

# A Mysterious and Prophetic Wheel (1861)

*The wise man's heart," we read in Holy Scripture, "knows times and judgments; for there is a time and a judgment for everything. Yet it is a great affliction for man that he is ignorant of what is to come; for who will make known to him how it will be?" [Eccl. 8, 5-7]*

*That Don Bosco knew when to toil and when to pause and explain, that he was not ignorant of things past and future concerning his mission, is further proven by the unswerving dedication inspiring the chronicles of Father Ruffino and Father Bonetti and the memoirs of Bishop John Cagliero, Father Chiala, and others who were privileged to hear Don Bosco's words.*

With remarkable accord, they report another dream in which Don Bosco saw the Oratory and its beneficial results, the spiritual condition of his pupils, their vocation – as Salesian priests or brothers or as laymen in the world – and, lastly, the future of his budding congregation.

Don Bosco's dream occurred during the night of May 1, 1861 and lasted about six hours. At dawn on May 2, he arose and jotted down the dream's highlights and the names of some of the various people he had seen in it. He narrated it after night prayers on three successive nights from the little rostrum in the porticoes. The first night, May 2, he spoke for nearly forty-five minutes. The introduction, as usual, seemed somewhat obscure and strange for reasons we have already explained and for others we shall soon give.

After announcing his topic, he continued:

This dream concerns the students only. Very much of what I saw simply defies description. I seemed to have just started out of my house at Becchi on a path leading to Capriglio, a village near Castelnuovo. I wanted to see a field

belonging to my family in a little dale behind a farmstead called "Valcappone." As a boy I had often worked there. The field was very sandy and its yield barely equaled the taxes on it. As I was nearing it, I met a man in his forties, of average height, suntanned, and with a long, well-trimmed beard. He wore a tunic reaching to his knees and fastened around his waist, and a white beret. He seemed to be waiting for somebody. He greeted me cordially, like an old acquaintance, and then asked, "Where are you going?"

"To a nearby field of mine," I answered. "And what brings you around here?"

"Don't be so curious," he replied. "You don't have to know that."

"Very well. Will you at least tell me your name? You seem to know me, but you are a stranger to me."

"You don't have to know that, either. Just come along with me."

I followed him and after a few steps saw a large fig orchard. "Look at those figs!" the man exclaimed. "Aren't they luscious? Go ahead, help yourself!"

Taken aback by the sight, I replied, "That's funny! There never were figs here before!"

"There are now!" he replied.

"But this isn't the season for figs! They can't be ripe."

"But some are! If you want to pick them, hurry because it's getting late." I did not stir and so my friend insisted: "Hurry, don't waste time because it will soon be dark."

"Why do you rush me? Besides, I don't want any. I like to look at them and give them away, but I personally don't care very much for them."

"In that case, let's go on. But remember what St. Matthew's Gospel says about great events menacing Jerusalem: 'From the fig tree learn a parable: When its branch is now tender and leaves break forth, you know that summer is near.' [Matt. 24, 32] It's all the nearer now that the figs are

already beginning to ripen.”

We resumed our walk and came to a vineyard. “Perhaps you care for grapes,” the man said. “Take some!”

“Not now! In due time I’ll pick them from my own vineyard.”

“But you have grapes right here!”

“Not now!”

“Can’t you see how ripe they are?”

“I can hardly believe it. This isn’t the season for grapes!”

“Hurry because it’s getting dark. You can’t afford to lose time.”

“What’s the hurry? It will be soon enough if I get home before dark.” “Hurry, I say, because night is coming.”

“So what? Morning will follow!”

“You are wrong. There will be no morning!”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that night is coming.”

“What kind of night? Are you trying to say that I have to pack up for eternity?”

“I repeat: Night is coming! You haven’t much time left.”

“Tell me, at least, if it will be very soon.”

“Don’t be so curious. *Non plus sapere quam oportet sapere*. [Don’t try to know more than is good for you.]”

“That’s what my mother used to say about nosy people,” I thought. Then I said aloud: “All right, but I still don’t want any grapes!”

So we continued along the road and soon came to my field. My brother Joseph was there loading a wagon. He greeted us both, but, seeing that the stranger ignored him, asked me if he was a schoolmate of mine.

“No,” I answered. “I never saw him before.”

My brother then turned to him. “Would you please tell me your name?” There was no response. In amazement my brother again asked me, “Who is he?”

“I don’t know. He won’t tell!”

We both again pleaded with the stranger to identify himself but he kept repeating, "*Non plus sapere quam oportet sapere*. [Don't try to know more than is good for you.]"

My brother gave up and left us alone. The stranger then turned to me and said, "Would you like to see something unusual?"

"Certainly!" I replied.

"Would you like to see your boys as they are now and as they will be in the future? Would you want to count them?"

"Very much so!"

"Come here then."

From I don't know where he pulled out a strange contraption housing a large wheel and set it on the ground.

"What's this wheel?" I asked.

"The wheel of eternity," he replied, and, seizing the handle, he gave it a spin.

"Now, you try it," he said.

I did so.

"Look inside."

I looked and saw a large lens encased in the wheel. The lens was about five feet in diameter, and its edge bore the inscription: *Hic est oculus qui humilia respicit in caelo et in terra*. [This is the eye that sees the lowly things in heaven and on earth.]

I immediately looked through the lens. What a sight! All the Oratory boys stood there before my eyes. "How can this be?" I said to myself. "I have never before seen anyone around here and now the place is full of boys. Aren't they in Turin?" I carefully examined the whole contraption; only through the lens could I see anybody. I looked at the stranger in amazement. After a few moments, he ordered me to turn the handle once more. Something startling happened: the boys were separated into two groups: the good and the bad; the former beaming with joy, the latter – not many, thank God – a sorry sight. I recognized them all. How different they were

from what their companions believed them to be! Some had tongues pierced through with holes, others had pitifully squinting eyes, and still others had ugly sores covering their heads or worms gnawing at their hearts. The longer I looked, the more I grieved for them. "Can these possibly be my boys?" I asked. "What can these strange ailments mean?"

"I will tell you," the stranger replied. "Pierced tongues symbolize foul talk; squinting eyes indicate a lack of appreciation of God's graces by setting earthly things above the heavenly. Sores on the head show that they neglect your advice and cater to their own whims; worms symbolize evil passions gnawing at their hearts. There are boys, too, who do not want to hear your words lest they have to put them into practice."

At a nod from him, I spun the wheel again and pressed my eyes to the lens. Four boys bound with heavy chains came into view. I looked at them carefully and recognized them. I asked the stranger what that meant. "That shouldn't be hard to figure out," he replied. "These are the boys who pay no attention to your advice. If they do not mend their ways, they run the risk of ending up in jail and rotting there for their crimes."

"Let me jot their names down lest I forget," I said, but the stranger objected, "You don't have to! Their names are in this book."

I noticed then that he carried a notebook. At his word I gave the wheel another turn and looked. This time I saw seven other boys, defiant and distrustful, their lips padlocked. Three were also clamping their ears shut with their hands. Again I wanted to write their names down, but again the stranger firmly forbade it.

Painfully amazed to see those boys in their predicament, I asked why their lips were padlocked.

"Can't you see it for yourself?" the stranger replied. "These are the boys who refuse to tell."

"Tell what?"

"They won't tell, that's all!"

I understood then that he meant confession. These are boys who, even when questioned by their confessor, will not answer or will answer evasively or contrary to the truth. They say "no" when the answer should be "yes." My friend then went on: "Do you see those three clamping their hands over their ears? Aren't they a sorry sight? Well, they are boys who not only do not tell their sins, but even refuse to listen to their confessor's advice, warnings, and orders. They hear your words, but pay no heed to them. They could unplug their ears, but won't. The other four boys, instead, listened to your exhortations and warnings but did not put them into practice."

"How can they get rid of that padlock?" I inquired.

*"Ejiciatur superbia e cordibus eorum"* he replied.  
[Let pride be cast out of their hearts.]

"I will speak to these boys," I went on, "but there is little hope for those who willfully shut their ears." That stranger then advised that whenever I say a few words by way of sermon, half those words should be on making a good confession.

I promised that I would. I don't mean to say that I will carry out that injunction to the letter because I would make myself tiresome, but I will do my best to impress the importance and need of good confessions upon all and as often as possible. In fact, more people are eternally lost through bad confessions than in any other way because even the worst people occasionally do go to confession. There are very many, however, who make bad confessions.

When, at the stranger's command, I gave the wheel another turn, I was horrified to see three boys gripped from behind by three husky monkeys armed with horns. Each beast gripped its victim's throat by its forepaws so tightly that the boy's face became flushed and his bloodshot eyes almost popped out of their sockets. Moreover, the beast's hind legs and long tail bound the boy's thighs and legs so as to almost completely immobilize him. These were boys who go through a spiritual retreat and still remain in mortal sin, guilty

especially of impurity, of a serious offense against the Sixth Commandment. The devil chokes them to keep them from speaking when they should; he makes them blush to the point of losing their heads so that they no longer realize what they are doing. A false shame then overwhelms them and leads them to perdition. The devil has them by their throats so tightly that their eyes seem to pop from their sockets, and they can no longer see their miserable condition and the way to get out of their horrible mess. A senseless fear and repugnance keep them from the sacraments. The devil grips their thighs and legs to make it impossible for them to take a step in the right direction. So strong are their bad habits that these boys become convinced they can no longer help themselves.

I assure you, my dear boys, that I wept at that sight. I wanted to rescue those unfortunate lads, but as soon as I drew away from the lens I could see them no more. I also wanted to take down their names, but my friend would have none of it. "It's unnecessary," he kept saying, "because they are all written down in this notebook."

Grieved by this sight beyond words, I tearfully turned to my companion, sobbing, "How is this possible? How can these boys be in such miserable shape after I lavished so much care on them in confession and out of confession?"

"*Labor, Sudor, Fervor*," was his scrambled, mumbled reply.

"I didn't quite get it," I said. "Please speak more clearly."

Again he muttered, "*Labor, Sudor, Fervor*"

"It's no use," I said. "As long as you keep mumbling, I can't make out what you are saying."

"Are you making fun of me?" he asked.

"Not at all! I just can't understand you."

"Listen, you know your grammar. Just pay attention: *Labor* – comma; *Sudor* – comma; *Fervor* – period. Do you get it now?"

"I get the words," I replied, "but what's the message?"

"All right, I'll make it clearer: *Labor in assiduis operibus* [Constant hard work]; *Sudor in poenitentiis continuus* [Incessant, painstaking mortification]; *Fervor in orationibus ferventibus et perseverantibus* [Fervent and persevering prayer]. For these boys, however, your sacrifices, no matter how great, will be of no avail. You will not win them over, because they do not want to shake off Satan's yoke of slavery."

Meanwhile I kept staring through the lens, fretting and thinking, "How is this possible? Are those boys really doomed, even after a spiritual retreat? Were all my sacrifices, efforts, sermons, suggestions, and warnings to no avail? Were all their promises a sham? What a letdown!"

These thoughts utterly disheartened me. My friend noticed it. "How proud and conceited you are!" he chided me. "Do you expect your boys to be converted just because you work for them, to respond to your cares just because you love them? Do you perhaps think that you love, work, and suffer more than Our Blessed Savior? Do you expect your words to be more effective than His? Do you preach better than He did? Do you believe you have been more loving and anxious for your boys than Our Lord was for His Apostles? Aren't you aware that they lived constantly with Him, endlessly benefited from all kinds of graces and favors, heard His admonitions and precepts, and witnessed His divine example? Shouldn't all this have effectively spurred them to saintly lives? Didn't He do all He could for Judas? And yet Judas betrayed Him and died impenitent. Are you better than the Apostles? Didn't they carefully choose seven deacons? They chose but seven and one of them went astray. Are you surprised and upset if among five hundred boys a few will not respond to your care? Are you so conceited as to expect that none of your boys will turn out badly and be lost? How proud can you be?"

These words silenced me, but for all that I still felt very much disheartened.

"Cheer up!" my friend went on. "Turn the wheel again and see how generous God is! See how many souls He wants



to give you! Look at all those boys."

I peered again into the lens and saw a very large number of boys totally unknown to me.

"I see them," I remarked, "but I don't know any of them."

"Well," he replied, "the Lord will give you all these boys to make up for the fourteen who do not cooperate with you. For each one of them He will give you a hundred!"

"Poor me!" I exclaimed. "The Oratory is full already. Where shall I put them?"

"Don't worry. Right now that's no problem. Later, He who sends them will make room for them."

"I'm not too worried about that," I said. "My greatest worry is feeding them!"

"Don't worry about that either! The Lord will provide."

"In that case, I am quite happy!" I replied in deep relief.

Delightedly I kept looking at those boys, studying the features of very many so as to be able to recognize them if I ever met them.

Thus ended Don Bosco's talk on the night of May 2, 1861.

Don Bosco resumed his story on the following night, concisely and vividly. Through the lens he had also seen the vocation of each of his boys. However, he did not disclose any names and postponed to a later account the questions he had put to his guide and the latter's answers concerning symbols and allegories of the dream.

The cleric Dominic Ruffino was nevertheless able to gather a few names confidentially from the boys themselves to whom Don Bosco had more privately manifested what he had seen about them. Ruffino recorded the names in 1861 and gave us the list. To make our narration clearer and avoid repetitions, we shall insert names and explanations, mostly in non-dialogue form, while still reporting the chronicle word by word. Don Bosco resumed his narration on May 3, as follows:

was rejoicing to see so many new boys when the stranger, still standing by his apparatus, asked me: "Would you like to see something even more delightful?"

"Certainly!" I replied.

"Then give the wheel another turn."

I did and peered through the lens. I saw the boys separated into two groups, some distance apart, in a broad area. At my left I could see a vast field, in which all sorts of vegetables were growing, and a meadow lined at its edge with a few rows of wild vines. The first group of boys was working this field with spades, hoes, picks, shovels, and rakes. They were broken up into squads, each with a foreman. The whole group took orders from Chevalier Oreglia who was busy handing out tools and prodding sluggish workers. Farther away, near the edge of the field, I saw other boys sowing seed. A second group was working on my right in a vast field covered with golden wheat. A long trench separated this field from other fields which stretched out as far as the eye could see. All the boys were busy harvesting – bundling into sheaves, piling them, gleaning, carting, threshing, sharpening sickles, and handing them out.

