

The story of the construction of the Church of Mary Help of Christians (2/3)

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

The Lottery

The authorisation was granted very quickly, so the complex machine of collecting and evaluating the gifts and selling the tickets was immediately set in motion in Valdocco: everything as indicated in the regulation plan circulated in the press. It was Cav. Federico Oreglia di Santo Stefano, a Salesian Brother, who personally worked to obtain names of prominent people to be included in the Promoters' catalogue, ask for other gifts, and find buyers or "sellers" of lottery tickets. The lottery was, of course, publicised in the city's Catholic press, although only after the closing of the deaf-mute lottery at the beginning of June.

The works continue, as well as expenses and debts

On 4 June the masonry work was already two metres above ground, but on 2 July Don Bosco was forced to resort urgently to a generous benefactor so that the master builder Buzzetti could pay the "workers' salary" (8000 euro). A few days later he again asked another aristocratic benefactor if he could undertake to pay for at least some of the four batches of tiles, planks and laths for the church roof over the course of the year, for a total expenditure of around 16,000 lire (64,000 euro). On 17 July it was the turn of a priest promoter of the lottery to be asked for urgent help in paying "another workers' salary": Don Bosco suggested that he get the money with an immediate bank loan, or rather prepare it for the end of the week when he himself would go to pick it up, or even better, to bring it directly to Valdocco where he could see the church under construction in person. In short, he was

navigating by sight and the risk of foundering due to lack of liquidity was renewed every month.

On 10 August, he sent the printed forms to Countess Virginia Cambray Digny, wife of the Mayor of Florence, the new capital of the Kingdom, inviting her to personally promote the lottery. By the end of the month, part of the walls were already at roof level. And shortly before Christmas, she sent 400 tickets to Marquis Angelo Nobili Vitelleschi of Florence with a request to distribute them among known individuals.

The search for donations for the Valdocco lottery and the sale of the tickets would continue over the following years. Don Bosco's circulars would spread especially to the centre north of the country. Even benefactors in Rome, the pope himself, would play their part. But why would they have committed themselves to selling lottery tickets to build a church that was not their own, moreover in a city that had just ceased to be the capital of the Kingdom (January 1865)?

There could have been many reasons, obviously including winning some nice prize, but certainly one of the most important was of a spiritual nature: to all those who had contributed to building the "Mary's house" on earth, at Valdocco, by means of alms in general or paying for items (windows, stained glass windows, altar, bells, vestments...) Don Bosco in the Virgin Mary's name, had guaranteed a special prize: "fine accommodation", a "room" not just anywhere, but "in paradise".

Our Lady seeks alms for her church

On 15 January 1867, the Prefecture of Turin issued a decree establishing the date for the lottery draw on 1 April. From Valdocco there was a rush to send the remaining tickets throughout Italy, with a request to return the unsold ones by mid-March so that they could be sent elsewhere before the draw.

Don Bosco, who had already been preparing for a second trip to Rome at the end of December 1866 (9 years after the first

one), with a stopover in Florence, to try to reach an agreement between State and Church on the appointment of new bishops, took the opportunity to go back over the network of his Florentine and Roman friendships. He managed to sell many bundles of tickets, so much so that his travelling companion, Fr Francesia, urged the shipment of others, because “everyone wants some”.



The basilica and the primitive square

If Turin charity, once the city was downgraded from its role as capital of the Kingdom, was in crisis, Florence's, on the other hand, was growing and so played its part with many generous aristocratic women; Bologna was no less worthy, with Marquis Prospero Bevilacqua and Countess Sassatelli. No was Milan lacking, even though it was to the Milanese Rosa Guenzati on 21 March that Don Bosco confided: “The lottery is nearing its end and we still have many tickets.”

What was the final economic result of the lottery? About 90,000 lire [328,000 euro], a nice sum, one might say, but it was only a sixth of the money already spent; so much so that on 3 April Don Bosco had to ask a benefactor for an urgent loan of 5,000 lire [18,250 euro] for payment for building materials that could be delayed no further: some expected income had not turned up.

Our Lady intervenes

The following week, while negotiating about the side altars with Countess Virginia Cambray Digny of Florence – she had personally promoted a collection of funds for an altar to be dedicated to St Anne (Our Lady's mother) – Don Bosco informed her of the resumption of work and the hope (which turned out to be in vain) of being able to open the church within the year. He was always counting on the offerings for graces that Our Lady continually granted his donors, and wrote to

everyone, to Cambray Digny herself, to Miss Pellico, sister of the famous Silvio, etc. Some of his female benefactors, incredulous, asked him for confirmation and Don Bosco repeated his request.



