

# The Venerable Monsignor Stefano Ferrando

*Monsignor Stefano Ferrando was an extraordinary example of missionary dedication and episcopal service, combining the Salesian charism with a profound vocation to serve the poorest. Born in Piedmont in 1895, he entered the Salesian Congregation at a young age and, after serving in the military during the First World War, for which he was awarded the Silver Medal for Valour, he dedicated himself to apostolate in India. As Bishop of Krishnagar and then Shillong for over thirty years, he tirelessly walked among the people, promoting evangelisation with humility and profound pastoral love. He founded institutions, supported lay catechists, and embodied the motto "Apostle of Christ" in his life. His life was an example of faith, surrender to God, and total self-giving, leaving a spiritual legacy that continues to inspire the Salesian mission worldwide.*

Venerable Bishop Stephen Ferrando knew how to combine his Salesian vocation with his missionary charism and episcopal ministry. Born on 28 September 1895 in Rossiglione (Genoa, diocese of Acqui) to Agostino and Giuseppina Salvi, he was distinguished by an ardent love of God and a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1904 he entered Salesian schools, first at Fossano and then at Valdocco in Turin where he got to know Don Bosco's successors and the first generation of Salesians, and undertook his priestly studies; in the meantime he nurtured the desire to leave as a missionary. On 13 September 1912, he made his first religious profession in the Salesian Congregation at Foglizzo. Called to arms in 1915, he took part in the First World War. For his courage he was awarded the silver medal for valour. Returning home in 1918, he took his perpetual vows on 26 December 1920.

He was ordained a priest in Borgo San Martino (Alessandria) on

18 March 1923. On 2 December of the same year, with nine companions, he embarked in Venice as a missionary to India. On 18 December, after 16 days of travel, the group arrived in Bombay and on 23 December in Shillong, the place of his new apostolate. As novice master, he educated the young Salesians in the love of Jesus and Mary and had a great spirit of apostolate.

On 9 August 1934, Pope Pius XI appointed him Bishop of Krishnagar. His motto was "Apostle of Christ". In 1935, on 26 November, he was transferred to Shillong where he remained bishop for 34 years. While working in a difficult situation of cultural, religious and social impact, Bishop Ferrando worked tirelessly to be close to the people entrusted to him, working zealously in the vast diocese that encompassed the entire region of North East India. He preferred to travel on foot rather than by car, which he would have had at his disposal: this allowed him to meet the people, to stop and talk to them, to be involved in their lives. This live contact with people's lives was one of the main reasons for the fruitfulness of his evangelical proclamation: humility, simplicity, love for the poor led many to convert and request Baptism. He established a seminary for the formation of young Indian Salesians, built a hospital, erected a shrine dedicated to Mary Help of Christians and founded the first Congregation of indigenous sisters, the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (1942).

A man of strong character, he was not discouraged in the face of countless difficulties, which he faced with a smile and meekness. Perseverance in the face of obstacles was one of his main characteristics. He sought to unite the Gospel message with the local culture in which it was to be embedded. He was intrepid in his pastoral visits, which he made to the most remote places in the diocese, in order to recover the last lost sheep. He showed particular sensitivity and promotion for lay catechists, whom he considered complementary to the bishop's mission and on whom depended much of the fruitfulness

of the proclamation of the Gospel and its penetration into the territory. His attention to family pastoral work was also immense. Despite his numerous commitments, the Venerable was a man with a rich interior life, nourished by prayer and recollection. As a pastor, he was appreciated by his sisters, priests, Salesian brothers and in the episcopate, as well as by the people, who felt him deeply close to them. He gave himself creatively to his flock, caring for the poor, defending the untouchables, caring for the cholera patients.

The cornerstones of his spirituality were his filial bond with the Virgin Mary, his missionary zeal, his continuous reference to Don Bosco, as emerges from his writings and in all his missionary activity. The most luminous and heroic moment of his virtuous life was his departure from the diocese of Shillong. Archbishop Ferrando had to submit his resignation to the Holy Father when he was still in the fullness of his physical and intellectual faculties, to allow the appointment of his successor, who was to be chosen, according to his superiors' instructions, from among the indigenous priests he had formed. It was a particularly painful moment, experienced by the great bishop with humility and obedience. He understood that it was time to retire in prayer according to the Lord's will.

He returned to Genoa in 1969 and continued his pastoral activity, presiding over the ceremonies for the conferral of Confirmation and dedicating himself to the sacrament of Penance.