Some boys were also playing guitars. I assure you, it was quite a scene. Nearby, in the shade of ancient trees, were tables laden with food; a little further off, one could see a gorgeous garden with all kinds of flowers in full bloom. The two groups of boys symbolized different vocations: the lay state and the priesthood. I did not know this at the time, and so I asked, "What's the meaning of all this?"

"Can't you see it yet?" he replied. "Boys tilling the soil are those who work for themselves alone. They are not called to be priests."

I understood then that this applied to the artisans. In their state of life they only think of saving their own souls and feel no special obligation to work at saving the souls of others.

"And the second group?" I asked. But then it dawned on me that these boys were called to be priests. Now I

knew who were called to the priesthood and who were not.

As I watched very interestedly, I noticed that Provera was handing out sickles. I took this to mean that he might become the rector of a seminary, a religious community, or a house of studies; perhaps he might become something even more important. I observed that not all the reapers received their sickles from him. The boys who did are those who are destined to join the [Salesian] Congregation. The others, instead, are to become diocesan priests. The sickle symbolized the Word of God. Another detail: Provera did not readily give a sickle to all who asked. Some he just ordered to take either one or two morsels of food. The first morsel signified piety, the second knowledge. James Rossi was sent to take one. The boys had to report to the cleric [Celestine] Durando who was in the little grove setting tables and serving the reapers – the task of those who are particularly destined to promote devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament. Matthew Galliano was busy serving beverages. Costamagna, too, asked for a sickle, but was first sent by Provera to pick two flowers from the garden. The same happened to Quattroccolo. Rebuffo was promised a sickle on condition that he first pick three flowers. Olivero also was there.

Meanwhile, all the other boys were scattered here and there in the wheatfield, some working abreast with larger or narrower rows to cultivate. Father Ciattino, the pastor of Maretto, was using a sickle he had received from Provera. Francesia and Vibert were cutting wheat. So too were Hyacinth Perucatti, Merlone, Momo, Garino, and Jarach – an indication that they would save souls by their preaching if they persevered in their vocation. Some reaped more than others. Bondioni was cutting wheat like mad, but how long could he last? Others hacked at the wheat with all their strength but cut nothing. Vaschetti took hold of a sickle, began to cut, and went at it zestfully until he found himself working in another field. He wasn't the only one, either. Some sickles were dull or blunted or in such poor condition that they actually did more harm than good.

Dominic Ruffino had a long row to take care of. His sickle was very sharp, but blunted at the point, signifying lack of humility and an ambition to outdo his companions. He went to Francis Cerruti to have his sickle fixed. The latter had been given that task, a symbol that one day he would become a teacher and instill knowledge and piety into students. Hammering, in fact, is the task of those charged with forming priestly candidates. Provera handed the blunted sickles to Cerruti and the dull ones to Rocchietti and others – an indication that they would one day form priestly vocations to piety. Viale came up for a sickle and picked out a dull one, but Provera made him take one he had just sharpened. I also saw Rinaudo servicing farm tools.

While all this was going on, Fusero was tying sheaves. This meant that his task would be to keep souls in God's grace, particularly the souls of those called to the priesthood. In other words, he would one day form young clerics.

Others were helping him; among them I saw Turchi and Ghivarello. This meant that they would work especially in setting consciences right, as, for example, in hearing confessions, particularly of priests or priestly candidates.

Others were loading sheaves on a wagon symbolizing God's grace. Converted sinners must climb upon this wagon in order to make a start on their way to heaven. When the wagon was fully loaded, oxen – a symbol of strength and perseverance – started pulling it. Some boys led them, following Rua. This means that Rua's task will be to lead souls to heaven. [Angelo] Savio trailed behind, gleaning ears of wheat or sheaves which fell from the wagon.

Scattered about the field were John Bonetti, Joseph Bongiovanni, and others, busily gleaning. Their task will be to rescue obstinate sinners. Bonetti, especially, is called by God to seek such unfortunate people.

Fusero and Anfossi were preparing sheaves for threshing. Perhaps this suggested a teaching career. Others, like Father Alasonatti, stacked them; they are those who

administer finances, watch over the observance of rules, and teach prayers and hymns – in short, those who materially and morally contribute in directing souls to heaven.

One strip of land had been cleared and smoothed out for threshing. John Cagliero, who had just gone to the garden for flowers and had handed them out to his companions, betook himself to the threshing area, still holding a little bouquet of flowers. Threshing grain symbolizes God's call to instruct the common people.

Far off, black columns of smoke were rising to the sky. Some boys had gathered cockle and were burning it outside the field. This symbolized those who would remove the bad from the good as directors of our future houses. Among them I saw Francis Cerruti, John Baptist Tamietti, Dominic Belmonte, Paul Albera, and others, who are now studying in the lower Latin grades.

All the above scenes kept unfolding simultaneously. I saw some boys in that crowd hold lighted lanterns, though it was broad daylight. Evidently they were destined to be beacons, giving good example to other workers in the Lord's vineyard. Among them was Paul Albera, who, besides carrying a lamp, also played the guitar. This means that not only will he guide priests, but he will also encourage them to persevere. It suggested, too, some high post in the Church.

Amid so much hustle and bustle, however, not all the boys were busy. One fellow was holding a pistol, an indication that he was inclined to a military career, though he was as yet uncertain. Others just stood about idly, watching the reapers, with no intention of joining them. Some looked undecided; being too lazy for action, they couldn't make up their minds. Others instead ran for a sickle, but a few of these did nothing on reaching the field. There were also some who swung the sickle wrongly. Molino was one of them. These are boys who always do the opposite of what they should. Quite a few others kept roaming about or picking wild grapes, denoting those who waste their time in tasks not

pertaining to them.

The boys tilling the soil in the field at the left were also an odd sight. While most of those sturdy lads worked very diligently, a few were using their hoes the wrong way or only pretending to work. Some knocked the blade off the handle at every blow. The handle symbolized the right intention.

I also observed artisans reaping wheat and students hoeing. I again tried to jot down some notes, but my guide would immediately show me his notebook and stop me. I could also see that very many boys stood idly about because they couldn't make up their minds. Instead, the two Dalmazzo brothers, Primo Gariglio, Monasterolo, and many others seemed determined to make a decision one way or the other. I saw some quit hoeing to go and do some reaping. One boy was in such a hurry that he forgot to get a sickle. Shamefacedly, he went back for one, but the person in charge refused to give it to him despite his insistence. "It's not time yet!" he told him.

"Yes, it is!" the lad insisted. "I want it now!"

"Not now!" was the reply. "First go to the garden and pick two flowers."

"All right," he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders. "I'll pick all the flowers you want."

"Two will do!"

He ran to the garden but, on getting there, realized he had not asked which two flowers he should pick. He rushed back to ask.

"Pick the flower of charity and that of humility," he was told.

"I've got them already."

"You only think you have them!"

The boy fumed, clenched his fists, and raged.

"This is no time for a tantrum," the one in charge told him, and he absolutely refused to hand him a scythe. The lad bit his fists in rage.

After this I stopped looking through the lens, which had enabled me to learn so much. I felt stirred, too, by the moral applications my friend had suggested. I again asked

for a few more explanations. The stranger repeated: "The wheat field is the Church; the harvest is the fruit reaped; the sickle is the tool – the Word of God especially – to harvest the fruit. The dull blade means lack of piety; the blunted point signifies lack of humility. Leaving the field while reaping means leaving the Oratory and the Salesian Society."

The following night, May 4, 1861, Don Bosco concluded his narrative. The first part had shown him the Oratory pupils, especially the students; the second indicated those who were called to the priesthood. The third part was a succession of visions: the Salesian Society in 1861, its prodigious growth, and the gradual disappearance of the first Salesians and their replacement by others. Don Bosco spoke thus:

After I had leisurely taken in the richly varied harvest scene, the obliging stranger said, "Now give the wheel ten turns and look."

I obeyed. Marvelously, those very lads whom I had patted as children a few days before were now virile, bearded men, some with greying hair.

"How could this happen?" I inquired. "That man was a mere youngster the other day!"

My friend answered, "Don't be surprised! How many turns did you give the wheel?"

"Ten."

"Then they are all ten years older. We have gone from 1861 to 1871."

"Oh!" Through that mysterious lens I saw new places, new houses of ours, and many pupils in the care of my dear Oratory boys, now priests, teachers, and directors.

"Give the wheel ten more turns, and we shall reach 1881," the stranger told me. I complied and peered into the lens. Now I saw only about half the boys I had seen before. Nearly all were grey-haired, a few stooping.

"Where are the others?" I asked.

"Gone into eternity," he replied.

This striking loss grieved me considerably, but I

was consoled by the sight of an immense tableau of new and unknown regions and a multitude of boys led by teachers unknown to me but pupils of my first boys, some already mature in years.

I gave the wheel ten more turns and then saw only one-fourth of the boys I had seen but a few moments before. They were much older and white-haired.

"Where are the others?" I asked.

"Gone into eternity. This is now 1891."

I then beheld a very touching sight. My toil-worn priests were surrounded by boys I had never seen; many were of a different race and color.

I turned the wheel ten more times. I could only see a few of my first boys, tottering and bent with age, gaunt and thin. Among others I remember seeing Father Rua, so old and haggard as to be hardly recognizable.

"What about all the others?" I asked.

"Gone into eternity! We are now in the year 1901."

I saw many houses of ours, but none of my old Salesians. The directors and teachers were all unknown to me. The multitude of boys kept growing, as was the number of houses and personnel.

"Now," the stranger said, "turn the wheel ten more times, and you will see things that will both cheer and sadden you." I complied.

"Nineteen hundred and eleven!" my friend exclaimed.

My dear boys, I saw new houses, new boys, new directors, and teachers dressed differently from us. And what about my first Oratory boys? I searched and searched through the great multitude and could find only one of you, white-haired, bent with age. Surrounded by boys, he was telling them about the Oratory's beginnings and repeating things he had learned from Don Bosco, while pointing out to them his picture hanging on the parlor wall. And what about the first pupils and superiors that I had just seen as old men? . . .

At a nod from the stranger, I again gave the wheel



several turns. All I could see was a vast solitude, with nobody in sight. "Oh!" I gasped. "There is nobody here! Where are all the cheerful, lively, strong boys that are at the Oratory with me right now?"

"Gone into eternity! Remember that a decade goes by with every ten turns of the wheel."

I figured that I had given the wheel fifty turns and that around 1911 the boys that are now at the Oratory would all be gone into eternity.

"Now," the stranger said, "would you like to see something really startling?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Watch! Give the wheel as many turns counterclockwise as you did clockwise."

I did so.

"Now look!" the stranger cried.

I saw an immense crowd of boys of countless nations, features, and tongues. So vast was the throng that I could single out only a small fraction with their superiors.

"I don't know any of them," I said to the stranger.

"Still," he replied, "they are all your sons. Listen. They are talking about you and your first boys, their superiors, now long dead, and the teaching you and your first sons handed down to them."

Again I looked intently, but on removing my gaze from the lens, I saw the wheel begin to spin by itself so fast and so noisily that I awoke and found myself in bed, exhausted.

Now that I have told you all these things, you may think that Don Bosco is an extraordinary man, a great man, a saint, no doubt! My dear lads, before you entertain such foolish notions about me, feel absolutely free to believe or not believe these things and to make whatever you want of them. I only ask that you do not make fun of them, whether among yourselves or with outsiders. Bear in mind, though, that Our Lord can manifest His will in many ways. Sometimes He

makes use of the most unsuitable, unworthy instruments, as when He made Balaam's donkey speak and even used Balaam himself – a false prophet – to foretell many things concerning the Messiah. Such may be the case with me. I warn you, then, not to follow my example blindly. What you must do is to pay close attention to all I say because that at least, I hope, will always be in accordance with God's will and helpful to your souls.

As for what I do, never say, "Don Bosco did it and so it has to be good." Examine it first. If you see it is good, do likewise, but if it were, perchance, bad, beware of imitating it. Don't! [Good night!]"

*(MB IT VI, 898-916 / MB EN VI, 530-544)*

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## **The handkerchief of purity (1861)**

On June 16, Don Bosco gave the boys the spiritual nosegay to pray for the grace of repentance for those with the big ape on their shoulders – boys so few in number that he could hardly speak of them in the plural. Then, at the "2 Good Night" on June 18, he told the following little story, or dream of sorts, as he called it on another occasion. His style of narration, however, was always such as to prompt Ruffino to apply to Don Bosco what Baruch had said of Jeremiah: "[He] dictated all these words to me as if he were reading them, and I wrote them down with ink in the book." [Jer. 36, 18] Don Bosco spoke thus:

On the night of June 14 I had no sooner fallen asleep than I was startled by a heavy blow on the bedstead, as if someone had struck it with a board. I jumped up and

immediately thought that it was lightning.

I looked about but found nothing unusual. Convinced that I had most likely been dreaming, I again tried to sleep. Hardly had I begun to doze when a second blow startled me again. This time I got out of bed and searched everywhere – under the bed, under the desk, and in the corners of the room – but I found nothing amiss. Commending myself to God's safekeeping, I blessed myself with holy water and slipped into bed. It was then that my mind began to wander and I saw what I am going to tell you.

I seemed to be in our church pulpit, about to start a sermon. All the boys were seated at their usual places, looking up and waiting, but I had no idea what to preach about. My mind was a complete blank. For a while I stood there dumbfounded and dismayed. Never had anything like this happened to me in all my years of ministry. Then suddenly the walls and boys disappeared, and the church turned into an immense valley. I was beside myself and could not believe my eyes.

"What's this?" I questioned. "A moment ago I was in the pulpit in church and now I am in a valley? Am I dreaming? What's happening to me?"

I decided then to get going, hoping to meet someone and find out where I was. After a while, I came to a stately palace. Its many balconies and broad terraces beautifully harmonized with the building and landscape. In front of the palace there was a large plaza. In a corner, at the right, a large number of boys were crowding around a lady who was handing out handkerchiefs, one to each boy. On taking theirs, the boys walked up to the terrace and ranged themselves along the parapet. Drawing close to the lady, I heard her say to each lad as she gave him a handkerchief, "Do not unfold it when it's windy, but if you are surprised by a wind, turn at once to the right, never to the left."

I keep looking at those boys, but then and there I did not recognize any of them. When all the handkerchiefs had been distributed, the boys were all lined up on the terrace in complete silence. As I watched, one boy took out his

handkerchief and unfolded it. Others followed his example and soon all had them out. The handkerchiefs were very large and exquisitely embroidered in gold. On each, lengthwise, there was written in gold: *Regina virtutum* [Queen of virtues].