The Basilica of Mary Help of Christians as Don Bosco built it

The graces increased, their reputation spread and Don Bosco had to restrain himself because, as he wrote on 9 May to Cav. Oreglia di S. Stefano, a Salesian sent to Rome to seek charity: "I cannot write because I am too involved." Indeed, he could not fail to update his alms-giver the following month: "A gentleman who had his arm healed immediately brought 3,000 lire [€11,000] used to pay part of the previous year's debts... I have never boasted of extraordinary things; I have always said that Our Lady Help of Christians has granted and still grants extraordinary graces to those who in some way contribute to the building of this church. I have always said and I still say: 'the offering will be made when grace is received, not before' [*italics in the original*]". And on 25 July he told Countess Callori about a girl he had taken in who was "mad and furious" and held down by two men; as soon as she was blessed she calmed down and went to confession.

If Our Lady was active, Don Bosco certainly was not standing still either. On 24 May he sent out another circular for the building and furnishing of the chapel of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary: he enclosed a form for the monthly offering, while he asked everyone for a Hail Mary for the donors. On the same day, with remarkable "nerve" he asked Mother Galeffi, Superior of the Oblates at Tor de Specchi in Rome, whether or not the 2000 *scudi* promised some time before for the altar of the Sacred Hearts was part of her renewed willingness to do other things for the church. On 4 July, he thanked Prince Orazio Falconieri di Carpegna of Rome for the gift of a

chalice and an offering for the church. He wrote to everyone that the church was progressing and that he was awaiting promised gifts such as altars, bells, balustrades etc. The large offerings therefore came from aristocrats, the princes of the church, but there was no lack of “widow’s mites”, offerings from simple people: “Last week, in small offerings made for graces received, 3800 francs were recorded” [€12,800].

On 20 February 1867, the *Gazzetta Piemontese* gave the following news: “to the many calamities with which Italy is afflicted – [think of the third war of independence that has just ended], we must now add the reappearance of cholera.” It was the beginning of the nightmare that would threaten Italy for the next twelve months, with tens of thousands of deaths all over the country, including Rome, where the disease also claimed victims among civil and ecclesiastical dignitaries.

Don Bosco’s benefactors were worried, but he reassured them: “none of those taking part in the construction of the church in honour of Mary will fall victim to these illnesses, as long as they put their trust in her”, he wrote at the beginning of July to the Duchess of Sora.

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Don Bosco to Fr Orione: We will always be friends

Saint Louis Orione: “My most beautiful years were those spent in the Salesian Oratory.”

An emotional recollection of the saintly Father Orione.

Who does not know the song *Giù dai colli, un dì lontano con la*

sola madre accanto (Down from the hills, one day a long time ago, with just his mother beside him)? Very few, I would say, since it is still sung in dozens of languages in over 100 countries around the world. But I would think that very few would know the comment made by the elderly Fr (St) Louis Orione during the (sung!) mass on 31 January 1940 by the *Orionians* from Tortona at 4.45 a.m. (exactly the time when Don Bosco had died 52 years earlier). Here are his precise words (taken from Orione sources):

“The hymn to Don Bosco that begins with the words *Giù dai colli* was composed and set to music for Don Bosco’s Beatification. The explanation of the first stanza is this. On the death of the saint, the government of the time, despite the fact that all the young people wanted it and all Turin wanted it, did not allow Don Bosco’s body to be buried at Mary Help of Christians, and it seemed to be a great favour that his beloved body be buried at Valsalice... a beautiful house! So, the body was taken to Valsalice and there, every year until the Beatification, the Salesian pupils went to visit their Father on the day of Don Bosco’s death, to pray. After Don Bosco was beatified, his body was taken to Mary Help of Christians. And the verse you sang *Oggi, o Padre, torni ancora* (Today, Father, you return once more) also recalls this. It celebrates Don Bosco returning among the young again, from Valsalice – which is on a hill beyond the Po – to Turin, which is on the plain.”

His memories of that day

Fr Orione continued: “The Lord gave me the grace to be present, in 1929, at that glorious moment, which was a triumph in Turin in celebration, amidst unspeakable joy and enthusiasm, I too was close to the triumphal float. The whole journey was made on foot from Valsalice to the Oratory. And with me, immediately behind it, was a man in a red shirt, a Garibaldino; we were close together, side by side. He was one of the oldest of Don Bosco’s first pupils; when he heard that

it was Don Bosco's body that was being transported, he too was behind the carriage. And they all sang: 'Don Bosco returns among the young once more.' It was a moment of joy; the young people sang and the people of Turin waved handkerchiefs and threw flowers. We also passed in front of the Royal Palace. I remember that the Prince of Piedmont stood on the balcony, surrounded by generals; the carriage stopped for a moment and he nodded his approval; the Salesian superiors bowed their heads, as if to thank him for that act of homage to Don Bosco. Then the carriage reached Mary Help of Christians. And a few minutes later the Prince also came, surrounded by members of the Royal Household, to pay an act of devotion to the new Blessed."

