a school, a playground, friendships and pleasant activities (games, music, theatre, outings...) and above all a profession that would guarantee them a serene future.

This explains the “arts and trades” workshops at Valdocco – the future vocational schools – that Don Bosco created from nothing: an authentic start-up, to put it in today’s terms. He had initially offered himself as the first instructor for tailoring, bookbinding, shoemaking... but progress did not stop and Don Bosco wanted to be at the forefront.

The availability of engines

Starting in 1868, at the initiative of the mayor of Turin, Giovanni Filippo Galvagno, some of the Ceronda stream, which had its source at an altitude of 1,350 m, were captured by the Ceronda Canal to be distributed to various industries that were springing up in the northern area of the Piedmontese

capital, Valdocco to be precise. The canal was then divided into two branches at the height of the Lucento district, the one on the right, completed in 1873, after crossing the Dora Riparia with a canal, continued to run parallel to what is now Corso Regina Margherita and Via San Donato to then discharge into the Po. Don Bosco, ever vigilant to what was happening in the city, immediately asked the City Hall for "the concession of at least 20 horsepower of water power" from the canal that would pass alongside Valdocco. Once the request was granted, he had the two inlets built at his own expense, arranged the machines in the workshops so that they could easily receive the motive power, and had an engineer study the engines needed for the purpose. When everything was ready, he asked the authorities on 4 July 1874 to proceed with the connection at his own expense. For several months he received no answer, so on 7 November he renewed his request. The response this time came fairly quickly. It seemed positive, but he asked for some clarifications first. Don Bosco replied in the following terms:

"Your Excellency the Mayor,

I hasten to convey to Your Excellency, the clarifications that I was pleased to ask you for in your letter of the 19th of this month, and I have the honour of notifying you that the industries to which the horsepower from the Ceronda water will be applied are:

1st Printing works for which no fewer than 100 workers are employed.

2nd Pulp factory with no fewer than 26 workers.

3rd Typeface foundry, copper engraving with no fewer than 30 workers.

4th Iron workshop with no fewer than 30 workers.

5th Carpenters, cabinet-makers, turners with hydraulic saw: no fewer than 40 workers.

Total workers more than 220."

This number included instructors and young students. Given the

situation, besides being subjected to unnecessary physical exertion, they would not have been able to withstand the competition. In fact, Don Bosco added: "These works are now done at the expense of a steam engine for the printing works, but for the other workshops they are done by manpower, in such a way that they could not withstand the competition of those who use water power."

And in order to avoid possible delays and fears on the part of the public authorities, he immediately offered a warning: "We do not object to depositing a bill of public debt as security, as soon as it can be known what it should be."

He always thought big... but was content with the possible

He had to think about the future, about new laboratories, new machines and so the demand for electricity would necessarily increase. Don Bosco then raised the demand and cited existential and contextual reasons:

"But while I accept the theoretical strength of ten horsepower, I find myself needing to note that this is totally insufficient for my needs, since the project which is being carried out was based on 30 [?] as I had the honour of expounding in my letter of November last. For this reason, I would ask you to take into consideration the construction work already underway, the nature of this institute, which lives on charity alone, the number of workers involved, the fact that we were among the first to subscribe and therefore be willing to grant us, if not the 30 horsepower promised, at least the largest amount available..."

"Word to the wise, one might say."

A successful entrepreneur

The amount of water granted to the Oratory on that occasion has not come down to us. The fact remains that Don Bosco once again demonstrates the qualities of a capable entrepreneur that everyone at the time recognised and still recognises in him today: a story of moral integrity, the right mix of humility and self-confidence, determination and courage,

communication skills and an eye to the future. Obviously, the fuel for all his ambitions and aspirations was a single passion: souls. He had many collaborators, but somehow everything fell on his shoulders. Tangible proof of this are the thousands of letters, just one of which we have published here, corrected and re-corrected several times: letters he usually wrote in the evening or at night by candlelight, after a day spent in prayer, talks, meetings, study, courtesy calls. While drawing up his plans by day, by night he was then able to dream up how they would develop. And these would come in the following decades, with the hundreds of Salesian vocational schools scattered around the world, with tens of thousands of boys (and then girls) who would find a springboard to a future full of hope in them.