He was faithful to the Salesian religious life to the last, deciding to live in community and renouncing the privileges that his position as bishop might have reserved for him. He continued to be "a missionary" in Italy. Not "a missionary who moves, but [...] a missionary who is". His life in this last stage of life became a "radiating" one. He became a "missionary of prayer" who said: "I am glad I came away so that others could take over to do such wonderful works."

From Genoa Quarto, he continued to animate the mission in Assam, raising awareness and sending financial aid. He lived

this hour of purification with a spirit of faith, of abandonment to God's will and obedience, touching with his own hand the full meaning of the evangelical expression "we are only useless servants", and confirming with his life the *caetera tolle*, the sacrificial aspect of the Salesian vocation. He died on 20 June 1978 and was buried in Rossiglione, his native land. In 1987 his mortal remains were brought back to India.

In docility to the Spirit he carried out a fruitful pastoral action, which manifested itself in great love for the poor, in humility of spirit and fraternal charity, in the joy and optimism of the Salesian spirit.

Together with many missionaries who shared the adventure of the Spirit with him in the land of India, including Servants of God Francis Convertini, Costantine Vendrame and Orestes Marengo, Bishop Ferrando gave rise to a new missionary method: to be an itinerant missionary. Such an example is a providential warning, especially for religious congregations tempted by a process of institutionalisation and closure, not to lose the passion to go out to meet people and situations of the greatest material and spiritual poverty and destitution, going where no one wants to go and entrusting themselves as he did. "I look to the future with confidence, trusting in Mary Help of Christians... I will entrust myself to Mary Help of Christians who already saved me from so many dangers."

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## Cardinal Augustus Hlond

The second of 11 children, his father was a railway worker. Having received a simple but strong faith from his parents, at the age of 12, attracted by Don Bosco's reputation, he followed his brother Ignatius to Italy to dedicate himself to the Lord

in the Salesian Society, and soon attracted two other brothers there: Antonio, who was to become a Salesian and a renowned musician, and Clement, who was to become a missionary. The college at Valsalice accepted him for his secondary studies. He was then admitted to the novitiate and received the cassock from Blessed Michael Rua (1896). Having made his religious profession in 1897, his superiors sent him to Rome to the Gregorian University for the philosophy course which he graduated in. From Rome he returned to Poland to do his practical training in the college at Oświęcim. His fidelity to Don Bosco's system of education, his commitment to assistance and to the school, his dedication to the young and the amiability of his manner won him great acclaim. He also quickly made a name for himself for his musical talent.

Having completed his theology studies, he was ordained a priest on 23 September 1905 in Cracow by Bishop Nowak. In 1905-09 he attended the Faculty of Arts at the Universities of Krakow and Lvov. In 1907 he was placed in charge of the new house in Przemyśl (1907-09), from where he went on to direct the house in Vienna (1909-19). Here his valour and personal ability had an even greater scope due to the particular difficulties the institute faced in the imperial capital. Fr Augustus Hlond, with his virtue and tact, succeeded in a short time not only in sorting out the financial situation, but also in bringing about a flowering of youth work that attracted the admiration of all classes of people. Caring for the poor, the workers, the children of the people attracted him the affection of the humblest classes. Dear to the bishops and apostolic nuncios, he enjoyed the esteem of the authorities and the imperial family itself. In recognition of this social and educational work, he received some of the most prestigious honours three times.

In 1919, the development of the Austro-Hungarian Province advised a division in proportion to the number of houses, and the superiors appointed Fr Hlond as provincial of the German-Hungarian Province based in Vienna (1919-22), entrusting him with the care of the Austrian, German and Hungarian confreres.

In less than three years, the young provincial opened a dozen new Salesian presences, and formed them in the most genuine Salesian spirit, raising numerous vocations.

He was in the full fervour of his Salesian activity when, in 1922, the Holy See having to provide religious accommodation for Polish Silesia still bleeding from political and national strife, the Holy Father Pius XI entrusted him with the delicate mission, appointing him as Apostolic Administrator. His mediation between Germans and Poles gave birth in 1925 to the diocese of Katowice, of which he became bishop. In 1926 he was Archbishop of Gniezno and Poznań and Primate of Poland. The following year the Pope created him Cardinal. In 1932 he founded the Society of Christ for Polish emigrants, aimed at assisting the many compatriots who had left the country.

In March 1939 he took part in the Conclave that elected Pius XII. On 1 September of the same year the Nazis invaded Poland: the Second World War began. The cardinal raised his voice against Hitler's violations of human rights and religious freedom. Forced into exile, he took refuge in France, at Hautecombe Abbey, denouncing the persecution of the Jews in Poland. The Gestapo penetrated the Abbey and arrested him, deporting him to Paris. The cardinal categorically refuses to support the formation of a pro-Nazi Polish government. He was interned first in Lorraine and then in Westphalia. Freed by allied troops, he returned to his homeland in 1945.