"My best years"

As a boy, Louis Orione had lived with Don Bosco for three years, from 1886 to 1889. He recalled them forty years later in these moving terms: "My best years were those spent in the Salesian Oratory. Oh, if only I could relive even a few of those days spent at the Oratory when Don Bosco was alive!" He had loved Don Bosco so much that he had been granted, by way of exception, to go to confession to him even when his physical strength was at its lowest. In the last of these conversations (17 December 1887) the holy educator had confided to him: "We will always be friends."



During the moving of Don Bosco's body from Valsalice to the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, we see Fr Louis Orione in a white surplice beside the casket

A total friendship, theirs, which is why it is not surprising that shortly afterwards 15-year-old Louis immediately joined the list of boys at Valdocco who offered their lives to the Lord so that their beloved Father's life may be preserved. The Lord did not accept his heroic request, but "reciprocated" his generosity with Don Bosco's first miracle after his death: on

contact with his corpse, the index finger of Louis' right hand was reattached and healed. The boy, who was left-handed, had cut it while he was preparing small pieces of bread to be placed on Don Bosco's body which was displayed in the church of St Francis de Sales, to distribute as relics to the many devotees.

Nonetheless, the young man did not become a Salesian: on the contrary, he had the certainty that the Lord was calling him to another vocation, precisely after having "consulted" with Don Bosco before his tomb at Valsalice. And so Providence wanted there to be one less Salesian, but one more religious Family, the Orione Family, which would radiate, in new and original ways, the "imprint" received from Don Bosco: love for the Blessed Sacrament and the sacraments of confession and communion, devotion to Our Lady and love for the Pope and the Church, the preventive system, apostolic charity towards "poor and abandoned" young people, etc.

And Fr Rua?

Fr Orione's sincere and deep friendship with Don Bosco then became an equally sincere and deep friendship with Fr Rua, which continued until the latter's death in 1910. In fact, as soon as he heard of the worsening of his health, Fr Orione immediately ordered a novena and rushed to his bedside. He would later recall this last visit with particular emotion: "When he fell ill, as I was in Messina. I telegraphed Turin to ask if I would still be able to see him alive if I left immediately. I was told yes; I took the train and left for Turin. Fr Rua welcomed me, smiling, and gave me his very special blessing for me and for all those who would come to our House. I assure you it was the blessing of a saint."

When the news of his death reached him, he sent a telegram to Fr (Blessed) Philip Rinaldi: "a past pupil pupil of the venerable Don Bosco, I join with the Salesians in mourning the death of Fr Rua who was an unforgettable spiritual father to me. We are all praying here. Fr Orione." The Salesians wanted to bury Fr Rua at Valsalice, next to Don Bosco, but there were

difficulties from the city authorities. Immediately with another telegram, on 9 April, Fr Orione offered Fr Rinaldi his help: "If difficulties arise for burying Fr Rua at Valsalice, please telegraph me, I could easily help them."

It was a great sacrifice for him not to be able to cross Italy from Messina to Turin to attend Fr Rua's funeral. But now Bosco, Rua, Orione, Rinaldi are all in heaven, side by side in God's one big family.

The story of the construction of the Church of Mary Help of Christians (1/3)

"Our Lady did it all", we are used to reading in Salesian spiritual literature, to indicate that the Virgin was at the origin of Don Bosco's whole story. If we apply those words to the construction of the Church of Mary Help of Christians, the truth of it is very well documented, always bearing in mind that, alongside heavenly intervention, Don Bosco also played his part, and how!

Launching the idea and first promises of grants (1863)

At the end of January and beginning of February 1863, Don Bosco sent out a lengthy circular about the purpose of a church, dedicated to Mary Help of Christians, which he had in mind to build at Valdocco: it was to serve the masses of young people taken in there and the twenty thousand souls from the surrounding area, with the further possibility of being erected as a parish by the diocesan authority.

Shortly afterwards, on 13 February, he informed Pope Pius IX, not only that the church was a parish church, but that it was

already “under construction”. He obtained the desired outcome from Rome: at the end of March he received 500 lira. Thanking the Cardinal Secretary of State Antonelli for the grant received, he wrote that “the works... are about to begin”. In fact, in May he bought land and timber for the building site and in the summer the excavation work began, which continued until the autumn.

On the eve of the feast of Mary Help of Christians, 23 May, the Ministry of Grace, Justice and Worship, having heard the Mayor, Marquis Emanuele Luserna, declared that it was willing to provide a grant. Don Bosco took the opportunity to make an immediate appeal to the generosity of the first Secretary of the *Ordine Mauriziano* (The Orders of Sts Maurice and Lazaraus) and the Mayor. He sent a twofold appeal to them on the same date: he asked the former, privately, for as big a grant as possible as possible, reminding him of the commitment he had made on the occasion of his visit to Valdocco; he asked the latter formally, officially, for the same, but dwelling in detail on the church to be built.