Don Bosco and door-to-door waste collection

Who would have thought it? Don Bosco as an early ecologist? Don Bosco pioneering door-to-door waste collection 140 years ago?

We could say so, at least according to one of the letters we have recovered in recent years and which can be found in the 9th volume of the Epistolary (no. 4144). It is a printed circular from 1885 that in its own small way – the city of Turin at the time – anticipates and, obviously in its own way, “solves” the major problems facing our society, the so-called “consumer” and “throwaway” society.

The addressee

Since it is a circular letter, the addressee is generic,

someone who may or may not be known. Don Bosco cunningly “captures” the reader’s attention immediately by calling him “well-deserving and charitable”. Having said this, Don Bosco points out to his correspondent a fact that is there for all to see:

“Your Excellency will know that the bones, left over from the canteen and generally thrown in the rubbish bin by families as waste, when collected in large quantities are then useful to human industry, and are therefore sought after by men of art [= industry] who are paid a few pence per myriagram. A company in Turin, with whom I am in contact, would buy them in any quantity.” So, what would be a nuisance, both at home and away from home, perhaps in the streets around the city, can be wisely used to the advantage of many.

A high purpose

At this point Don Bosco launches his proposal: *“In view of this and in conformity with what is already being practised in some countries on behalf of other charitable institutes, I have come up with the idea of appealing to the well-to-do and benevolent families in this illustrious city, and begging them that instead of letting the leftovers from their table go to waste and become useless, they give it freely for the benefit of the poor orphans gathered in my Institutes, and especially for the benefit of the Missions in Patagonia where the Salesians, at great expense and at the risk of their own lives, are teaching and civilising the savage tribes, so that they may enjoy the fruits of Redemption and true progress. Similar recourse and such a prayer I therefore make to Your Excellency, convinced that you will take them into benign consideration and grant them.”*



The project seemed appealing to several parties: families would get rid of some of the table waste, the company would be

interested in collecting it to reuse it in other ways (food for animals, fertilisers for the countryside, etc.); Don Bosco would get money from it for the missions... and the city would remain cleaner.

A perfect organisation

The situation was clear, the goal was high, the benefits were there for all, but it may not be enough. It was necessary to collect bones “door to door” throughout the city. Don Bosco did not flinch. Seventy years old, he now had deep insights, long experience but also great managerial skills. So, he organised this “enterprise”, taking care to avoid the ever-potential abuses in the various phases of the collection operation: *“Those families who are good enough to accept this humble request of mine will be given a special bag where they will put the bones mentioned, which will often be collected and weighed by a person appointed by the purchasing company, and issued a receipt, which in the event of a check with the company itself will be collected from time to time in my name. In this way, Your Excellency will have no other choice but to issue the appropriate orders so that these useless leftovers from your canteen, which would otherwise be lost, may be placed in the same bag, to be delivered to the collector and then sold and used by charity. The bag will bear the initials O. S. (Salesian Oratory), and the person who comes to empty it will also present some sign to make himself known to Your Excellency or to the family.”*

What can we say other than that the project seems valid in all its parts, even better than some similar projects in our third-millennium cities!

The incentives

Obviously, the proposal had to be supported with some incentive, certainly not economic or promotional, but moral and spiritual. Which? Here it is: *“Your Excellency will be well-deserving of the above-mentioned works, you will have the gratitude of thousands of poor youngsters, and what is more*

important, you will receive the reward promised by God to all those who strive for the moral and material well-being of their fellow men."