Suddenly a soft breeze came out of the north – that is, from the left; gradually it grew stronger, then it became a wind. Immediately some boys folded their handkerchiefs and hid them, while others turned quickly to the right. Others, instead, left them exposed and flapping in the wind. Meanwhile the disturbance gained force while ominous clouds gathered overhead and darkened the sky. Lightning flashed as thunderous, frightening rumbles rolled across the heavens, followed by hail, rain, and snow. Unbelievably, many boys still kept their handkerchiefs flapping in the storm. The hail, rain, and snow battered them mercilessly.

In no time they were riddled with holes, torn beyond recognition.

I was stunned, not knowing what to make of it. However, I was in for a still greater shock. As I got closer to those boys for a better look, I recognized every one of them. They were my own Oratory boys. I hurried up to one and asked, “What in the world are you doing here? Aren’t you so-and-so?”

“Yes,” he replied, “I am.” And then, pointing to several others, he added, “So-and-so and so-and-so are here too!”

I then went over to the lady who had distributed the handkerchiefs.

Several men were around her.

“What does all this mean?” I asked them.

The lady herself [hearing my question] turned to me. “Didn’t you see the inscription on those handkerchiefs?” she asked.

“Why yes, my lady,” I replied. “*Regina virtutum*.”

“Do you understand now?”

“Yes, I do!”

All those boys exposed their purity to the wind of temptation. Some, on realizing the danger, immediately fled. Those are the boys who folded and hid their handkerchiefs. Others, taken by surprise and unable to fold their handkerchiefs, turned to the

right. These are the boys who promptly have recourse to prayer when in danger and turn their backs upon the enemy. Others, instead, kept their handkerchiefs open to the full blast of temptation and fell into sin.

Saddened by this sight and the realization that so very few of my boys had kept themselves pure, I nearly lost heart and burst into tears.

When I was able to control myself again, I asked, "Why did even raindrops and snowflakes riddle the handkerchiefs? Aren't they symbols of venial sins?"

One of the men replied: "Don't you know that where purity is concerned *non datur parvitas materiae* [there is no matter that is not considered to be grave]? Nevertheless, don't be downhearted. Come and see."

He moved to the balcony and, signaling to the boys with his hand, shouted, "Right about face!" Nearly all obeyed, but a few did not budge.

Their handkerchiefs were torn to shreds. I noticed, too, that the handkerchiefs of those who had turned to the right had shrunk and were covered with patches. They had no holes but were pitifully shapeless.

"These boys," the lady explained, "had the misfortune of losing purity, but they regained God's grace through confession. Those few who did not stir are those who persist in sin and perhaps will go to perdition." Finally, she said to me: "*Nemini dicito, sed tantum admone.*"

[Tell no one in particular, but give only a general warning.]  
(*BM VI*, 582-584)

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## Hiking to Heaven (1861)

*We shall now narrate another inspiring dream of Don Bosco which occurred on the nights of April 3, 4, and 5, 1861. "Its*

*striking details," Father Bonetti remarks, "will aptly convince our readers that this is such a dream as God now and then graciously sends to His faithful servants." We shall report it here as detailed in Bonetti's and Ruffino's chronicles.*

"After night prayers on April 7," they wrote, "Don Bosco mounted the little rostrum to give the 'Good Night' and spoke as follows:

I have something very strange to tell you tonight – a dream. It's only a dream, so do not give it more importance than it merits. Let me first tell you, though, that I am quite honest with you, as I would like you to be honest with me. I keep no secrets from you, but what is said within the family should be kept in the family. I don't mean to imply that it would be a sin to tell others, but even so I'd rather you didn't. Talk about it all you want, and laugh and joke to your heart's content among yourselves, or even with those few who may – in your opinion – benefit spiritually from it.

This dream has three parts because it lasted three nights. This evening I'll tell you only the first part, leaving the rest for other nights. Surprisingly, on the second and third night I resumed the dream at the very point I had left off when I awoke.

## **PART ONE**

Since dreams come while sleeping, I too was asleep. A few days ago, having to go out of town, I passed by the green-clad hills of Moncalieri.<sup>1</sup> I was deeply impressed. Possibly this charming scene came back to my mind, stirring a desire to go hiking. As a matter of fact, that's what I decided to do in my dream.

I seemed to be with my boys in a vast plain which stretched

out to a massively high hill. As we were all standing there, I suddenly proposed a hike.

“Yes, yes!” they all cheerfully shouted. “Let’s go!”

“Where to?” we asked one another undecidedly. While we looked hopefully at each other for suggestions, someone abruptly blurted out, “Let’s hike to heaven.”

“Yes, yes, to heaven!” the cry arose on all sides.

We started off, and after a while we reached the foot of the hill and began climbing. A magnificent view soon unfolded before our eyes. As far as we could see, the hillside was dotted with trees and saplings of all kinds – some small and tender, others tall and vigorous, none thicker than a man’s arm. There were pears, apples, cherries, plums, vines, and other fruit trees. Amazingly, each tree had some flowers just blossoming and others in full bloom, some fruits just forming and others lusciously ripe. In other words, each tree showed the best of each season at one and the same time. The fruit was so plentiful that the branches sagged under its weight. Surprised at this phenomenon, the boys kept asking me for explanations. To satisfy their curiosity somewhat, I remember saying, “Well, it’s like this. Heaven is not like our earth with its seasons. Its climate is always the same, embodying the best of every season. It is very mild and suitable for every tree and plant.”

We stood entranced by the beauty surrounding us. The gentle breeze, the calm, and the fragrant air about us left no doubt that this climate was ideally suited to all kinds of fruits. Here and there, the boys were plucking apples, pears, cherries, or grapes while slowly climbing. When we finally reached the top of the hill, we thought we were in heaven, but in reality we were quite far from it.

From this vantage point we could see, beyond a vast plain, an extensive plateau and, in its center, a very lofty mountain

soaring straight up to the clouds. Many people were determinedly struggling up its steep sides, while on its summit stood One inviting and encouraging them to go up. We also spotted some persons descending from the top to help those who were too exhausted to continue the steep climb. Those reaching the top were greeted with vibrant cheers and jubilation. We understood that paradise was at that peak, and so we started downhill toward the plateau and mountain.

After covering a good part of the way – many boys were running far ahead of the crowd – we were in for quite a surprise. Some distance from the foot of the mountain the plateau held a big lake full of blood. Its length would extend from the Oratory to Piazza Castello. Its shore was littered with human limbs, fractured skulls, and remnants of corpses. It was a gruesome sight, a veritable carnage! The boys who had run on ahead stopped in their tracks terrified. Being far behind and having no inkling of what was ahead, I was surprised to see them stop with horrified looks on their faces.

“What’s wrong?” I shouted. “Why don’t you keep going?”

“Come and see!” they replied. I hurried over and gazed upon the grim spectacle. As the others came up, they too took in the scene and immediately became silent and dispirited. Standing on the banks of that mysterious lake, I sought a way across, but in vain. Just in front of me, on the opposite bank, I could read a large inscription: *Per sanguinem!* [Through blood!]

Puzzled, the boys kept asking one another: “What does all this mean?”

Then I asked someone (who he was I can’t remember) for an explanation, and he replied, “This is the blood shed by the very many who have already reached the mountain’s summit and are now in heaven. It is the blood of martyrs. Here, also, is the blood of Jesus Christ. In it were bathed the bodies of those who were martyred in testimony of the faith. No one may



enter heaven without passing through this blood and being sprinkled by it. It guards the Holy Mountain – the Catholic Church. Whoever attempts to attack her shall drown in it. The torn limbs, mangled bodies, and broken skulls dotting the shore are the gruesome remains of those who chose to fight the Church. All have been crushed to bits; all have perished in this lake.”

In the course of his explanation, the mysterious youth named many martyrs, including the papal soldiers who died defending the Pope’s temporal power.

Then, pointing eastward to our right, he showed us an immense valley four or five times the size of the lake. “Do you see that valley?” he asked. “Into it shall flow the blood of those who will pass this way to scale this mountain – the blood of the just, of those who will die for the faith in days to come.” Seeing that the boys were terrified by all they saw and heard, I tried to encourage them by saying that, if we were to die martyrs, our blood would flow into that valley, but our limbs would not be tossed about like those of the persecutors.

We then hastened to resume our march, skirting the shore of the lake. At our left stood the hill we had come down from; at our right were the lake and mountain. Where the lake ended, we saw a strip of land dotted with oaks, laurels, palms, and other trees. We went through it in search of a trail to the mountain, but only came across another vast lake. Floating in its waters were dismembered human limbs. On the shore stood an inscription: *Per aquam!* [Through water!]

“What does all this mean?” the boys again asked, mystified.

“This lake,” someone replied, “holds the water which flowed from Christ’s side. Small in quantity then, it has increased, is still increasing, and will keep increasing in the future. This is the baptismal water which washed and purified those who climbed this mountain. In this same water all who must still climb will have to be baptized and purified. In it must

be cleansed all those who want to go to heaven. There is no other way to paradise than through innocence or penance. No one can be saved without being cleansed in this water." Then, pointing to the dismembered limbs, he added, "These are the remains of those who have recently attacked the Church."

Meanwhile, a number of people and some of our own boys, too, were swiftly darting across the lake, skimming over the waters without wetting the soles of their feet. We were astonished at this, but were told, "These are the just. When the souls of the saints are freed from their bodily prison or when their bodies are glorified, they not only can tread lightly and swiftly over water, but they can also fly through the air."

Hearing this, all the boys, eager to cross the lake like the other people, looked at me inquiringly. No one, however, dared attempt it.

"For my part, I don't dare," I replied. "It would be rash to believe ourselves so just as to be able to cross the lake without sinking."

"If you don't dare, we dare even less," they all exclaimed.

Continuing on our way, always skirting the mountain, we reached a third lake as large as the first, full of flames and more torn human limbs.

On the opposite shore an inscription proclaimed: *Per ignem!*  
[Through fire!]

While we were observing that fiery lake, that same mysterious person spoke again and said, "This is the fire of the charity of God and His saints. These are the flames of love and desire through which all must pass if they have not gone through blood and water. This is also the fire with which tyrants tortured and consumed so many martyrs. Many are they who had to go through it before climbing the mountain. But these flames will also serve to reduce their enemies to ashes."

Thus for the third time we were seeing God's enemies crushed and defeated.

Wasting no time, we advanced past the lake and came upon a fourth one, even more frightening, shaped like a huge amphitheatre. It was full of dogs, cats, wolves, bears, tigers, lions, panthers, snakes, and other fierce monsters eager to pounce upon anyone within their reach.

We saw people stepping over the heads of these raging beasts. We also saw boys fearlessly following them and suffering no injury.

I tried to call them back, shouting as loudly as I could: "Stop! Can't you see that those beasts are just waiting to devour you?" It was useless.

They didn't hear me and kept treading upon the monsters' heads as if they were on firm, safe ground. My usual guide then said to me: "Those beasts symbolize the devils, the dangers and snares of the world. Those who step over them unharmed are the just, the innocent. Don't you know what Holy Scripture says? 'They shall tread upon the asp and the viper; they shall trample down the lion and the dragon.' [Cf. Ps. 90, 131] It was of such souls that David spoke. And doesn't the Gospel say: 'Behold, I have given you power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you'?" [Luke 10, 19]

We still kept asking one another: "How shall we cross over? Do we have to step over these wild beasts too?"

"Yes, let's go!" someone told me.

"I don't dare!" I replied. "It would be rash to believe ourselves so good as to be able to tread safely over these fierce beasts. Do as you wish, but not I."

"Then we won't try it either," the boys concluded.

We left that place and came upon a vast plain crowded with noseless, earless, or headless people. Some, moreover, had no limbs, others had no hands or feet, and still others had no tongue or eyes. The boys were simply struck dumb at such an odd sight. A mysterious person explained: "These are God's friends. To save their souls, they have mortified their senses and performed good works. Many lost parts of their bodies in carrying out harsh penances or in working for God or their fellow men. The headless ones are those who in a special manner consecrated themselves to God."

While we were pondering these things, we could see that many people, having crossed the lake, were now ascending the mountain.

We also saw others, already at the top, helping and encouraging those who were going up, giving them joyous, hearty cheers of welcome as they reached the top. The handclapping and cheering woke me, and I found myself in bed. This ended the first part of the dream.

The following night, April 8, Don Bosco again spoke to the boys, who couldn't wait to hear the continuation of the dream. He began by repeating his prohibition to put their hands on one another or move around the study hall, and added, "If one has to leave the study hall, he must ask his monitor's permission." By now the boys were becoming restless. Smiling upon their upturned faces, Don Bosco briefly paused and then went on thus:

## **PART TWO**

You will remember that at the bottom of a deep valley, near the first lake, stood another lake yet to be filled with blood. Well, after seeing all I have already described and going around that plateau, we found a passage taking us into another valley, which in turn opened into a large, wedge-shaped plaza. We entered it. Wide at the entrance, it

gradually tapered into a trail at its other end near the mountain. At this point the trail was wedged between two huge boulders so close together that only one person at a time could squeeze through. The plaza was filled with cheerful, happy people, all heading for the narrow mountain trail.

“Could that be the trail to heaven?” we asked one another. As the people reached it and squeezed through single-file, they had to pull their clothes tight, hold their breath, and discard whatever they carried. This sufficed to convince me that surely this was the way to heaven, for I remembered that, to get there, one must not only rid himself of sin, but also give up all worldly ties and desires. “There shall not enter into it anything defiled,” says the Apostle John. [Apoc. 21, 27] We stood briefly watching that scene. Then we did a very foolish thing. Instead of trying to squeeze through the trail, we turned back to see what was happening in the valley past the entrance of the plaza. We had noticed a great crowd of people far off, and we were curious to know what went on there.

We started off on a boundless stretch of land and were faced by the odd sight of people and many of our boys yoked to various kinds of animals. “What can this mean?” I mused. Then it flashed across my mind that the ox is a symbol of laziness, and I understood that those boys were lazy. I clearly recognized them. They were habitually indolent, sluggish in their work. So I said to myself, “It serves you right! Stay where you are! If you don’t want to work, that’s just where you belong!”

I saw others yoked to donkeys, carrying loads or grazing. These were the stubborn boys who obstinately resist suggestions and orders. Other lads were paired with mules and horses, reminding me of what Holy Scripture says: “He has become like the horse and the mule which have no understanding.” [Ps. 31, 9] These were the boys who never give a thought to their souls. Such empty heads!