Early replies

The appeals made for offerings were followed by replies. The reply on 29 May from the secretary of the Order of St Maurice was negative for the current year, but not for the following year when a grant (amount unspecified) could be budgeted for. The reply from the Ministry on 26 July, however, was positive: 6,000 lire were allocated, but half would be delivered when the foundations were laid at ground level, and the other half when the church was roofed; everything, however, was conditional on the inspection and approval of a special government commission. Finally, on 11 December came the answer, unfortunately negative, from the city council: the municipality’s financial contribution was only envisaged for parish churches, and Don Bosco’s was not such. Nor, given the fact that the Diocese was a vacant see at that stage, could it easily be granted. Don Bosco then took a few days of reflection and on Christmas Eve reaffirmed his intention to

the Mayor to build a large parish church to serve the “densely populated neighbourhood.” If there was a failure in providing a grant, he would have to limit himself to a much smaller church. But this new appeal also fell on deaf ears.

1863 thus ended for Don Bosco with little to show for it in real terms, apart from a few general promises. There was cause for discouragement. But if the public authorities were lacking in financial support, Don Bosco thought, Divine Providence would not fail. He had experienced its strong presence some fifteen years earlier, during the construction of the church of St Francis de Sales. He therefore entrusted the engineer, Antonio Spezia, already known to him as an excellent professional, with the task of drawing up the plans for the new church he had in mind. Among other things, he was to work, once again, free of charge.

The decisive year (1864)

In little more than a month the plans were ready, and at the end of January 1864 they were handed over to the municipal building commission. In the meantime, Don Bosco had asked the management of the State Railways of Upper Italy to transport the stones from Borgone in the lower Susa Valley to Turin free of charge. The favour was quickly granted, but the Building Commission was not so favourable. In mid-March it rejected the drawings that had been delivered due to some “construction irregularity”, inviting the engineer to modify them. Resubmitted on 14 May, they were found to be defective again on 23 May, with a further invitation to take them into account; alternatively, it was suggested that a different design be considered. Don Bosco accepted the first proposal, and on 27 May the revised project was approved and on 2 June the City Council issued the building permit.



First photo of the Church of Mary Help of Christians

Meanwhile Don Bosco had wasted no time. He had asked the Mayor to have the exact alignment of the sunken Via Cottolengo drawn up, in order to be able to raise it at his own expense with material from church excavations. In addition, he had sent out a printed circular throughout central and northern Italy, through some trusted benefactors, in which he presented the pastoral reasons for the new church, its dimensions, and its costs (which actually quadrupled during the course of construction). The appeal, addressed above all to “devotees of Mary”, was accompanied by a registration form for those who wished to indicate in advance the sum they would pay over the three-year period 1864-1866. The circular also indicated the possibility of offering materials for the church or other items needed for it. In April the announcement was published in the Official Gazette of the Kingdom and in *L'Unità Cattolica*.

The work continued and Don Bosco had to always be there because of the constant requests for changes, especially regarding the demarcation lines on the irregular Via Cottolengo. In September he sent out a new circular to a wider circle of benefactors, modelled on the previous one, but specifying that the work would be finished within three years. He also sent a copy to Princes Tommaso and Eugenio of the House of Savoy and to Mayor Emanuele Luserna di Rorà; however, he only asked them, once again, to collaborate on the project by rectifying Via Cottolengo.

Debts, a lottery and much courage

At the end of January 1865, on the feast of St Francis de Sales when Salesians from various houses were gathered at Valdocco, Don Bosco told them of his intention to start a new lottery to raise funds for the continuation of the work (of excavation) for the church. However, he had to postpone it due to the simultaneous presence in the city of another work on behalf of deaf-mutes. As a result, the work, which would have resumed in the spring after the winter break, had no financial cover. So, Don Bosco urgently asked his friend and confrere

from Mornese, Fr Domenico Pestarino, for a loan of 5000 lire (20,000 euro). He did not want to resort to a bank loan in the capital, since interest rates were too high. As if these thorny financial problems were not enough, others arose at the same time with the neighbours, in particular those in the Casa Bellezza. Don Bosco had to pay them compensation so he could deny them passage through the Via della Giardiniera, which then ceased to be a road.