A precise approach

As a practical person, he devised what we might call a very modern approach to succeed in his undertaking: he asked his recipients to send him back the coupon, placed at the foot of the letter, bearing his address: *"I would ask you again to assure me of this, for my sake and for the completion of the procedures to be carried out, by detaching and sending me back the part of this printed matter which bears my address. As soon as I have your acceptance, I will give the order that the aforementioned bag be delivered to you."*

Don Bosco closed his letter with the usual formula of thanks and good wishes, which was so much appreciated by his correspondents.

Don Bosco, besides being a great educator, a far-sighted founder, a man of God, was also a genius of Christian charity.

The story of the construction of the Church of Mary Help of Christians (3/3)

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

Always in action

But Providence must also be "sought". And in August Don Bosco wrote again to Count Cibrario, Secretary of the Order of St Maurcie, to remind him that the time had come to honour the second part of the financial commitment he had made two years earlier. From Genoa, fortunately, he received substantial

offers from Count Pallavicini and Counts Viancino di Viancino; other offers reached him in September from Countess Callori di Vignale and likewise from other cities, Rome and Florence in particular.

However, a very cold winter soon arrived, with the consequent increase in consumer prices, including bread. Don Bosco went into a liquidity crisis. Between feeding hundreds of mouths and suspending building work, the choice was forced on him. Work on the church therefore stagnated, while debts grew. So, on 4 December, Don Bosco took pen and paper and wrote to Cavalier Oreglia in Rome: "Collect lots of money, then come back, because we don't know where to get any more. It is true that Our Lady always does her part, but at the end of the year, all the providers ask for money." Great!

9 June 1868: solemn consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians

In January 1868 Don Bosco set about completing the interior decoration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians.

At Valdocco the situation was still quite serious. Don Bosco wrote to Cav. Oreglia in Rome: "Here we continue with very intense cold: today it reached 18 degrees below zero; despite the fire in the stove, the ice in my room would not melt. We have delayed rising time for the boys, and as most are still dressed for summer, each puts on two shirts, a jacket, two pairs of breeches, military coats; others keep the blankets over their shoulders throughout the day and look like carnival masquerades."

Fortunately, a week later the cold diminished and the metre of snow began to melt.

Meanwhile, the commemorative medal was being prepared in Rome. Don Bosco, once he had it in hand, had corrections made to the inscription and the thickness halved in order to save money. Even so, the amount of money collected was always less than what was needed. So, the collection for the chapel of St. Anne promoted by the Florentine noblewomen, in particular Countess

Virginia Cambray Digny, wife of the Minister of Agriculture, Finance and Commerce, in mid-February, was still one sixth of the total (6000 lira). However, Don Bosco did not despair and invited the Countess to Turin: "I hope that on some occasion you will be able to visit us and see with your own eyes this majestic building, of which it can be said that every brick is an offering made by those now near and now far but always for grace received."

And so it really was. At the beginning of spring, he told the Cavlier as usual (and he would print it shortly afterwards in the commemorative booklet (*The wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians*): "I am swamped with expenses, many things to be settled, all the work to be resumed; do what you can but pray with faith. I think the time is right for those who want grace from Mary! We see one every day."



Initial altar of the Church of Mary Help of Christians

Preparations for the feast

In mid-March, Archbishop Riccardi fixed the date for consecration of the church for the first fortnight in June. Everything was ready by then: the two bell towers on the façade surmounted by two archangels, the large golden statue on the dome already blessed by the archbishop, the five marble altars with their respective paintings, including the marvellous one of Mary Help of Christians with the child in her arms, surrounded by angels, apostles, evangelists, in a blaze of light and colour.

An exceptional plan for the preparation was then set in motion. First of all, it was a matter of finding the consecrating bishop; then contacting various bishops for the solemn celebrations in the morning and evening of each day of the Octave; then issuing personal invitations to dozens of distinguished benefactors, priests and lay people from all

over Italy, many of whom were to be hosted in the house in a worthy manner; finally, it was a matter of preparing hundreds of children both to solemnise the pontifical and liturgical ceremonies with songs, and to participate in academies, games, parades, moments of joy and merriment.