Still others were feeding with pigs. Like them, they grunted and wallowed in the mire. These were the boys who feed on earthly pleasures by gratifying their lower passions. They are far from their heavenly Father. What a sad spectacle! They reminded me of what the Gospel says about the prodigal son being reduced to that sad state "by loose living." [Luke 15, 13]

Finally, I saw a multitude of people – and some of our boys too – cavorting with cats, dogs, cocks, rabbits – animals symbolizing thieves, scandal-givers, braggards, and spineless individuals who don't have the courage to stand up for their religious beliefs. We now realized that this valley represented the world. I took a good look at each of the boys, and then we moved on to another very large area of that boundless plain. The ground sloped so gently that we did not even notice it at first. A little way off there seemed to be a flower garden, and we decided to look at it. We first came across most beautiful red roses. "How gorgeous!" the boys shouted, running to pluck a few. But they were disappointed! Though full-blown and colourful, those roses were rotten inside and gave off an extremely foul stench. Fresh-looking violets were there too, but when we picked a few we saw that they also were blighted and smelly.

We kept going and came to several charming groves of trees laden with luscious fruit. They were truly enticing orchards. A boy ran up to a tree and plucked a large pear. A more beautiful one would be hard to find. Yet, as soon as he bit into it, he flung it away in disgust. It was stuffed with clay and sand and tasted awful.

"How can this be?" we asked.

One of our boys, whose name I well remember, replied, "Is this all the world can give us? It's a worthless sham!"

While we wondered where we were headed for, we became aware

that the road was sloping, though ever so slightly. One boy remarked, "We're going downhill. It's no good!"

"Let's take a look, anyway!" I replied.

Meanwhile, a vast multitude of people overtook us and kept going down the road in coaches, on horseback, or on foot. The last-named group kept jumping and running about, singing and dancing or marching along to the beat of drums. The merrymaking was beyond description.

"Let's wait a while and see before going along with them," we decided.

Presently a couple of boys noticed some individuals in the crowd who seemed to be directing various groups. They were handsome, well dressed, and quite gracious in manner, but it was obvious that their hats covered horns. That vast plain, then, symbolized our wicked, corrupt world so well described by the Holy Spirit: "Sometimes a way seems right to a man, but the end of it leads to death." [Prov. 16, 25]

Then and there a mysterious person said to us: "See how men almost unknowingly fall into hell." At this I immediately called back the boys who had gone ahead. They ran to me, crying, "We don't want to go down there!" Still shouting, they kept running back to where we had come from, leaving me alone. When I finally caught up with them, I said, "You're right. Let's get out of here, or we too shall fall into hell before we realize it!"

We wanted to return to the plaza from which we had set out and finally get started on the trail to the mountain. Imagine our surprise when, after a long walk, we saw no trace of the valley leading to heaven, but only a meadow. We turned this way and that, but could not find our bearings.

"We have taken the wrong road!" someone cried.

"No, we haven't," replied another.

While the boys were arguing, I woke up. Thus ended the dream on the second night.

Before sending you to bed, though, I must tell you one more thing. I do not want you to give any importance to this dream; just remember that pleasures which lead to perdition are deceitful; they are not pleasures at all! Remember also to be on guard against bad habits which make us so similar to beasts and deserving of being yoked with them.

Guard especially against sins that turn us into unclean animals. It is, indeed, most unbecoming for a man to be brought down to the level of beasts, but it is far more unbecoming for a creature made to God's image and likeness, an heir to heaven, to wallow in the mire like swine through those sins which Holy Scripture labels "loose living."

I told you only the highlights of my dream – and briefly too – because to narrate it as it was would take too much time. As a matter of fact, last night too I gave you but a hint of what I saw. Tomorrow night I will tell you the rest.

On Saturday 2 night, April 9, Don Bosco continued the narration of his dream:

### **PART THREE**

I would rather not tell you my dreams. In fact, the night before last I had no sooner started my narration than I regretted my promise. I truly wished I had never said a word at all. However, I must confess that if I kept these things to myself I would feel very uneasy. Narrating them, in fact, is a great relief. I will therefore continue with the last part of the dream. Let me first say, though, that the past two nights I had to cut short many things which were better left unsaid, and I left out others which could be seen but not described.



After taking in all the scenes I mentioned, after seeing various places and ways through which one may fall into hell, we were determined to get to heaven at all costs, but try as we might, we always strayed off and came upon new sights. Finally we hit upon the right road and reached the plaza; it was still crowded with people striving to go up the mountain. If you remember, it gradually tapered into a very narrow trail wedged between two lofty boulders. Just beyond them was a rather long, very narrow, rayless bridge spanning a frightful gorge. As soon as we saw the trail, we all shouted, "There it is! Let's go."" And so we did.

Some boys immediately began running, leaving their companions behind. I wanted them to wait for me, but they had got it into their heads to arrive there first. On reaching the bridge, however, they became frightened and stopped. I tried to urge them to advance bravely, but they refused.

"Go ahead," they replied. "You try it first, Father! The bridge is too narrow. If we miss one step, we're through!" Finally one boy mustered enough courage to attempt the crossing; another followed him and then the rest. Thus we reached the foot of the mountain.

We looked for a trail but found none. We walked around looking for one, but our search was hindered on all sides by boulders, crags, ravines, and briers. The climb looked steep. We knew we were in for a hard time. Nevertheless, we did not lose heart and eagerly began to work our way up. After a short but very exhausting climb with hands and feet, occasionally helping one another, the obstacles began to decrease until we finally found a trail and were able to climb more comfortably.

Eventually we reached a spot on the mountainside where a great many people were suffering such horrible and strange pains that we were filled with compassion and horror. I cannot tell you what I saw because it's too distressing and you could not bear it. I leave this out entirely.

We saw also very many people climbing the mountain on all sides.

As they reached the summit they were greeted with loud cheers and applause by those who were already there. We could also hear a truly heavenly music, a most melodious singing, which encouraged us all the more to keep climbing. While we ascended, a thought struck me, and I said to the boys near me, "Isn't this funny? Here we are on our way to heaven, but are we alive or dead? What about the judgment? Or have we already been judged?"

"No," they replied laughingly. "We are still alive."

"Well," I concluded, "alive or dead, let's get to the top and see what's there!" And we quickened our step.

By dint of perseverance we finally got close to the summit. Those already there were getting ready to greet us, but, as I looked behind to see if the boys were following, I found to my great sorrow that I was almost alone. Only three or four boys had kept up with me.

"Where are the others?" I asked, somewhat upset.

"They stopped here and there," was the answer. "Perhaps they will come up later!"

I looked down and saw them scattered about the mountain trail, hunting for snails, picking scentless wild flowers, plucking wild berries, chasing butterflies and crickets, or just resting on some green patch under a shady tree. I shouted as loud as I could, waved to them, and called them by name, urging them to hurry up and telling them that this was no time to rest. A few heeded me, so that now I had about eight boys around me. All the others turned a deaf ear, busy with silly trifles. I had no intention at all of going to heaven with only a few boys, and therefore I decided to go down and get after those lazy fellows. I told the boys near me to wait and

then I started down.

As many boys as I met, I sent up the mountain. I urged, exhorted, reprimanded, even jabbed and shoved, as needed.

“For heaven’s sake, go up,” I kept saying. “Don’t waste time on trifles!”

In the end, after reaching nearly every one of them, I found myself almost at the scarp of the mountain which we had climbed with so much effort. Here I stopped some boys who, exhausted and discouraged, had given up the ascent and were on their way down. As I turned to resume the climb with them, I stumbled against a stone and woke up. Now that you have heard the whole dream, I ask two things of you.

First, don’t tell it to outsiders, because they would only make fun of it.

I tell you these things just to please you. Talk about this dream among yourselves all you want, but remember that it is only a dream. Secondly, please don’t come to ask me if you were there or not, who was or wasn’t there, what you were or weren’t doing, if you were among the few or the many, where I saw you, or similar questions, because then we would have a repetition of last winter’s commotion. For some this could be more harmful than useful, and I don’t want to disturb your consciences.

I only tell you that, if this had not been a dream but reality and we had died then, of the seven or eight hundred boys we have here, very few would have made it to heaven – perhaps only three or four.

Now, lest you get me wrong, let me explain this rash statement.

What I mean is that only three or four would make it straight to heaven without having to go through purgatory. Some might

have to spend only a minute there; others, perhaps a day; still others, several days or weeks; nearly all, at least a short time. Now would you like to know how to avoid that? Strive to gain as many indulgences as you possibly can. If you rightly carry out these practices of piety to which indulgences are attached and gain a plenary indulgence, you will go straight to heaven.

Don Bosco gave no private explanation of this dream to any of the pupils and said very little otherwise on the various meanings of the things he had seen. It would not have been easy. This dream, as we shall show, portrayed a variety of tableaux: the Oratory as it was and as it would be; all the boys who were there now or would come later – each with his moral traits and his future; the Salesian Society – its growth, vicissitudes, and destinies; the Catholic Church – her persecutions and triumphs; and other events of general or particular interest.

With tableaux so bewildering in their vastness and interaction, Don Bosco simply could not thoroughly describe everything he had so vividly seen in his dream. Besides, discretion dictated – and duty required – that some things be kept secret or disclosed only to prudent persons to whom such a revelation might be comforting or serve as a warning.

In narrating to his boys the various dreams of which we shall have occasion to speak in due time, Don Bosco only told them what was best for them, since this was the intent of Him who gave these mysterious revelations. Occasionally, however, because of the deep impression he had received, in an effort to choose his subject matter, Don Bosco hinted vaguely at other incidents, things, or ideas. Occasionally these seemed incoherent and unrelated to his narrative, but strongly suggested that he was holding back much more than he told. Such is the case in his narration of the hike to heaven. We shall attempt to throw some light upon it both by quoting a few words we heard from Don Bosco and also by making a few

comments of our own. However, we submit them to the readers' judgment.

1. Seemingly, the hill Don Bosco met at the start of his hike is the Oratory. Its verdure suggests youth. There are no old trees there, large and lofty; rather, youth's blossoms are ever flowering, and flowers and fruit blossom and ripen in every season. Such is the Oratory, or such it should be. Like all of Don Bosco's works it is sustained by charity, which Holy Scripture describes as a garden blessed by God, yielding precious fruits of immortality, similar to Eden's garden, where stood also the tree of life.

2. The mountain climbers are prefigured in the man described in Psalm 83, whose strength comes from the Lord. In this valley of tears he – and many others too – resolved to climb steadily to the summit of the mountain, to the tabernacle of the Most High, that is, to heaven. [Cf. Ps. 83, 6] Our Lord, the lawgiver, will bless them, fill them with His grace, and help them to grow in all virtues until they see God in the heavenly Jerusalem and are eternally happy with Him.

3. The lakes seemingly sum up the history of the Church. The countless severed limbs scattered about the shores are the remnants of persecutors, heretics, schismatics, and rebellious Christians.

From certain expressions of Don Bosco in his dream we gather that he saw events both present and future. The chronicle remarks:

"Speaking privately to a few about the vast valley near the lake of blood, Don Bosco said, 'That deep valley is to be filled especially with the blood of priests, perhaps very soon.'"

The chronicle continues: "During the last few days Don Bosco paid a visit to Cardinal De Angelis who said to him: 'Tell me

something to cheer me up.'

" 'Very well, I will tell you a dream.'

"Don Bosco then began to narrate his dream, but with more details and remarks. When he came to the lake of blood, the cardinal became serious and sad. Don Bosco cut his account short, saying, 'That will be all for now!'

" 'Go on,' said the cardinal.

" 'Not now,' Don Bosco repeated, and then passed on to more cheerful topics.

4. The straight, narrow pass between the two boulders, the narrow wooden bridge (Our Lord's Cross), the self-assurance of a man of faith that he can cross it, the peril to which a man exposes himself in so doing if he does not have the right intention, the various obstacles before the mountain trail becomes passable – all this, if we are not mistaken, may refer to religious vocations. The people in the plaza may be boys called by God to serve Him in the Salesian Society. In fact, all those waiting to start on the trail to heaven looked happy and content and enjoyed themselves. This would indicate mostly young people. As for the climbers who had stopped in their ascent or were turning back, could this not suggest a cooling in following one's vocation? Don Bosco's own interpretation of this incident could indirectly allude to vocations, but he did not deem it wise to elaborate.

5. On the slope of the mountain, just past the initial obstacles, Don Bosco saw people in pain. Father Bonetti's chronicle offers this explanation: "Several asked him about this privately, and he replied, 'This place symbolized purgatory. If I had to preach on this subject, I'd just describe what I saw. It was simply frightful.

There were all kinds of torments. I will only say that I saw people crushed under presses, hands, feet and heads sticking out all around, eyes bursting from their sockets. These people

were so badly squashed and crushed that the sight was truly bloodcurdling.’”

We shall conclude with an important observation which can apply to this and other dreams which we shall narrate. In these dreams or visions, as they may be called, there nearly always appears a personage who acts as Don Bosco’s guide or interpreter.

Who can he be? This is the most amazing and consoling part of these dreams, but Don Bosco kept it in his heart.

(MB IT VI, 864-882 / MB EN VI, 508-520)

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## **Faith, our shield and our victory (1876)**

*“When I devoted myself to this part of the sacred ministry, I intended to consecrate all my efforts to the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls; I intended to work to make good citizens on this earth, so that they might one day be worthy inhabitants of heaven. May God help me to continue in this way until the last breath of my life.” (Don Bosco)*

The boys were not the only ones eagerly waiting to hear Don Bosco’s dream. He kept his promise a day late in his “Good Night” of June 30, the feast of Corpus Christi.

I am happy to see you (he began). How many angelic faces I see turned toward me (general laughter). I was afraid that I would frighten you by telling you this dream. If I had an angelic face, I would say “look at me!” and all your fears would vanish. Unfortunately I am but clay, the same as you. Nevertheless, we are made in God’s likeness, and I can say with St. Paul that you are “my joy and my crown.” However, do

not be surprised if you find a few rough edges in the crown. But let us get on to the dream. I was rather unwilling to tell you about it lest it frighten you, but then, I thought, a father should keep no secrets from his children, especially if he feels they are concerned and should know what their father thinks and does. So I made up my mind to tell you the dream in every detail. I only beg you not to give it any more importance than you would any other dream. Choose what you like best, whatever helps you most. We all know that people are asleep when they dream (general laughter), but you must also know that I did not have this dream last night. It came two weeks ago, as you were ending your spiritual retreat. I had long prayed to the Lord to show me my sons' state of conscience, how they could be helped to grow stronger spiritually, and how certain bad habits could be uprooted from their hearts. This was my anxious concern, especially during this spiritual retreat.