Solemn laying of the foundation stone

The day finally came for the laying of the foundation stone of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians on 27 April 1865. Three days before, Don Bosco issued the invitations in which he announced that His Royal Highness Prince Amadeus of Savoy would lay the cornerstone, while the religious function would be presided over by the Bishop of Casale, Bishop Pietro Maria Ferrè. However, the latter passed away at the last minute and the solemn ceremony was celebrated by the Bishop of Susa, Bishop Giovanni Antonio Odone, in the presence of the City Prefect, the Mayor, various City Councillors, benefactors, members of the city nobility and the Lottery Commission. Duke Amedeo's procession was welcomed to the sound of the royal march by the band and the children's choir at Valdocco, and Mirabello students. The city press acted as a sounding board for the festive event and Don Bosco, for his part, grasping its great political-religious significance, extended its historical scope with his own publications.



Mary Help of Christians Square and Church

Three days later, in a long and painful letter to Pope Pius IX about the difficult situation in which the Holy See found itself in in the face of the politics of the Kingdom of Italy, he mentioned the church with its walls already rising from ground level. He asked for a blessing on the ongoing

enterprise and for gifts for the lottery he was about to launch. In fact, in mid-May he formally asked the Prefecture of Turin for authorisation, justifying it with the need to pay off the debts of the various oratories in Turin, to provide food, clothing, accommodation and schooling for the 880 or so pupils at Valdocco, and to continue the work on the Church of Mary Help of Christians. Obviously, he undertook to observe all the numerous legal provisions in this regard.

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Bullying. A new thing? It was also around in Don Bosco's time

It is certainly no mystery for those who know the "living reality" of Valdocco, so well and not only the "ideal" or "virtual" one, that daily life in a decidedly restricted structure accommodating several hundred youngsters of different ages, origins, dialects, interests 24/7 and for many months a year, posed quite some educational and disciplinary problems for Don Bosco and his young educators. We report two significant episodes in this regard, mostly unknown.

The violent scuffle

In the autumn of 1861, the widow of painter Agostino Cottolengo, brother of the famous (Saint) Benedetto Cottolengo, needing to place her two sons, Giuseppe and Matteo Luigi, in the capital of the newly-born Kingdom of Italy for study, asked her brother-in-law, Can. Luigi Cottolengo of Chieri, to find a suitable boarding school. The latter suggested Don Bosco's oratory and so on 23 October the two

brothers, accompanied by another uncle, Ignazio Cottolengo, a Dominican friar, entered Valdocco at a fee of 50 lire a month. Before Christmas, however, the 14-year-old Matteo Luigi had already returned home for health reasons, while his older brother Giuseppe, who had returned to Valdocco after the Christmas holidays, was sent away a month later for reasons of force majeure. What had happened?

It had happened that on 10 February 1862, 16-year-old Giuseppe had come to blows with a certain Giuseppe Chicco, aged nine, nephew of Can. Simone Chicco from Carmagnola, who was probably paying his fees.

In the scuffle, with lots of beating, the child obviously got the worst of it, and was seriously injured. Don Bosco saw that he was taken in by the trustworthy Masera family, to avoid the news of the unpleasant episode spreading inside and beyond the house. The child was examined by a doctor, who drew up a rather detailed report, useful “for those who had a right to know”.



The bully's temporary removal

So as not to run any risks and for obvious disciplinary reasons, Don Bosco on 15 February was forced to remove the young Cottolengo for a while, having him accompanied not to Bra at his mother's house (she would have suffered too much) but to Chieri, to his uncle the Canon. The latter, two weeks later, asked Don Bosco about Chicco's state of health and the medical expenses incurred so that he could pay for them out of his own pocket. He also asked him if he was willing to accept his nephew back to Valdocco. Don Bosco replied that the wounded boy was now almost completely healed and that there was no need to worry about medical expenses because “we are dealing with upright people.” As for accepting his nephew back, “imagine if I were to refuse” he wrote. But on two conditions: that the boy recognise his wrongdoing and that Can. Cottolengo write to Can. Chicco to apologise on behalf of

his nephew and to beg him to “say a simple word” to Don Bosco for him to accept the young man back at Valdocco. Don Bosco assured him that Can. Chicco would not only accept the apology – he had already written to him about it – but had already arranged for the nephew to be admitted “to a relative’s house to prevent any publicity.” In mid-March both Cottolengo brothers were welcomed back to Valdocco “in a kindly way.” However, Matteo Luigi remained there only until Easter because of the usual health problems, while Giuseppe remained until the end of his studies.

A stronger friendship and a small gain

Not yet content that the affair had ended to the mutual satisfaction of both parties, the following year Can. Cottolengo again insisted with Don Bosco to pay for the wounded child’s doctor and medicines. Can. Chicco, when questioned by Don Bosco, replied that the total expense had been 100 lire, but that he and the child’s family were not asking for anything; but if Cottolengo insisted on paying the bill, he would redirect this sum “in favour of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.” And so it happened.

The culprit had repented, the “victim” had been well cared for, the uncles had come together for the good of their nephews, the mothers had not suffered, Don Bosco and the Valdocco work, after having taken some risks, had gained in friendships, sympathy... and, something always appreciated in that boarding school for poor boys, a small financial contribution. Bringing good from evil is not for everyone but Don Bosco succeeded. There is much to learn.