Finally the big day

Three days before 9 June, the boys from the Lanzo boarding school arrived in Valdocco. On Sunday 7 June, *L'Unità Cattolica* published the programme for the celebrations, and on Monday 8 June the first guests arrived and the arrival of the Duke of Aosta representing the Royal Family was announced. The boys from the Mirabello boarding school also arrived. The singers spent hours rehearsing the new Mass by Maestro De Vecchi and Fr Cagliero's new *Tantum Ergo*, as well as the solemn antiphon *Maria Succurre Miseris* also by Cagliero, which had been inspired by the polyphonic *Tu es Petrus* from the Vatican basilica.

The following morning, 9 June, at 5.30 a.m., passing between a double line of 1,200 festive and singing boys, the archbishop made the triple tour around the church and then with the clergy entered the church to perform the planned consecration ceremonies of the altars behind closed doors. It was only at 10.30 that the church was thrown open to the public, who attended the archbishop's Mass and Don Bosco's following Mass. The archbishop returned in the afternoon for the pontifical vespers, solemnized by the triple choir of singers: 150 tenors and basses at the foot of St Joseph's altar, 200 sopranos and contraltos on the dome, another 100 tenors and basses in the orchestra. Fr Cagliero conducted them, even without seeing them all, through an electric contraption designed for the occasion.



The old sacristy of the Church of Mary Help of Christians

It was a triumph of sacred music, an enchantment, something heavenly. Indescribable was the emotion of those present, who on leaving the church were also able to admire the external illumination of the façade and the dome surmounted by the illuminated statue of Mary Help of Christians.

And Don Bosco? All day surrounded by a crowd of benefactors and friends, moved beyond words, he did nothing but praise Our Lady. An “impossible” dream had come true.

An equally solemn octave

Solemn celebrations alternated morning and evening throughout the octave. They were unforgettable days, the most solemn Valdocco had ever seen. Don Bosco immediately made them widely known through a solid publication “[Remembrance of a solemnity in honour of Mary Help of Christians](#)”.

On 17 June some peace returned to Valdocco, the young guests went back to their schools, the devotees to their homes; the church still lacked interior finishing touches, ornaments, furnishings... But the devotion to Mary Help of Christians, which by then had become “Don Bosco’s Madonna” quickly spread throughout Piedmont, Italy, Europe and Latin America. Today in the world there are hundreds of churches dedicated to her, thousands of altars, millions of pictures and little images. Don Bosco repeats to everyone today, as he did to Fr Cagliero as he left for the missions in November 1875: “Place all your trust in Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and in Mary Help of Christians and you will see what miracles are.”

St Paul VI. The most Salesian Pope

Pope Montini knew the Salesians closely, appreciated them, always encouraged and supported them in their educational mission.

Other popes before him, and after him, have shown great signs of affection for the Salesian Society. We recall some of them.

The two Popes at the origin and development of Salesian work

There were two Popes with whom Don Bosco had direct dealings. First of all, Blessed Pius IX, the Pope whom he supported at tragic times for the Church, whose authority, rights and prestige he defended, so much so that his opponents called him “the Garibaldi of the Vatican”. He was reciprocated with numerous affectionate private audiences, many concessions and indulgences. The Pope also supported him financially. During his pontificate, the Salesian Society, its Constitutions, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA), the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators, the Mary Help of Christians association were all approved. He appointed himself protector of the Society.

He was succeeded by Pope Leo XIII who in turn accepted to be the first Salesian Cooperator, treated Don Bosco with unusual warmth and granted him the privileges that were now essential for the rapid and prodigious development of the Congregation. He directed the first Apostolic Vicariate entrusted to the Salesians, appointing the first bishop in the person of Bishop Giovanni Cagliero in 1883. In his first audience with Fr Rua after Don Bosco’s death, he was generous with advice for the consolidation of the Salesian Society.