In the new Poland liberated from Nazism, he finds communism. He courageously defended the Poles against atheistic Marxist oppression, even escaping several assassination attempts. He died on 22 October 1948 of pneumonia, at the age of 67. Thousands of people flocked to the funeral.

Cardinal Hlond was a virtuous man, a shining example of a Salesian religious and a generous, austere pastor, capable of prophetic vision. Obedient to the Church and firm in the exercise of authority, he showed heroic humility and unequivocal constancy in times of greatest trial. He cultivated poverty and practised justice to the poor and needy. The two pillars of his spiritual life, in the school of

St John Bosco, were the Eucharist and Mary Help of Christians. In the history of the Church of Poland, Cardinal Augustus Hlond was one of the most eminent figures for the religious witness of his life, for the greatness, variety and originality of his pastoral ministry, for the sufferings he faced with an intrepid Christian spirit for the Kingdom of God. The apostolic ardour distinguished the pastoral work and spiritual physiognomy of the Venerable Augustus Hlond, who took *Da mihi animas coetera tolle* as his episcopal motto. As a true son of St John Bosco he confirmed it with his life as a consecrated man and bishop, bearing witness to tireless pastoral charity.

We must remember his great love for Our Lady, learnt in his family and the great devotion of the Polish people to the Mother of God, venerated in the shrine of Częstochowa. Moreover, from Turin, where he began his journey as a Salesian, he spread the cult of Mary Help of Christians in Poland and consecrated Poland to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. His entrustment to Mary always sustained him in adversity and in the hour of his final encounter with the Lord. He died with the Rosary beads in his hands, telling those present that the victory, when it came, would be the victory of Mary Immaculate.

Venerable Cardinal Augustus Hlond is an outstanding witness of how we must accept the way of the Gospel every day despite the fact that it brings us problems, difficulties, even persecution: this is holiness. "Jesus himself warns us that the path he proposes goes against the flow, even making us challenge society by the way we live and, as a result, becoming a nuisance. He reminds us how many people have been, and still are, persecuted simply because they struggle for justice, because they take seriously their commitment to God and to others. Unless we wish to sink into an obscure mediocrity, let us not long for an easy life, for 'whoever would save his life will lose it' (Mt 16:25). (Mt 16:25). In living the Gospel, we cannot expect that everything will be easy, for the thirst for power and worldly interests often

stands in our way... the cross remains the source of our growth and sanctification.” (Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, nos. 90-92).

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## **The Education of Conscience with St. Francis de Sales**

It was most likely the advent of the Protestant Reformation that brought the issue of conscience—and more precisely, “freedom of conscience”—to the forefront. In a 1597 letter to Clement VIII, the Provost of Sales lamented the “tyranny” that the “state of Geneva” imposed “on the consciences of Catholics.” He asked the Holy See to intervene with the King of France to ensure that the Genevans would be granted “what they call freedom of conscience.” Opposed to military solutions for the Protestant crisis, he glimpsed in *libertas conscientiae* a possible way out of violent confrontation, provided reciprocity was respected. Claimed by Geneva for the Reformation and by Francis de Sales for Catholicism, freedom of conscience was about to become a pillar of modern thought.

### **The Dignity of the Human Person**

The dignity of the individual lies in conscience, and conscience is first and foremost synonymous with sincerity, honesty, frankness, and conviction. The Provost of Sales acknowledged, for example, “to ease his conscience,” that the project of the *Controversies* had been somewhat imposed on him by others. When presenting his reasons in favour of Catholic doctrine and practice, he took care to specify that he did so “in conscience.” “Tell me in conscience,” he asked his opponents. A “good conscience” ensures one avoids certain acts that contradict oneself.



However, individual subjective conscience cannot always be taken as a guarantee of objective truth. One is not always obliged to believe what someone says in conscience. "Show me clearly," the Provost said to the lords of Thonon, "that you are not lying at all, that you are not deceiving me when you say that in conscience you had this or that inspiration." Conscience can fall victim to illusion, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. "Hardened misers not only do not confess their greed but do not even think in conscience that they are greedy."

The formation of the conscience is an essential task because freedom of conscience carries the risk of "doing good and evil," but "choosing evil is not using, but rather, abusing our freedom." It is a difficult task because conscience sometimes appears as an adversary that "always fights against us and for us." It "steadily resists our bad inclinations," but does so "for our salvation." When one sins, "inner remorse moves against our conscience with a drawn sword," but only to "pierce it with holy fear."