A very interesting letter that opens a glimpse into the Valdocco world

But let’s present an even more serious case, which again can be instructive for today’s parents and educators grappling with difficult and rebellious boys.

Here are the facts. In 1865 a certain Carlo Boglietti, slapped

for serious insubordination by the assistant in the bookbinding workshop, cleric Giuseppe Mazzarello, denounced the fact to the Borgo Dora urban magistrate's court which opened an enquiry, summoning the accused, the accuser and three boys as witnesses. Wishing to settle the matter with less disturbance from the authorities, Don Bosco thought it best to address the magistrate himself directly and in advance by letter. As the director of a house of education he believed he could and should do so "in the name of all [...] ready to give the greatest satisfaction to whoever required it."

Two important legal premises

In his letter he first of all defended his right and responsibility as father-educator of the children entrusted to him: he immediately pointed out that Article 650 of the Penal Code, called into question by the summons, "seems entirely extraneous to the matter at hand, for if it were interpreted in the sense demanded by the urban court, it would be introduced into the domestic regime of families, and parents and their guardians would no longer be able to correct their children or prevent insolence and insubordination, [things] that would be seriously detrimental to public and private morality."

Secondly, he reiterated that the faculty "to use all the means that were judged opportune [...] to keep certain youngsters in check" had been granted to him by the government authority that sent him the children; only in desperate cases – indeed "several times" – had he had to call in "the arm of public safety."

The episode, its precedents and the educational consequences

As for the young Charles in question, Don Bosco wrote that, faced with continual gestures and attitudes of rebellion, "he was paternally and warned but without effect several times; that he proved not only incorrigible, but insulted, threatened and swore at Cl. Mazzarello before his class mates", to the point that "the assistant, of a very mild and meek

disposition, was so frightened by this that from then on he was sick, unable to resume his duties, and continues to be ill."

The boy had then escaped from the school and through his sister had informed his superiors of his escape only "when he knew that the news could no longer be kept from the police", which he had not done before "to preserve his honour." Unfortunately, his class mates had continued in their violent protest, so much so that – Don Bosco wrote again – "it was necessary to expel some of them from the establishment, and, sorrowfully, to hand them over to the public security authorities who took them to prison."



Don Bosco's requests

Faced with a young man who was "disorderly, who insulted and threatened his superiors" and who then had "the audacity to report those who for his own good [...] consecrated their lives and their money, to the authorities" Don Bosco generally maintained that "public authority should always come to the aid of private authority and not the other way around." In this specific case, then, he did not oppose criminal proceedings, but on two precise conditions: that the boy first present an adult to pay "the expenses that may be necessary and that he take responsibility for the serious consequences that could possibly occur."

To avert a possible trial which would undoubtedly be exploited by the gutter press, Don Bosco played his hand: he asked in advance that "the damage that the assistant had suffered in his honour and person be compensated for at least until he could resume his ordinary occupations", "that the costs of this case be borne by him" and that neither the boy nor "his relative or counsellor" Mr Stephen Caneparo should come to Valdocco "to renew the acts of insubordination and scandals already caused."

Conclusion

How the sad affair came to an end is not known; in all likelihood it came to a prior conciliation between the parties. However, the fact remains that it is good to know that the boys at Valdocco were not all Dominic Savios, Francis Besuccos or even Michael Magones. There were also young “jailbirds” who gave Don Bosco and his young educators a hard time. The education of the young has always been a demanding art not without its risks; yesterday as today, there is a need for close cooperation between parents, teachers, educators, guardians all interested in the exclusive good of the young.

The invisible other Don Boscós

Readers of the *Salesian Bulletin* already know about the intercontinental journey that Don Bosco’s Casket went on a few years ago. The mortal remains of our saint reached dozens and dozens of countries around the world and lingered in a thousand cities and towns, welcomed everywhere with admiration and sympathy. I do not know which saint’s body has travelled so far and which Italian corpse has been received so enthusiastically beyond the borders of its own country. Perhaps none.

While this ‘journey’ is already known history, the intercontinental of the [ACSSA](#) (Association of Salesian History Scholars) from November 2018 to March 2019 is certainly not. It was to coordinate a series of four Study Seminars promoted by the same Association in Bratislava (Slovakia), Bangkok (Thailand), Nairobi (Kenya), Buenos Aires (Argentina). The fifth was held in Hyderabad (India) in June 2018.

Well: on these trips I did not see the Salesian houses, colleges, schools, parishes, missions as I have done on other occasions and as anyone who travels a bit anywhere from the north to the south, from the east to the west of the world can do; instead I encountered a story of Don Bosco, *all yet to be written*.