Thank God, the retreat went very well for both students and artisans. But the Lord did not end His mercy there. He chose to give me the privilege to read into the boys' consciences much as one would read a book. More astounding, I not only saw each one's present condition but also whatever he would undergo in the future. This happened in a way which truly astonished me because never before have I been enabled to see so well, so clearly, so openly into future events and into my boys' consciences. This was the first time. I had also prayed a great deal to the Blessed Virgin Mary that She would favor me by having none of you harbor a demon in his heart, and I trust that this request has also been granted, since I have reason to believe that you all opened your consciences to me. Well, then, lost in these thoughts and pleading with the Lord to let me know what would be helpful and what would be harmful to my dear sons' souls, I got into bed and my dream began.

This preamble began with expressions of innate, deep humility but ended with an assertion which precludes any doubt about the supernatural nature of the dream-which may well be entitled: Faith, Our Shield and Our Victory.



I seemed to be at the Oratory in the midst of my boys, my glory and crown. It was evening. Dusk was just settling, so one could see but dimly. As I was walking from this portico toward the main gate, an unbelievably huge crowd of boys closed in about me, as you do because we are friends. Some had come to say hello, others to tell me something. Saying a word here and there, I slowly made my way to the center of the playground. Suddenly I heard drawn out moans and sobs followed by a resounding roar with intermingling boyish screams and wild shrieks which seemed to come from the main entrance. The students ran there to see what was happening, but almost immediately they ran back madly to us along with the terrified artisans. Many artisans had already fled from the gate to the other end of the playground.

As the cries and howls of pain and hopelessness kept increasing, I anxiously asked what was happening and tried to shove forward to help, but the boys about me wouldn't let me.

"Let me go," I cried. "Let me see what is happening to frighten everyone so."

"No, no, please don't go!" they shouted. "Stay away. There's a monster which will swallow you up. Run away with us! Don't go there!"

But I wanted to see and, shaking off the boys, I got close to the artisans' playground.

"Look out!" the boys screamed. "Look out!"

"What's wrong?"

"Look! Back there!"

I turned in the direction indicated and saw a horrid animal. At first I thought that it was a giant lion, but it was nothing like an earthly lion. I gazed intently at it. It was monstrous; it looked like a bear, but seemed more ferocious and was far more terrifying. It had an undersized rump but enormous shoulders and a huge belly. Overly large too was its head, with grotesquely cavernous jaws, open wide, ready to swallow a person at one bite. Its mouth sprouted two thick, long, pointed tusks shaped like sharp swords.

I stepped back among the boys, who kept asking what they were

to do, but I was frightened too and at a loss. "I wish I could tell you," I replied, "but I don't know myself. Just now let's stay together under the porticoes."

No sooner had I said this than the bear stalked into the second playground and made its way toward us with a slow heavy tread as though assured of its prey. We drew back in terror until we stood here under this portico, the boys clinging fast to me and all eyes centered on me. "Don Bosco, what should we do?" they pleaded. I kept looking at them in silence, not knowing what action to take. Finally I exclaimed, "Let's turn back to the farther end of the portico, where Our Lady's statue stands. Let's kneel and pray more fervently than usual so that She may tell us what to do and what kind of a monster this is, and so that She may rescue us. If it is just a wild animal of some kind, we shall manage to kill it somehow; if it is a demon, Mary will come to our aid. Don't be afraid. Our heavenly Mother will see to our safety."

Meanwhile the beast kept up its slow approach, belly close to the ground, crouching and preparing to spring and seize us.

We fell to our knees in prayer. It was a moment of utter helplessness. The huge monster had gotten so close that in one leap it could be upon us. Then, all at once-I don't know how or when-we found ourselves on the other side of the wall in the clerics' dining room.

In the center I could see Our Lady. I am not sure, but She looked like the statue we have here in the portico or the one in the dining room itself, or maybe like the statue atop the dome or the one inside the church. But, be it as it may, there She stood, aglow with a brilliance which blazed through the dining room now grown a hundred times in breadth and height. She shone like the sun at midday, thronged by saints and angels.

The dining room seemed like heaven. Her lips moved as though She wished to say something to us.

We were a countless crowd in that dining hall. Astonishment had replaced terror in our hearts. The eyes of all were upon the Madonna.

"Do not be afraid," She reassured us in the gentlest of tones. "My divine Son is just testing you."

I looked carefully at the persons brilliant in glory who surrounded the Blessed Virgin and recognized Father Alasonatti, Father Ruffino, a certain Brother Michael of the Christian Schools, whom some of you knew, and my own brother Joseph. I saw others too who had once attended our Oratory or belonged to our Congregation and are now in heaven. In their company I also saw several others who are living today.

Suddenly, one of those about the Blessed Virgin loudly announced, "*Surgamus!* Let us rise!" Since we were already standing, we could not understand his command.

"Why *surgamus*? We are already on our feet."

"*Surgamus!*" he repeated in stentorian tones. The boys looked at me, thoroughly surprised and still, waiting for directions because they had no idea of what to do. I turned toward the one who had given the command and asked, "What do you want us to do? What does *surgamus* mean, since we are already on our feet?"

"*Surgamus!*" he again ordered in a stronger tone. The order made no sense to me; it was incomprehensible.

As I was standing on a table for better control of the crowd, one of those who thronged around the Blessed Virgin addressed me in a wondrously powerful voice. The boys listened intently as he said to me, "You are a priest and should understand what this *surgamus* means. When you offer Holy Mass, do you not say *sursum corda* [lift up your hearts] every day? Are you speaking about the physical act of standing up? Don't you mean instead the uplifting of the heart's love to God?"

Turning to the boys I instantly shouted, "Up, up with your hearts, my sons! Let us strengthen our faith and raise our hearts to God. Let us make an act of love and repentance. Let us earnestly strive to pray with lively fervor. Let us trust in God." I gave a sign and we all knelt down. Moments later, as we softly prayed in an outburst of confidence, we again heard a voice ordering, "Surgite! Rise!" Leaping to our feet, we all felt that we were being lifted from the ground by some

kind of supernatural power – how high I cannot say, but I know that we were all raised quite a distance above the ground. I have no idea what supported us. I do recall that I held fast to the sill or frame of a window. All the boys were clinging to windows or doors – one gripping here and one there, some holding on to iron bars or stout spikes, some others to the cornices of the ceiling. We were all hanging in the air, and I wondered that none of us fell to the floor.

Then, behold, the monster we had seen in the playground stormed into the dining room, followed by a vast herd of other wild animals. They stamped about the dining hall growling frightfully, straining for combat and ready to pounce upon us at any moment. But, though they kept eyeing us, staring with bloodshot eyes and tossing their heads, they did not immediately attack us. We looked down on them from above. Clinging for life to that window, I thought, Were I to fall, how horribly they would tear me to shreds!

Caught as we were in these strange positions, we heard Our Lady sing out the words of St. Paul: *Sumite ergo scutum fidei inexpugnabile*. [Take up, therefore, the impregnable shield of faith. cf. Eph. 6, 16] So harmonious was the sound, so full, so sublimely melodious, that we listened ecstatically. Every note could be heard from the lowest to highest, and we thought that a hundred voices had blended into one.

Intent upon this heavenly song, we noticed a number of graceful young lads, who had descended from heaven on wings, leave Our Lady's side and draw near to us. They bore shields in their hands and put one up against the heart of each boy. They were large shields, sparkling in beauty and reflecting the light which shone from the Madonna. It was a heavenly sight. Each shield seemed to have a steel center, surrounded by a large ring of diamonds, and the whole shield was edged in purest gold. It was all one could hope for in beauty, sweetness, and melody.

As I gazed about me. lost in the music, I was startled by a booming voice which cried: *Ad pugnam!* [To arms!] Then the wild beasts began stamping about furiously. In a flash we all found

ourselves on the floor, each on his feet, each engaged in deadly combat with those monsters, protected only by our divine shields. I can't say whether the struggle took place inside the dining hall or out in the playground. The heavenly choir did not interrupt its singing. The monsters rushed at us as smoke streamed from their gaping mouths along with leaden balls, spears, arrows, and weapons of all kinds. But these weapons either missed us or hit our shields and bounced off. Our adversaries were bent on wounding and slaughtering us, and they kept hurling themselves against us, but all in vain. Meeting us head on, they smashed their fangs and were forced to flee. In waves these hordes of frightful monsters assailed us, but all met with the same fate.

It was a lengthy battle, but finally we heard Our Lady saying: *Haec est victoria vestra, quae vincit mundum, fides vestra.* [This is the victory that overcomes the world: your faith—cf. I Jn. 5, 4.]

At Her voice, the entire herd of frightened beasts balked and, dashing headlong, disappeared, leaving us safe, free, victorious in that immense dining hall, still ablaze with the brilliance emanating from the Madonna.

Then I carefully studied the faces of those who bore the shields. They were an immense number. Among others I could see Father Alasonatti, Father Ruffino, my brother Joseph, and the Christian Brother who had fought by our side.

But the boys could not take their eyes away from the Blessed Virgin. She was chanting a canticle of thanksgiving which gladdened us with a new joy and an ecstasy beyond words. I doubt that a lovelier canticle can be heard in heaven itself.

Suddenly our happiness was rudely broken by blood-curdling shrieks and cries intermingled with bellowing roars. Were some of our boys being torn to pieces by the wild beasts which had fled the scene but moments before? I immediately tried to rush out and help these sons, but I could not because the boys kept restraining me and firmly refused to let me out of the room. I struggled to free myself. "Let me go to help those poor boys," I begged. "I want to see them. If they are hurt or killed, I

want to die with them. I must go, even if it costs me my life." Tearing myself from those who were holding me, I dashed out to the portico. Oh, what horror! The playground was strewn with the dead, the dying and the wounded. Boys, panicking with fear, tried to flee in all directions, only to be pursued by those monsters which pounced on them, sinking their fangs into their arms and legs, tearing them to pieces. Every second some boys fell to the ground and died amid horrifying screams.

But the beast that wrought the most fearful slaughter of all was the bear which had first appeared in the artisans' playground. With its sword-sharp tusks it pierced the boys' chests first from the right side to the left, and then from left to right. The victims fell tragically dead with a double mortal wound through the heart.

With determination I shouted, "Courage, my dear sons!" Immediately many lads ran to me for protection, but they were pursued by the bear. Summoning up my courage, I stepped forward in its path, joined by some of the boys who had already conquered the beasts in the dining room.

That prince of darkness flung itself upon us but could not hurt us because of our shields. In fact, it could not even touch us because the very sight of the shields forced it to back away in terror and even homage. Then it was that, as I fixed my gaze on the two long sword-sharp tusks, I noticed one word on each in big letters: *Otium* [Idleness] on one, *Gula* [Gluttony] on the other. In utter surprise I kept asking myself: Is it possible that here where everyone is so busy and we do not know where to begin doing all the work we have to do, there is still someone who idles away his time? As for the boys, I think they keep busy with their work, study and play. It made no sense to me.

Then someone said: "And yet how many half-hours they waste!" "But gluttony too?" I asked. "Here at the Oratory one could not indulge in gluttony if he wanted to. There is hardly ever a chance. Our food is most ordinary and so is what we drink. We barely have just what we need. How could one be so intemperate as to endanger his eternal salvation?"

Again came the reply: "Oh, you priest! You think you are well versed in moral theology and quite experienced, but on this point you know nothing. You are a babe in arms. Do you not know that one may sin by gluttony and intemperance even when drinking water?"

I wasn't convinced at all, and I wanted a better explanation. While the dining hall was still bright with the Blessed Virgin's presence, I went very sadly to Brother Michael to clear up my doubts. "My friend," he answered, "you are still a novice in these things. I will teach you." As regards gluttony, you must learn that one can be intemperate by eating, drinking or sleeping more than one needs, and by pampering the body in other ways. As for idleness, you must know that it does not just mean being lazy. It also means letting one's fantasy run on to dangerous thoughts. One can also be idle during study periods by fooling around and disturbing others, by wasting time in silly reading, or by being slothful, especially in church. Idleness is the father, the font and source of many temptations and of all evils. You who are these boys' director must safeguard them from these two sins by striving to strengthen their faith. If you can manage to make your boys temperate in the little things I have mentioned, they will always overcome the devil. Through temperance they will grow in humility, chastity, and other virtues as well. If they will properly use their time, they will never fall into the clutches of the infernal enemy but will live and die as saintly Christians."

I thanked him for his instructions and then, wanting to verify the reality of all this, lest it be a mere dream, I tried to grasp his hand but touched nothing. Again and again I tried but failed. I grasped nothing but air. Yet I could see those people. They were talking and seemed real. I approached Father Alasonatti, Father Ruffino, and my brother, but once more I grasped nothing.

Beside myself, I cried out, "Is this all true or not? Aren't these all real people? Didn't I hear them talk?"

Brother Michael replied, "After all your studies, you should

know that as long as my soul is separated from my body, it is useless to try to touch me. You cannot touch a pure spirit. We take on our former likeness only to enable mortal eyes to see us. But when we shall all have risen at the Last Judgment, then we shall put on our bodies, immortal and spiritualized."

Then I tried to draw close to Our Lady who seemed to have something to tell me. I was almost beside Her when I heard a new uproar and more shrieks from outside. I immediately dashed out of the dining hall again, but as I did so, I awoke.

To conclude his account, Don Bosco added these reflections and suggestions:

Whatever this mixed-up dream may mean, it does restate and explain St. Paul's words. However, I was so worn out and exhausted by the strain of this dream that I begged the Lord never to send me any more dreams like that. But – wouldn't you know it? – the following night that very same dream came back, only this time I had to see it to the end, something I was spared the night before. I was so frightened that I screamed. Father Berto heard me and in the morning he asked me why I had shrieked and if I had passed a sleepless night. These dreams drain me far more than if I were to spend the night at my desk.

As I said, this is only a dream. I do not want you to give it any more importance. Think of it only as a dream, no more. I would not like you to write home about it or tell outsiders who know nothing of the Oratory, lest they say, as they have already, that Don Bosco fills his boys with dreams. I don't really mind, though. Let them say what they will, but let each of us draw from this dream whatever applies. Just now I will not give you any explanations because all of you can easily understand the dream.