The two (future) Popes who sat at Don Bosco’s table

St Pius X as a simple canon met with Don Bosco in Turin in 1875, sat at his table and was enrolled among the Salesian Cooperators. He left highly edified. As Bishop and Patriarch

of Venice he gave proof of benevolence towards the Salesian Society. In 1907 he signed the decree introducing the apostolic process of Don Bosco and in 1914 for St Dominic Savio as well. In 1908 he appointed Bishop Cagliero as Apostolic Delegate to Central America. He was the first Salesian Cooperator raised to the honour of the altars.

As a young priest in 1883, Pius XI also visited Don Bosco at the Oratory, staying there for two days. He sat at Don Bosco's table and left full of deep and pleasant memories. He spared no means to quickly promote the apostolic process of Don Bosco, wanting to set no less than the date of Easter 1934, the close of the Holy Year, as the date of his canonisation. Thanks to him Dominic Savio's cause overcame difficulties that seemed insurmountable: in 1933 he signed the decree of the heroicity of his virtues; in 1936 he proclaimed the heroicity of the virtues of St Mary Mazzarello, whom he beatified on 20th November 1938. Other signs of predilection for the Salesian Society were the granting of the Indulgence of Sanctified Work (1922) and the elevation to the purple of Polish Cardinal Augustus Hlond (1927).

The most Salesian pope

If Pius XI was rightly called the "Pope of Don Bosco", perhaps just as rightly the "most Salesian Pope" was Pope St. Paul VI for the knowledge, esteem and affection shown to the Salesian society, without wishing to underestimate other previous or subsequent Popes. Father Giorgio, a journalist, was a great admirer of Don Bosco (not yet Blessed), whose autographed painting he kept in his study, and was often admired by young Giovanni Battista. During his studies in Turin, the young Montini had wavered between choosing the Benedictine life he had known at San Bernardino di Chiari (which later became a Salesian house, it still is today), and Salesian life. A few days after his priestly ordination (Brescia 29 May 1920), he asked the bishop, even before receiving his pastoral destination, if he could choose his own. In that case he would have liked to go with Don Bosco. The bishop decided instead on

studies in Rome. But after one Montini who had failed to become a Salesian came another. A few years after that interview, his cousin Luigi (1906-1963) told him of his desire to become a priest too. The future pope, who knew him well, told him that given his lively temperament, Salesian life would be good for him and so he took advice from the famous Salesian Fr Cojazzi. The advice was positive, and upon hearing the news Fr Giovanni was so pleased that his cousin would take his place that he himself accompanied him to the Salesian missionary aspirantate in Ivrea. He would then be a missionary for 17 years in China and later in Brazil until his death. Completing the Salesianity of the Montini family was the presence, for about ten years, in the Salesian house at Colle Don Bosco of one of Enrico's brothers, Luigi (1905-1973).

There is no need to say how close Bishop Montini was to the Salesians in the various responsibilities he assumed: for example as Substitute at the Secretariat of State or in the very early post-war period in Rome for the nascent Borgo Don Bosco work for the *sciusscià* (shoe-shine boys), then as Archbishop of Milan at the end of the 1950s asking them to take over the Arese *barabitt*, and finally as Pope in supporting the entire Salesian Congregation and Family, erecting among other things the Pontifical Salesian University and the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences at the FMA Auxilium.

He spoke several times of his immense esteem for Salesian work, missionary work in particular, in private audiences given the Rector Major Fr Luigi Ricceri as well as in public audiences. One of the most famous was the private audience granted to the Chapter Members of General Chapter 20 on 20 December 1971. Obviously in many speeches given to the Salesians, of Milan in particular, he demonstrated a profound knowledge of the Salesian charism and its potential.