The other Don Boscos

The theme of the Study Seminars was in fact to present figures of deceased Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who, over a short or long period of their lives, had stood out as particularly significant and relevant, and above all had left their mark after their death. Some of them, then, were authentic “innovators” of the Salesian charism, capable of inculturating it in the most varied ways, obviously in absolute fidelity to Don Bosco and his spirit.

The result was a gallery of a hundred or so men and women of the 20th century, all different from each other, who knew how to make themselves “other Don Boscos”: that is, to open their eyes to their land of birth or mission, to become aware of the material, cultural and spiritual needs of the young people living there, especially the poorest, and to “invent” the best way of satisfying them.

Bishops, priests, nuns, lay Salesians, members of the Salesian Family: all figures, men and women, who without being saints – in our research we excluded saints and those already on their way to the altars – have fully realised Don Bosco’s educational mission in different spheres and roles: as educators and priests, as professors and teachers, animators of oratories and youth centres, founders and directors of educational works, formators of vocations and new religious institutes, as writers and musicians, architects and builders of churches and colleges, artists of wood and painting, missionaries *ad gentes*, witnesses of the faith in prison, simple Salesians and simple Daughters of Mary Help of

Christians. Among them, not a few have often lived a life of hard sacrifices, overcoming obstacles of all kinds, learning very difficult languages, often risking death for lack of acceptable sanitary conditions, impossible climatic conditions, hostile and persecutory political regimes, even actual attacks. The latest of these happened just as I was leaving for Nairobi: Spanish Salesian, [Fr Cesare Fernández](#), murdered in cold blood on 15 February 2018 at the border between Togo and Burkina Faso. One of the most recent Salesians 'martyrs', we could call him, knowing the individual as I did.

A story to learn about



La Boca, neighbourhood of Buenos Aires, Argentina; first mission among emigrants

What can we say then? That this too is *the unknown history of Don Bosco*, or, if you like, of the Sons and Daughters of the saint? If the saint's casket has been received, as we were saying, with so much respect and esteem by public authorities and the simple population even in non-Christian countries, it means that his Sons and Daughters have not only sung his praises – this too has certainly been done, since Don Bosco's image can be found just about everywhere – but have also realised his dreams: to make God's love for young people known, to bring the good news of the Gospel everywhere, to the end of the world (in Tierra del Fuego!).

Those who, like me and my colleagues from ACSSA, were able in February and March 2018 to listen to experiences of Salesian life lived in the 20th century in some fifty countries on four continents, can only affirm, as Don Bosco often did when looking at the impressive development of the congregation before his eyes: 'Here is the finger of God'. If the finger of God has been in Salesian works and foundations, it has also been in the men and women who have consecrated their entire

lives to the evangelical ideal realised in the manner of Don Bosco.

Are these presented to us as “next door saints”? Some certainly, even considering their personal limitations, their characters, their whims, and, why not, their sins (which only God knows). All, however, were endowed with immense faith, great hope, strong charity and generosity, much love for Don Bosco and souls. Some of them – think of the pioneer missionaries in Patagonia – one might be tempted to call real “madmen”, madmen for God and for souls of course.

The concrete results of this story are there for all to see, but the names of many have remained almost ‘invisible’ until now. We can get to know them by reading “[Volti di uno stesso carisma: Salesiani e Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice nel XX secolo](#)” (Faces of the same charism: Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the 20th century), a multilingual book, published by Editrice LAS, in the “Associazione Cultori Storia Salesiana – Studi” series (not yet available in English).

If evil leaves its mark, so does good. ‘*Bonum est diffusivum sui*’ wrote St Thomas Aquinas centuries ago. The Salesians and Salesian women presented at our seminars are proof of this; alongside them or following them, others have done the same, until today.

Let us briefly introduce these new faces of Don Bosco.

1	Antonio COJAZZI, Fr.	1880-1953	brilliant educator	Educators in the field	EU
2	Domenico MORETTI, Fr.	1900-1989	experience in Salesian oratories with the poorest young people	Educators in the field	EU

3	Samuele VOSTI, Fr.	1874-1939	creator and promoter of a renewed festive oratory in Valdocco	Educators in the field	EU
4	Karl ZIEGLER, Fr.	1914-1990	nature lover and scout	Educators in the field	EU
5	Alfonsina FINCO, Sr.	1869-1934	dedication to abandoned children	Educators in the field	EU
6	Margherita MARIANI, Sr.	1858-1939	Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Rome	Educators in the field	EU
7	Sisto COLOMBO, Fr.	1878-1938	man of culture and mystical soul	Educators in the field	EU
8	Franc WALLAND, Fr.	1887-1975	theologian and provincial	Educators in the field	EU
9	Maria ZUCCHI, Sr.	1875-1949	made Salesian mark on the Don Bosco Institute in Messina	Educators in the field	EU
10	Clotilde MORANO, Sr.	1885-1963	the teaching of women's physical education	Educators in the field	EU
11	Annetta URI, Sr.	1903-1989	from the desk to building sites: the courage to build the future of the school	Educators in the field	EU