I only recommend very strongly that you revive your faith, which is safeguarded particularly by being temperate and avoiding idleness. Let temperance be a friend and sloth an enemy. Some other evening I will return to this subject. For now, good night.

*(BM XII, 248-255)*



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## Fifth missionary dream: Peking (1886)

During the night of April 9th, Don Bosco had a new missionary dream, which he related to Father Rua, Father Branda, and Brother Viglietti, in a voice at times choked by sobs. Viglietti wrote it down immediately afterwards and, at Don Bosco's direction, sent a copy to Father Lemoyne so that he could read it to all the superiors of the Oratory for their general encouragement. "But," the secretary warned, "this is nothing more than a sketch of a very long, magnificent vision." The text that we are publishing is that of Viglietti, slightly touched up stylistically by Father Lemoyne to put it into more correct Italian:

Don Bosco found himself in the neighborhood of Castelnuovo standing on the hillock known as Bricco Del Pino 3 near the Sbornau valley. He turned his gaze everywhere, but could see nothing more than thick scrubs that sprawled everywhere and which were covered by an infinite number of small mushrooms.

"Now," Don Bosco said to himself, "this is also the country estate of Joseph Rossi (*As a joke, Don Bosco had named Coadjutor Brother Joseph Rossi "count" of that piece of land*). He ought to be here!"

Shortly after that, in fact, he saw Rossi on a distant hilltop, gazing most seriously over the valleys spread out beneath him.

Don Bosco hailed him, but he answered only with a distracted glance, as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

Turning in another direction, Don Bosco also saw Father Rua at a distance, who just as Rossi, was most seriously, but peacefully, seated as if resting.

Don Bosco called to both of them, but they remained silent,

not replying by so much as a gesture.

So he descended from the hillock and walked over to another one, from the summit of which he saw a forest, but it was cultivated, and roads and paths ran through it. He gazed around in another direction, looking toward limits of the horizon, and even before his eye perceived them, his ear was struck by the uproar created by an immense crowd of children.

No matter how much he tried to discover from where the noise came, he saw nothing. Then a shout followed the uproar, as though in the wake of some catastrophe. At length he saw a vast crowd of boys who ran toward him, crying, "We've been waiting for you. We've been waiting for you so long. Now at last you're here. You're among us and you won't get away from us!"

Don Bosco did not understand at all and wondered what these boys wanted from him. But while he was standing there, dazed in their midst, gazing at them, he saw an immense flock of lambs led by a shepherdess. After she had separated the boys from the sheep, she set one group to one side and the other to the opposite side. She stopped in front of Don Bosco, to whom she said, "Do you see what's before you?"

"Yes, I do," Don Bosco answered.

"Good. Do you recall the dream you had when you were ten years old?"

"Oh! It's quite hard for me to remember it! My mind's tired and, at present, I don't remember it clearly."

"Good, good! Think hard and you'll recall it."

Then she summoned the boys to Don Bosco's side, telling him, "Now look in this direction. Look further on – all of you, look further and read what is written over there. So what do you see?"

"I see mountains, then the sea, then hills, and again mountains and seas."

"I read *Valparaiso*," one boy said.

Another boy said, "I read *Santiago*."

"I read both those names," added a third.

"Well," continued the shepherdess, "set out from there and you

will form an idea of how much the Salesians have to do in the future. Now look in that direction. Draw a visual line and look."

"I see mountains, hills, and seas!"

The boys, too, focused their eyes and exclaimed in chorus, "We read *Peking!*"

Then Don Bosco saw a great city. Through it ran a wide river, over which some big bridges had been built.

"Good," said the maiden, who seemed to be the boys' teacher.

"Now draw a single line from one end to the other, from Peking to Santiago. Establish your center in the middle of Africa, and you will get an exact idea of how much the Salesians have to do."

"But how can all this be accomplished?" Don Bosco exclaimed.

"The distances are enormous, the places difficult, and the Salesians few."

"Don't worry. Your sons, the sons of your sons, and their sons again will do this. Just let them steadfastly observe the Rules and keep the spirit of the Pious Society."

"But where are we to find so many people?"

"Come here and look. Do you see fifty missionaries standing ready there? Farther on, do you see others, and still others? Draw a line from Santiago to the center of Africa. What do you see?"

"I can see ten central [mission] stations."

"Well, these central stations that you see will make up houses of studies and novitiates and will send forth a multitude of missionaries to staff these lands. Now look to this other side. Here you see ten more centers reaching from Africa to Peking. These, too, will provide missionaries for all of these other lands. There's Hong Kong; there, Calcutta; farther on, Madagascar. Here and also elsewhere there will be more houses, houses for studies and novitiates."

Don Bosco listened as he looked and examined, then he said:

"And where can so many people be found, and how can missionaries be sent to all those places? There you have savages that feed on human flesh. In this place you have

heretics and in that one persecutors. So how shall we manage?"  
"Look," the shepherdess answered. "Be of good will. There is only one thing to do: recommend that *my sons constantly cultivate the virtue of Mary.*"

"Okay, good. I believe I understand. I will preach your words to all of them."

"And beware of the error now prevailing, which is to mix those who are studying the human arts with others studying the divine arts, for the science of Heaven is not to be mixed with earthly matters."

Don Bosco wanted to say more, but the vision disappeared.

His dream was over.

*(BM XVIII, 49-52)*

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## **Fourth Missionary Dream in Africa and China (1885)**

*From time to time, Divine Providence would reveal the future before the very eyes of Don Bosco, thus revealing the progress the Salesians would make in future times in the vast field of missionary work. Again in 1885, a revealing dream informed him of God's design for a remote future. Don Bosco told of this dream and commented on it to the assembled Chapter on the evening of July 2nd. Father Lemoyne hastened to write down what he heard:*

It seemed that I stood before a high mountain. At the summit, a magnificently radiant angel who lit up the remotest corners of the horizon stood. A giant crowd of unknown people had gathered all around the mountain.

The angel held a sword that blazed like a flame in his right hand, and he pointed out the surrounding countryside to me

with his left. He said, "*Angelus Arphaxad vocat vos ad proelianda bella Domini et ad congregandos populos in horrea Domini* [The Angel of Arphaxad summons you to wage the battles of the Lord and to gather all peoples into His granaries.]" He did not utter these words in a commanding voice, as he had done on other occasions, but instead as if he were making a proposal.

A wonderful crowd of angels, whose names I did not know or cannot remember, surrounded him. Among them, I saw Louis Colle, who was surrounded by a crowd of younger people. He was teaching how to sing the praises of God, which he himself was singing.

A great number of people lived all around the mountain and on its slopes. They were talking among themselves, but I did not know their language and could not understand them. I only understood what the angel was saying. I cannot describe what I saw. There are things that you can see and understand, and yet they cannot be explained. At the same time, I saw isolated things all simultaneously, and these changed the scene that was before me to the point that it now looked like the plains of Mesopotamia.

Even the mountain on which the Angel of Arphaxad stood assumed a myriad of different characteristics at every moment, until the people living on it looked like mere drifting shadows.

Throughout this pilgrimage and in the face of this mountain, I felt as if I were being elevated above the clouds and that an infinite void surrounded me. Who could find words to describe that height, the spaciousness, the light, the radiance, or the vision before me? One could delight in it, but not describe it.

In this and other scenes, there were many people who accompanied and encouraged me. They also encouraged the Salesians not to stop along the road. Among those who eagerly urged me onward were our dear Louis Colle and a band of angels who echoed the canticles of the youths gathered around Louis.

Then I thought I was in the heart of Africa in an immense desert. Written on the ground in gigantic, transparent letters

was one word: Negroes. Here stood the Angel of Cam, who said, "*Cessabit maledictum* [the curse will stop] and a balmy salve and the blessing of their labor shall descend upon His sorely-tired children and honey shall heal the bites of the serpents. Thereafter, all the sins of the children of Cam will be covered." All of these people were naked.

Finally, I thought I was in Australia. Here, too, there was an angel, but he had no name. He shepherded and marched, urging the people to march toward the south. Australia was not a continent, but a number of islands grouped together, whose inhabitants varied in temperament and appearance. There was a big crowd of children

living there who tried to come toward us, but could not because of the distance and the waters that separated them from us.

Nevertheless, they held out their hands towards Don Bosco and the Salesians, saying, "Come and help us! Why do you not fulfill what your fathers have began?" Many held back, but others made every possible effort to push their way through wild animals to reach the Salesians, who were unknown to me, and they began to sing "*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini* [blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord]." A little distance away, I could see groups of many islands, but could not distinguish any details. I felt that all this indicated that Divine Providence was offering part of this evangelical field to the Salesians, but for some future period. Their efforts will bear fruit, for the hand of God will be constantly outstretched over them, unless they become unworthy of His graces.

If only I could preserve some fifty of the Salesians we have with us now! They would be able to see the magnificent destiny Divine Providence has reserved for us within a five-hundred-year span from now, provided we remain steadfast.

Within 150 or 200 years, the Salesians would be the masters of the whole world.

We shall always be well liked, even by malevolent people because our particular activity is one that arouses

benevolence in everybody, good and bad alike. There may be a few hotheads who would prefer to see us destroyed, but these will only be isolated incidents and will not find any support from others.

It all depends on whether the Salesians will resist the desire for comforts and will thereby shirk their work. Even if we were only to maintain what we have already founded, we would have a long-standing guarantee, provided we do not become victimized by the vice of gluttony.

The Salesian Society will prosper in a material sense if we uphold and spread the Bulletin and the institution of the Sons of Mary Help of Christians. These we will uphold and spread. Many of these dear children are so good! The institution of the Sons of Mary will provide us with valiant confreres, who are steadfast in their vocation.

These are the three things that Don Bosco saw most distinctly, recalled best, and reported on them that first time. But as he told Father John Baptist Lemoyne later on, he had seen a good deal more. He had seen all the countries where the Salesians would be summoned as time went on, but he saw them fleetingly, completing a rapid journey that started out from a given locality and returned to it again. He said it all happened just in a flash. Nevertheless, as he covered this immense distance in the blink of an eye, he had seen whole regions, inhabitants, seas, rivers, islands, customs and a thousand other things all interwoven. The scenes changed so rapidly that it was impossible to describe them all. But there was barely a distinct recollection left in his mind of this phenomenally fantastic itinerary. He was, therefore, not able to give any detailed account of it.

It had seemed to him that there were many people with him who encouraged him and the Salesians not to stop along the way. Among those who encouraged him to move forward with the greatest fervor was Louis Colle, about whom he wrote to his father on August 10th: "Our friend Louis took me on a tour through the heart of Africa, '*the land of Cam,*' he called it,

and through Arphaxad; that is, China. If Our Lord shall so dispose that we meet, we shall have a lot to talk about.”

The following is the description of Don Bosco's itinerary when he traveled through a circular area in the southern part of the globe, as Father Lemoyne declared he had heard it from his very lips:

He set out from Santiago, Chile. He saw Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Cape of Good Hope, Madagascar, the Persian Gulf, the Banks of the Caspian Sea, Sennaar, Mount Ararat, Senegal, Ceylon, Hong Kong, Macao at the mouth of the infinitely vast sea and facing the gigantic mountain from which one could see China. Then, the Chinese Empire, Australia, and the Diego Ramirez Islands. He ended his trip by returning to Santiago, Chile, once again. In his lightning-like travels, Don Bosco distinguished islands, territories and nations scattered all over the different degrees of latitude and many areas that were barely inhabited or altogether unknown. He could not recall the exact names of many of the places he had glimpsed at in his dream. Macao, for example, was called “Meaco” in his narration.

He talked of some of the more southern latitudes visited in America with Captain Bove; but the officer had not rounded the Magellan's Cape for want of funds, and was obliged to turn back on his voyage for various reasons, and so he was unable to clarify matters for Don Bosco.

We would say something about the enigmatic Angel of Arphaxad. Don Bosco had no idea of who he was prior to his dream, but later talked about it rather frequently. He instructed the cleric Festa to look for the word in Biblical dictionaries, history and geography books and periodicals, so that he might know with what people of the earth the presumptive person was connected. At last, he believed he had found the key to the mystery in the first volume of Rohrbacher, who states that the Chinese are descendants of Arphaxad.

His name appears in the tenth chapter of the Book of Genesis



in the genealogy of Noah's sons, who divided the world amongst themselves after the flood. In Verse 22, we find: "*Filii Sem Aelam et Assur Arphaxad et Lud Gether et Mes* [The sons of Sem are: Elam, Addur, Aphaxad, Lud and Aram]." Here, as in other portions of the vast ethnographical panorama, the individual names indicate the ancestors of different races, and reference is made to the regions they inhabited. Thus, Aelam means "*highland*," and refers to Elam, which became a province of Persia with Susiana.

Assur was the ancestral father of the Assyrians. Exegetes do not agree about the population to which reference is made in the third instance.

Some, such as Vigouroux Gust to quote one of the better known names), held that *Arphaxad* should be connected with Mesopotamia. At any rate, since he is listed among the ancestors of Asiatic peoples immediately after two other people who occupied the most extreme eastern border of the land described in the Mosaic document, one may well believe that Arphaxad indicated a nation connected with the area of those preceding it, and which later spread still further east. It would not be improbable, therefore, to see that the Angel of Arphaxad stands for the Angel of China.

Don Bosco fixed his attention on China, and said he believed it would not be long before the Salesians would be summoned there. In fact, once he added, "If I had twenty missionaries to send to China, I am sure that they would be given a triumphant welcome, despite the persecutions." So, from that time on, he always took a keen interest in all that concerned the Celestial Empire.

He frequently thought about this dream and was always glad to talk about it, considering it as a confirmation of his previous dreams about the missions.

(*BM XVII 593-598*)

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# Third missionary dream: air travel (1885)

*Don Bosco's dream on the eve of the missionaries' departure for America is an event rich in spiritual and symbolic significance in the history of the Salesian Congregation. During that night between 31 January and 1 February, Don Bosco had a prophetic vision emphasising the importance of piety, apostolic zeal, and total trust in divine providence for the success of the mission. This episode not only encouraged the missionaries but also strengthened Don Bosco's conviction about the need to expand their work beyond the Italian borders, bringing education, support, and hope to the younger generations in distant lands.*

Meanwhile, the eve of Bishop Cagliero's departure had arrived. All that day, the idea that Bishop John Cagliero and the others going so far away, and the knowledge of the absolute impossibility that he could accompany them to the place of embarkation as he had done on other occasions, and even that it might even be impossible to say goodbye to them in the church of Mary Help of Christians, caused Don Bosco a great deal of emotion which, at times, left him depressed and certainly exhausted.

On the night of January 31st, Don Bosco had a dream just like the one he had had about the Missions in 1883. He told Father John Baptist Lemoyne about it, who immediately wrote it down:

"I thought that I was accompanying the missionaries on their journey. We talked briefly before setting out from the Oratory. They were gathered around me and asked for advice. I think I said to them, **'Neither with science, nor good health, nor riches, but with zeal and piety you'll be able to do a**

**great deal of good to promote God's glory and the salvation of souls.'**

"We had been at the oratory only a little while before, and then without knowing how we had gone there or by what means, we found ourselves in America almost immediately. At the end of the journey, I found myself alone in the heart of an immense prairie located between Chile and Argentina. All my dear missionaries had scattered here and there over the infinite expanse. I wondered as I looked at them why they seemed so few to me. After all the Salesians I had sent to America on several expeditions, I had expected to see a greater number of missionaries. But then I remembered that it only seemed as if there were so few of them, because they were scattered in so many different places, like seeds that have to be transplanted for cultivation and multiplication.

"I saw a great many long, long roads in that prairie and a number of houses scattered along the routes. These roads were not like the roads we have here, nor were the houses like the ones we know in this part of the world. They were mysterious, I might say – spiritual houses. There were vehicles, means of transportation, moving along the roads, and as they moved, they assumed a thousand fantastic different forms and aspects, all of them wonderful and magnificent, so that I could not define or describe a single one of them. I looked with wonder and saw that when these vehicles were driven near to any group of dwellings, villages, or cities, they soared into the air, so that anyone traveling in them would see the roofs of the houses beneath them although these houses were very tall. Many of them were below the level of the roads that had run along the ground level through the wasteland, but suddenly became airborne as they reached inhabited areas, almost creating a magic bridge. From the bridges, one could see the people living in the houses, people in the playgrounds and streets, or on their farms in the countryside, busily working.

"Each of these roads led to one of our missions. At the far end of one very long road which came from the direction of Chile, I saw a house [*All the topographic indications prior to*

*and after this would seem to indicate the house at Fort Mercedes on the left bank of the Colorado River]* where there were many Salesians engaged in scientific pursuits, practices of piety, and various trades, crafts and agricultural activities. To the south lay Patagonia. In the opposite direction, I could see in one single glance all our houses in the Argentine Republic. I could also see Paysandu, Las Piedras and Villa Colon in Uruguay. I could see the School of Niteroy in Brazil and a number of other schools scattered in the various provinces of that same empire. Finally to the west, another long, long road that crossed rivers, seas and lakes leading to unknown lands. I also saw Salesians there, too. I looked very carefully and noticed only two of them.

"Just then, a man of noble, handsome appearance appeared at my side. He was pale and stout, so closely shaven that he seemed beardless although he was a grown man. He was dressed in white, wearing some kind of cloak of rose-colored material, interwoven with golden threads. He was altogether resplendent. I recognized him as my interpreter."

"'Where are we?' I asked, pointing to this territory."

"'We are in Mesopotamia,' my interpreter said."

"'In Mesopotamia?' I echoed, 'but this is Patagonia.'"

"'I tell you that this is Mesopotamia,' the other said."

"'And yet ... and yet ... I cannot believe it.'"

"'That is what it is. This is Me-so-po-ta-mia,' the interpreter repeated, spelling it out so that it might well be impressed on my mind.'"

"'Why do I see only so few Salesians here?'"

"'What is not there now, it will be in the future,' the interpreter said."

"I was standing motionless in the prairie, scanning all those interminable roads, and contemplating quite clearly, but inexplicably, all the places the Salesians were then and were going to be later. How many magnificent things did I not see! I saw each individual school. I saw as if they were all concentrated in one place, all the past, present and future of our missions. Since I saw all of it as a whole in one single

glance, it is extremely difficult, indeed altogether impossible, for me to give you even the most vague idea of what it was that I saw. What I saw in that prairie of Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, and the Argentine Republic, would in itself require an immense volume, just to give a few overall pieces of information about it.

"In that immense plain, I also saw all the savages who lived scattered in that territory of the Pacific, down to the gulf of Ancud, the strait of Magellan, Cape Horn, the Diego Islands, and the Malvinas. All this was a harvest awaiting the reaping by the Salesians. I saw that as of now, the Salesians were only sowing, but that those coming after them would reap. Men and women will swell our ranks and become preachers. Their children who, so now it seems, cannot possibly be won over to our faith will themselves become evangelizers of their parents and friends. The Salesians will succeed in everything with humility, work, and temperance.

"All that I saw in that moment and later concerned all the Salesians: regular settlements in those territories; their miraculous expansion; and the conversion of many natives and many Europeans settled there. Europe will stream into South America. European trade began to decline from the very moment that Europeans began stripping their churches, and it has continued to decline more and more ever since. Hence, workers and their families, driven by their own poverty, will go and seek their fortune in those new hospitable lands.

"Once I saw the area assigned to us by Our Lord as well as the glorious future of the Salesian Congregation, I had the impression that I was setting out on a journey again, this time on my way back to Italy. I was carried at an extremely rapid pace along a strange road, which was at a very high level, and in an instant, I found myself above the Oratory. The whole of Turin was beneath my feet and the houses, palaces and towers looked like so many low huts to me, for I was so high up. Squares, streets, gardens, avenues, railways, and the walls of the city to the countryside and adjacent hills, the cities, the towns of the Turin Province, and the gigantic

chain of the Alps all covered with snow lay spread out beneath my gaze like a stupendous panorama. I saw the boys down below in the Oratory and they looked like so many little mice. But there was an immense number of them; priests, clerics, students, and master craftsmen were evident everywhere. A good many of them were setting out in procession while others were coming in to fill the ranks where the others had gone forth.

"It was one constant procession.

"They all went thronging to the immense prairie between Chile and Argentina to which I myself had now returned in the twinkling of an eye. I stood watching them. One young priest who looked like our Father Joseph Pavia, though he was not, came toward me.

"With his affable manner, courteous speech, candid appearance and boyish complexion, he said, 'Behold! These are the souls and the territories assigned to the sons of St. Francis of Sales.'"

"I was amazed by such an immense multitude, all gathered there, but it disappeared in an instant and I could barely detect the direction they had all taken in the far distance.

"I must point out that as I relate it, my dream is described only in the summarized form, and that it is impossible to specify the exact chronological order of all the magnificent sights that appeared before me and of all the secondary features. My spirit is incapable, my memory forgetful, my words inadequate. Apart from the mystery in which everything I saw was shrouded, the scenes before me alternated. At times, they were interlocked and repeated according to the variations of amalgamation, division or departure of the missionaries, and the way in which the people they have been called upon to convert to the faith gathered around them or moved away from them. I repeat: I could see the past, the present and the future of the missions with all their phases, hazards, triumphs, defeats or momentary disappointments concentrated as in one single whole; in a word, all the things that will be connected with the Apostolate. At the time, I could understand everything quite plainly, but now it is impossible to unravel

these intricate mysteries, ideas and people one from another. It would be like trying to cram into one single narrative and sum up in one sole instance or fact the whole panorama of the firmament, relating the motion, splendor and properties of all the stars with their individual laws and reciprocal aspects; one star by itself would supply enough material for the concentration and study of the most formidable brain. I again must point out that here it is a question of things having no connection with material things.

"Now resuming my narrative, I repeat that I stood bewildered as I saw this great multitude disappear. At that moment, Bishop John Cagliero stood beside me. A few missionaries were at some short distance away. Many others stood around me with a fair number of Salesian cooperators. Among them I saw Bishop Espinosa, Dr. Torrero, Dr. Caranza and the Vicar General of Chile. [*Perhaps thus alludes to Bishop Domingo Cruz, Capitular Vicar of the diocese of Concepcion.*] Then my usual interpreter came over to me, talking with Bishop John Cagliero and a number of others, and we tried to ascertain whether all this had meaning.

"Most kindly my interpreter said, 'Listen and you will see.'"

"At that same moment, the whole immense plain turned into a big hall. I cannot describe exactly how it looked in its splendor and richness. The only thing I can say is that if anybody tried to describe it, he would not be able to withstand its splendor, not even with his imagination. It was so immense that it escaped the eye, nor could one see where its sidewalls were; no one could have estimated its height. The roof ended with immense arches, very wide and magnificent, and no one could see what supported them. There were neither columns nor pillars. It rather looked as if the cupola of this immense hall was made of the finest candid linen, something like tapestry. The same applies to the floor.

"There was neither illumination, nor the sun, moon, or stars, though there was a general brilliance distributed evenly everywhere. The very candor of the linen blazed and made everything visible and beautiful so that one could see every

ornament, every window, every entrance and exit. There was a most beautiful fragrance all around formed by a mixture of the loveliest aromas.

"Just at that moment, I became aware of something phenomenal.

"There were many tables of extraordinary length arranged in every direction, but all converging towards one focal point. They were covered with refined tablecloths, and on them were crystal bowls in which many various kinds of flowers were arranged handsomely.

"The first thing that struck the attention of Bishop John Cagliero was that there are tables here, but no food.

"Indeed, there was no food and nothing to drink visible on them, nor were there any dishes, goblets or any other receptacle in which one might place food.

"Then my friend the interpreter spoke, '*Those who come here, neque sitient, neque esurient amplius*' (they will never thirst or feel hungry anymore).

"As he said this, people began to stream in, all clothed in white with a simple ribbon of rose hue embroidered with golden threads around the neck and shoulders. The first to enter were small in number, only a few together in small groups.

"As soon as they entered, they went to sit at a table set for them and sang, '*Hurrah!*'"

"Behind them, other more numerous groups advanced singing '*Triumph!*' Then a great variety of people began to appear: old and young; men and women of all ages; of different colors, appearances, and attitude, and one could hear canticles on every side. They sang, '*Hurrah!*'"

"Those already seated sang '*Long live!*' and those entering sang '*Triumph!*' Each group that entered represented yet another nation or section of a nation which will be converted by our missionaries."

"I glanced at those infinitely long tables and saw that there were many of our nuns and confreres sitting there and singing, but they did not have anything to show that they were priests, clerics or nuns for all of them wore the same white robe and rose-colored ribbon. But my wonder grew when I saw men of



rough appearances dressed the same as the others who sang '*Long live! Triumph!*'"

"Just then, our interpreter said, 'The foreigners, the savages who drank the milk of the divine word from those who educated them, have become heralds of the word of God.'"

"I also saw many boys of strange and rough appearance in the crowds and I asked, 'Who are these boys whose skin is so rough that it looks like that of a toad, and yet at the same time it is beautiful and of a resplendent color?'"

"The interpreter replied, 'They are the children of Cam who have not relinquished the heritage of Levi. They will strengthen the ranks of the armies defending the kingdom of God that has appeared in our midst at last. Their number was small, but the children of their children have made it larger. Now listen and you will see, but you will not be able to understand the mysteries placed before you.' These boys belonged to Patagonia and to the southern part of Africa.

"Just then, there were so many people streaming into this amazing hall that every seat seemed taken. The seats and benches did not have any specific form, but assumed whatever shape the individual wanted. The seating was satisfactory to everyone.

"Just as everyone was shouting '*Hurrah!*' and '*Triumph!*' on all sides, an immense crowd appeared to join the others, and sang, '*Hallelujah, glory, triumph!*' When it looked as if the hall were entirely full and no one could have counted all the thousands of people present, there was a profound silence, and then the multitude began singing in different choirs:

"The first choir sang, '*Appropinquavit in nos regnum Dei: laetentur Coeli et exultet terra. Dominus regnavit super nos. Alleluia*' (The kingdom of God has come among us. Let the heavens and the earth rejoice. The Lord has reigned over us).

"The second choir sang, '*Vincerunt et ipse Dominus dabit edere de ligno vitae et non esurient in aeternum. Alleluia*' (They won and the Lord Himself shall give them food from the tree of life and they shall never go hungry).

"A third choir sang, '*Laudate Dominum omnes gentes, laudate*

*eum omnes populi*' (Praise the Lord all you nations, praise Him all you peoples).

"While they were alternately singing these hymns, a profound silence suddenly fell once more. Then one heard voices from high up and far away. No one could possibly describe the harmony of this new canticle. *Solo Deo honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum* (To God alone honor and glory forever).

"Other voices still higher up and further away replied to these other voices, '*Semper gratiarum actio illi qui erat, est, et venturus est. Illi eucharistia, illi soli onor sempiternus*' (Forever thanks to Him who was, is, and will come. To Him alone thanksgiving and honor).

"These choirs seemed to descend from their high level and draw nearer to us. I also noticed Louis Colle among the singers.

Everyone else in the hall also began to sing, joining in, blending voices, sounding like an exceptional musical instrument with sounds with an infinite resonance. The music seemed to have a thousand different high notes simultaneously and a thousand degrees of range which all blended into one single vocal harmony. The high voices of those singing soared so high that one could never have believed it. The voices of the singers in the hall were sonorous, fully rounded and so deep that one could not believe that either. All together they formed one single chorus, one sole harmony, but both the high notes and the low were so fine and beautiful and penetrated so deeply through all the senses and were absorbed by them that one forgot his very existence, and I fell on my knees at the feet of Bishop John Cagliero and exclaimed, 'Oh, Cagliero! We are in Paradise.'"

"Bishop John Cagliero took me by the hand and answered, 'This is not Paradise, but only a pale image of what Paradise really will be.'"

"Meanwhile, the voices of the two magnificent choirs continued singing in unison in indescribable harmony: '*Soli Deo honor et gloria, et triumphus alleluia, in aeterum in aeterum!*'"

"Here I quite forgot myself and I no longer know what happened to me. I found it difficult to rise from my bed next morning,

and as soon as I came to my senses, I went to celebrate Holy Mass.

“The main thought which was impressed on me after this dream was to warn Bishop John Cagliero and all my beloved missionaries of something of the greatest importance regarding the future of our missions: all the efforts of both the Salesians and the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians should concentrate on cultivating vocations for the priesthood and religious life.”

*(BM XVII, 273-280)*

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

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

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

various topics.

A lengthy conversation centered on the hordes of savages in Australia, the Indies, China, Africa, and more especially America, who in countless numbers are presently entombed in the darkness of death.

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

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

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

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

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

missions.

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

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

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

"But what is your name?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Sit at this table and pull this rope."