12	Frances PEDRICK, Sr.	1887-1981	the first Daughter of Mary Help of Christians to graduate from Oxford University	Educators in the field	EU
13	Giuseppe CACCIA, Bro.	1881-1963	a life dedicated to Salesian publishing	Educators in the field	EU
14	Rufillo UGUCCIONI, Fr.	1891-1966	writer for children, evangeliser and disseminator of Salesian values	Educators in the field	EU
15	Flora FORNARA, Sr.	1902-1971	a life for educational theatre	Educators in the field	EU
16	Gaspar MESTRE, Bro.	1888-1962	the Salesian school of carving, sculpture and decoration in Sarriá (Barcelona)	Educators in the field	EU
17	Wictor GRABELSKI, Fr.	1857-1902	a forerunner of Salesian work in Poland	Educators in the field	EU
18	Antoni HLOND, Fr.	1884-1963	musician, composer, founder of a school for organists	Initiators	EU
19	Carlo TORELLO, Fr.	1886-1967	popular devotion and civic memory in Latina	Initiators	EU

20	Jan KAJZER Bro.	1892-1976	engineer co-author of the Polish “art deco” style and moderniser of the Salesian vocational school in Oświęcim	Initiators	EU
21	Antonio CAVOLI, Fr.	1888-1972	founder of religious congregation in Japan inspired by the Salesian charism	Initiators	EU
22	Iside MALGRATI, Sr.	1904-1992	innovative Salesian in printing, school and vocational training	Initiators	EU
23	Anna JUZEK, Sr.	1879-1957	contribution to the establishment of the works of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Poland	Initiators	EU
24	Mária ČERNÁ, Sr.	1928-2011	basis for the rebirth of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Slovakia	Initiators	EU

25	Antonio SALA, Fr.	1836-1895	economer at Valdocco and earliest Economer General	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU
26	Francesco SCALONI, Fr.	1861-1926	an extraordinary figure of a Salesian superior	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU
27	Luigi TERRONE, Fr.	1875-1968	novice master and rector	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU

28	Marcelino OLAECHEA, Bishop	1889-1972	promoter of housing for workers	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU
29	Stefano TROCHTA, Cardinal	1905-1974	martyr under Nazis and Communists	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU
30	Alba DEAMBROSIS, Sr.	1887-1964	builder of female Salesian work in the German-speaking area	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU

31	Virginia FERRARO ORTÍ, Sr.	1894-1963	from trade unionist to Salesian superior	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU
32	Raffaele PIPERNI, Fr.	1842-1930	parish priest, 'mediator' in the integration of Italian immigrants into the San Francisco mainstream	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
33	Remigio RIZZARDI, Fr.	1863-1912	the father of beekeeping in Colombia	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
34	Carlos PANE, Fr.	1856-1923	pioneer of the Salesian presence in Spain and Peru	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
35	Florencio José MARTÍNEZ EMBODAS, Fr.	1894-1971	a Salesian way of building	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
36	Martina PETRINI PRADO, Sr.	1874-1965	Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; origins in fast- developing Uruguay	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF

37	Anna María COPPA, Sr.	1891-1973	foundress and face of the first Catholic school in Ecuador	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
38	Rose MOORE, Sr.	1911-1996	pioneer in the rehabilitation of blind Thai youth	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
39	Mirta MONDIN, Sr.	1922-1977	the origins of the first Catholic girls' school in Gwangju (Korea)	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
40	Terezija MEDVEŠEK, Sr.	1906-2001	valiant missionary in North-East India	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
41	Nancy PEREIRA, Sr.	1923-2010	tireless dedication to the poor	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
42	Jeanne VINCENT, Sr.	1915-1997	one of the first missionaries in Port-Gentil, Gabon	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
43	Maria Gertrudes DA ROCHA, Sr.	1933-2017	missionary and economer in Mozambique	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
44	Pietro GIACOMINI, Bishop	1904-1982	obedience blossoms	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	AM, AS, AF

45	José Luis CARREÑO ECHANDIA, Fr.	1905-1986	a multifaceted missionary with a preferential option for the poor	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	AM, AS, AF
46	Catherine MANIA, Sr.	1903-1983	first provincial in North-East India	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	AM, AS, AF
47	William Richard AINSWORTH, Fr.	1908-2005	an essay on modern Salesian leadership	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	AM, AS, AF

48	Blandine ROCHE, Sr.	1906-1999	the Salesian presence in the difficult years of post-independence Tunisia	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	AM, AS, AF
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