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

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

I therefore took the end of the rope, looked at it, and saw

that the tip was marked zero.

I smiled.

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

"Zero."

"Pull it a bit."

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

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

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

"Is that enough?" I asked.

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

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

"Is that enough?" I asked.

"What is the number?" the youth answered.

"It's 47."

"What is 47 plus 3?"

"50."

"And add 5 more?"

"55."

"Take note: 55."

He then told me, "Pull some more."

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

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

I did so until I reached the number 10.

"Pull more," the lad told me.

"There's nothing left!"

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

"I see water," I replied.

Indeed, at that moment I felt something very strange happening to me which I cannot explain. I was present in that hall, I was pulling that rope, and at the same time I saw unfolding before my eyes the vision of an immense country over which I

was hovering like a bird in flight, and the more the cord was pulled the farther out did the view stretch.

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

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

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

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

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

"65," I answered.

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

"And now?"

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

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

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

successive localities I visited as I travelled in the second part of this same dream.]

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

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

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

"How will you manage? Watch!"

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

"Take some, Don Bosco," he said.

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

"I was told to bring them to you."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Impossible! How can it be done?"

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

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

That dear youth, reading my mind, continued, "This success



will take place before the second generation comes to an end."

"Which will be the second generation?"

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

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

"Sixty."

"And then?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the meantime I was looking out the carriage window, and I

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

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

defy belief."

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

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

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

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

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

in the Sao Paulo Province, the railroad line will then probably go between the Parana and Uruguay Rivers and connect Brazil's capital with the Republic of Uruguay and the Republic of Argentina.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Possibly on the 47th parallel, where at the very beginning of the dream I had seen the big knot in the rope.] There was no one at the station to meet me. I got off the train and immediately found the Salesians. I saw many houses with many people in them; more churches, schools, various hospices for children and youths, artisans and farmers, and a school for girls which taught a variety of domestic arts. Our missionaries were caring for both the young and the adults.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Something new struck my sight and made me wonder. The region of Patagonia closest to the Strait of Magellan, between the

Andes and the Atlantic, is not as wide as geographers claim it to be.

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

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

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

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

We then entered a region packed with wild animals and poisonous snakes of bizarre and horrifying shapes. They

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

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

"Yes, of course," I answered.

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

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

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

supplant savagery, and thus many Indians will enter the flock of Jesus Christ.”  
(*BM XVI, 303-312*)

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# The Snake and the Rosary (1862)

## Part I

At the “Good Night” on August 20, 1862, Don Bosco, after giving some disciplinary reminders, addressed them as follows:

I want to tell you a dream I had some nights ago, most probably on the eve of the Assumption. I dreamed that I was at my brother’s home at Castelnuovo d’Asti with all my boys. While they were at play, a total stranger came up to me and asked me to go with him. He took me to a meadow alongside the playground and pointed to a huge, ugly snake, over twenty feet long, coiled in the grass. Frightened, I wanted to run off, but the stranger held me back. “Get closer and take a good look,” he said.

“What?” I gasped. “Don’t you realize that monster could spring on me and gobble me up in no time?”

“Don’t be afraid! Nothing of the sort will happen. Just come with me.”

“Nothing doing! I’m not crazy!”

“Then stay where you are,” the stranger replied. And he went to fetch a rope.

“Take this end,” he said on his return, “and grip it tightly with both hands. I’ll hold the other, and we’ll let it dangle over the snake.”



"And then?"

"Then we'll snap it across its back."

"You must be crazy! The snake will leap up and tear us to pieces."

"No, it won't. Leave that to me."

"Count me out! I have no intention to risk my life for a thrill of this kind!"

Again I tried to run away, but the stranger once more assured me that I had nothing to fear because the snake would do me no harm. He talked so persuasively that I stayed on and agreed to his plan. He went around to the other side of the monster. We stretched the rope and then snapped it across the snake's back. The monster immediately sprang up and struck at the rope, but, as it did so, it ensnared itself as in a noose.

"Hold on!" the stranger shouted. "Don't let go!" He ran to a nearby pear tree and tied his end of the rope to it. Then he came to me and tied my end to the iron grating of a window in the house. The snake kept furiously struggling to free itself, writhing, thrashing, and flailing about. In its fury it tore itself to pieces, scattering its flesh over the area, till it was slashed to a mere skeleton.

The stranger then untied the rope and coiled it up. "Now watch very carefully!" he said as he put it into a box and closed it. By this time the boys had swarmed about me. Within a few moments he opened the box. We looked in and were astounded to see the rope shaped into the words *Ave Maria*. "How did that happen?" I asked.

"The snake," the man replied, "is a symbol of the devil, whereas the rope stands for *Ave, Maria* or, rather, the rosary, a succession of Hail Marys with which we can strike, conquer, and destroy all of hell's demons."

What I've told you so far – Don Bosco concluded – is the first part of the dream. What followed is even stranger and more amazing, but it's too late to tell you now. I'll leave it for tomorrow. In the meantime let us give thought to what that stranger said about the Hail Mary and the rosary. Let us devoutly say a Hail Mary whenever we are tempted, and we'll be

sure to win. Good night.

Since Don Bosco gave no interpretation of this dream, we shall volunteer a few comments.

The pear tree is the same one to which Don Bosco, as a boy, often used to tie one end of a tightrope as he got ready for the acrobatic performances with which he enticed his peers to a catechism lesson. Seemingly, we may see this tree as an image of the tree in Chapter 2, verse 3 of the Canticle of Canticles: "As an apple tree among the trees of the words, so is my lover among men." Tirino and other famous biblical commentators hold that this apple tree stands for any fruit tree. Hence, the fruit tree, with its delightful, refreshing shade, is a symbol of Jesus and His cross, the source of effective prayer and certain victory. Possibly this may be the reason why one end of the rope, so fatal to the snake, was tied to the pear tree. The other end, secured to the iron grating of a window, can mean that the mission of spreading devotion to the rosary was entrusted to the one that dwelt in that home and to his [spiritual] sons.

Don Bosco had promptly understood that.

He first began the annual celebration of Our Lady of the Rosary at Becchi. Then he directed that in all his schools pupils should daily recite five decades of the rosary. Finally, in his sermons and writings he strove to restore this ancient practice in families. He looked upon the rosary as a weapon which would bring victory not only to individuals but to the Church as well. That is why his [spiritual] sons published all the encyclicals of Leo XIII on this prayer so beloved by Mary and, through the *Bollettino Salesiano*, warmly promoted the desires of the Vicar of Jesus Christ [concerning the establishment of the Confraternity of the Rosary in all parishes].

*Most Reverend Father (Don Rua),*

*Having returned to Rome from the Eucharistic*

*Congress in Naples, I learn with much pleasure that the exhortation directed to the Parish Priests in the Salesian Bulletin is beginning to bear fruit. I therefore offer my best thanks to Your Excellency, and I assure you that you have done a work well pleasing to the Holy Father, who so much desires that his Encyclicals on the Rosary be kept alive, through the erection of the Confraternity under the same title.*

*To the sentiments of gratitude I add one more prayer; and that is that from time to time I renew the memory with a few lines to the parish priests and Rectors of Churches, so that forgetfulness may not cause them to lose sight of the foundation of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary.*

*And may God always prosper Your Venerable Mother, of whom I remain*

*Most Venerable Servant in G. Maria*

*Rome, Palazzo S. Uffizio, 27 November  
1891.*

*† Fr. VINCENZO LEONE SALLUA, Gle.  
Comm.*

*Archbishop of Chalcedon.*

## **Part II**

The following day, August 22, we again pestered him to tell us, at least privately, the part of the dream he had not revealed. He did not want to change his mind, but after much insistence on our part, he finally relented and promised that he would tell us more that evening. At the "Good Night" he spoke as follows:

Yielding to your repeated entreaties, I shall tell you the second part of the dream or at least what little I can. First, I must make it clear that no one is to write or talk about it outside this house. Discuss it among yourselves, laugh at it, do as you wish, but only among yourselves. Now, while talking with that stranger about the rope, the

snake, and what they symbolized, I turned around and saw boys picking up scraps of snake meat and eating them. "What are you doing?" I shouted. "Are you mad? That meat is poisonous!"

"It's delicious!" they replied.

And yet, no sooner had they swallowed it than they would crumple to the ground and their bodies would swell and harden like stone. I was helpless because, despite this, more and more boys kept eating that meat. I shouted and yelled at them, and even slapped and punched them to keep them from eating, but in vain. For every one who crumpled to the ground, another took his place. Then I called the clerics and told them to go among the boys and do all they could to make them stop eating that meat. My order was ineffective; worse yet, some clerics themselves began to eat it and they too fell to the ground.

Nearly out of my mind at seeing so many boys lying about me in such a pitiful state, I turned to the stranger. "What does this mean?" I asked. "These boys know that this meat will kill them, yet they eat it. Why?"

"Because 'the sensual man does not perceive the things that are of God.' That's why!" he answered.

"But isn't there some way of saving these boys?"

"Yes, there is."

"What?"

"Anvil and hammer."

"Anvil and hammer? What for?"

"To put the boys back in shape!"

"You mean I am to put them on an anvil and strike them with a hammer?"

"Look," the stranger said "this whole thing is a symbol. The hammer symbolizes confession, and the anvil symbolizes Holy Communion. These are the remedies you must use." I went to work and found the treatment very effective, but not for all. While most boys were restored to life and recovered, a few did not because their confessions were bad.

After the boys had retired to their dormitories, I (Provera) asked Don Bosco privately why his order to the

clerics had proved ineffective. "Because not all obeyed," he replied. "Worse yet, some even ate that meat."

On the whole, these dreams represent real life. Along with Don Bosco's words and deeds, they reveal the state of things in any average community where the most outstanding virtues are matched by deplorable weaknesses. This comes as no surprise, because evil unfortunately tends to spread far more readily than virtue. Consequently, constant vigilance is necessary. It may be said that it would have been better to play down or even eliminate more disgusting details, but we disagree. If history must properly fulfill its noble mission and teach life, it must describe the past as it happened, so that future generations may not only draw inspiration and courage from the noble examples of preceding ages, but also learn through their failings and errors how they must act themselves. A one-sided report of historic facts can lead only to distorted views. When suppressed and unacknowledged, mistakes and failings will repeat themselves, while a misguided apologia will neither help the favorably disposed nor make the hostile change their views. Only uninhibited frankness will generate belief and trust.

To speak our mind fully, we shall add that, while giving explanations which better met the boys' intellectual level, Don Bosco let it be known that he passed over other details of no less account because they probably did not concern them. In fact, in his dream he outlined not only the present but the future, as in the dream The Wheel of Eternity 1 and in others we shall later narrate.

The poisonous meat of that monstrous snake might well symbolize scandal which destroys one's faith, or immoral, irreligious readings. Likewise, what else might disobedience, collapsing, swelling up, and hardening signify but pride, obstinacy, and love of sin?

These are the evil effects of the deadly poison fed them by that accursed food, by that dragon described by Job and identified by the Fathers of the Church as a figure of

Lucifer. "His heart shall be as hard as stone." (Job 41, 15) Indeed, the hearts of those poisoned wretches become rebellious and obstinate in sin. What cure is there for such hardness? Don Bosco used a somewhat obscure symbolism which basically pointed to supernatural aid.

We are inclined to explain it thus: The prayers and sacrifices of the just must first ask that God's grace warm hardened hearts and soften them so that the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist-the hammer and the anvil on which the metal is shaped into lasting art before it is tempered-may exercise their divine efficacy. Thus the hammer's blows and the anvil's support will both bring about the cure of an ulcer-ridden but now docile heart. As the sparks fly, the heart is reconditioned.

We now resume our narrative. Certain that with Mary's protection he could withstand and overcome hell's attacks, Don Bosco prepared his pupils to celebrate the feast of Our Lady's Nativity.

On August 29 he gave the first nosegay for the novena. He also personally gave the next five on successive evenings. Bonetti recorded them in his chronicle:

1. Let us all strive to commit no sin whatever during this novena.

2. Let us give a friend some good advice.

(On the following evening he set an example himself by suggesting that we make necessary sacrifices to overcome bad habits while we are still young and urging us to have the greatest confidence in our superiors in both spiritual and material matters.)

3. Those who have never made a general confession should consider doing so; those who have should recite an act of contrition for all the sins of their past life.

4. He told us of Father Cafasso's reply to a menial laborer who had asked him what would most please Our Lady. "What pleases mothers most?" he questioned the man in turn.

“When we show our love for their children.”

“Good,” Father Cafasso went on. “You are right. Therefore, if you want to please the Madonna, love Her Divine Son first by receiving Him in Holy Communion, and then by keeping your heart free of all sin, even venial.” This was Father Cafasso’s reply, and now I pass it on to you.

5. Tomorrow do your best in church not to sit back on your heels or on the pew behind you or anything like that. I say this to those who have this habit. To all I suggest this nosegay: Speak Italian [instead of your dialect] and remind those who forget.

6. Show perfect obedience in everything. Tomorrow let’s see to it that we don’t have to be reminded about house rules and our chores.

If you’re told to do something special, obey promptly and readily.

I assure you that this will be the most welcome flower we can offer Our Heavenly Mother. In this way we shall deserve to be called Her children. As a loving Mother, She will teach us the holy fear of God, as She Herself promises through Holy Scripture: “Come, children, hear Me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.”[Ps. 33, 12]

*(BM VII, 143-1493)*

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## **First missionary dream: Patagonia (1872)**

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

He narrated it for the first time to Pius IX in March 1876. Later he repeated the story to some Salesians in private. The first to be admitted to this confidential

narration was Fr Francesco Bodrato, on 30 July of the same year. And Fr Bodrato told Fr Giulio Barberis on that same evening in Lanzo, where he had gone to spend a few days of leisure with a group of cleric novices.

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

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

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

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



hacking them into pieces, and brandishing chunks of their flesh on the barbs of their long spears. Now and then, fighting broke out again among the savages or against neighboring tribes.

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

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

How can this be? I exclaimed. I did not want them to advance any further because I feared that soon their fate would be that of the former missionaries. I was about to force them back when I saw that the barbarians seemed pleased by their arrival. Lowering their spears, they warmly welcomed them. In utter amazement I said to myself: let's see how things will turn out! I saw that our missionaries mingled with them and taught them, and they docilely listened and learned quickly. They readily accepted the missionaries' admonitions and put them into practice.

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

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

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

time were one of my most fervent aspirations.

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

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

*(BM X, 46-48)*