A means to exercise responsible freedom is the practice of the "examination of conscience." Examining one's conscience is like following the example of doves that look at each other "with clear and pure eyes," "groom themselves carefully, and adorn themselves as best they can." Philothea is invited to perform this examination every evening before bed, asking oneself, "how one behaved at various times of the day. To make it easier, one should reflect on where, with whom, and in what occupations one was engaged."

Once a year, we must conduct a thorough examination of the "state of our soul" before God, our neighbour, and ourselves, not forgetting an "examination of our soul's affections." The examination—Francis de Sales tells the Visitandines—will lead you to "probe your conscience deeply."

How to lighten the conscience when burdened by error or fault? Some do so poorly, judging and accusing others "of vices they themselves succumb to," thinking this will "soften their conscience's remorse." This multiplies the risk of rash

judgments. Conversely, “those who properly care for their conscience are not at all prone to rash judgments.” The case of parents, educators, and public officials deserves special consideration, for “a good part of their conscience consists in carefully watching over the conscience of others.”

### Self-Respect

From the affirmation of each person’s dignity and responsibility must arise self-respect. Socrates and all ancient pagan and Christian thought had already shown the way:

It is a saying of the philosophers, yet held valid by Christian doctors: “Know thyself”—that is, know the excellence of your soul so as not to debase or despise it.

Certain acts offend not only God but also human dignity and reason. Their consequences are deplorable:

The likeness and image of God we bear within us is stained and disfigured, the dignity of our spirit dishonoured, and we are made similar to irrational animals [...], enslaving ourselves to our passions and overturning the order of reason.

There are ecstasies that elevate us above our natural state and others that debase us. “O men, how long will you be so senseless,” writes the author of *Theotimus*, “as to trample your natural dignity, voluntarily descending and plunging yourselves into the condition of beasts?”

Self-respect helps avoid two opposite dangers: pride and contempt for one’s gifts. In a century where honour was highly exalted, Francis de Sales had to denounce crimes, particularly duelling, which made his “hair stand on end,” and even more, the senseless pride behind it. “I am scandalised,” he wrote to the wife of a duelling husband; “truly, I cannot fathom how one could have such unbridled courage even over trifles.” Fighting a duel is like “becoming each other’s executioner.” Others, conversely, dare not acknowledge their gifts and thus sin against gratitude. Francis de Sales condemns “a certain

false and foolish humility that prevents them from seeing the good in themselves." They are wrong, for "the goods God has placed in us must be acknowledged, valued, and sincerely honoured."

The first neighbour I must respect and love, the Bishop of Geneva seems to say, is myself. True self-love and due respect demand that I strive for perfection and correct myself if needed, but gently, reasonably, and "following the path of compassion" rather than anger and fury.

There exists a self-love that is not only legitimate but beneficial and commanded, "Charity well-ordered begins with oneself," says the proverb, reflecting Francis de Sales' thought—provided one does not confuse self-love with self-centredness. Self-love is good, and Philothea is asked to examine how she loves herself:

Keep good order in loving yourself? For only disordered self-love can ruin us. Ordered love requires that we love the soul more than the body and seek virtue above all else.

Conversely, self-centredness is selfish, "narcissistic" love, fixated on itself, jealous of its beauty, and concerned only with self-interest. "Narcissus, say the profane, was a youth so scornful he would offer his love to none; finally, gazing at his reflection in a clear fountain, he was utterly captivated by his beauty."

The "Respect Due to Persons"

If one respects oneself, one is better prepared to respect others. Being "the image and likeness of God" implies that "all human beings share the same dignity." Francis de Sales, though living in a deeply unequal society marked by the ancient regime, promoted thought and practice marked by "respect due to persons."

Start with children. St. Bernard's mother—says the author of Philothea—loved her newborns "with respect as something sacred God had entrusted to her." A grave rebuke from the Bishop of Geneva to pagans concerned their contempt for defenceless

lives. Respect for a baby about to be born emerges in a letter written according to the Baroque rhetoric of the time to a pregnant woman. He encourages her by explaining to her that the child forming in her womb is not only “a living image of the Divine Majesty”, but also an image of its mother. He advises another woman:

Offer often to the eternal glory of your Creator the little creature whose formation He has wanted to take you as His cooperator.

Another aspect of respect for others concerns the theme of freedom. The discovery of new lands had as a disastrous consequence, the re-emergence of slavery, that recalled the practice of the ancient romans at the time of paganism. The sale of human beings degraded them to the level of animals.

One day, Marc Antony bought two youths from a merchant; back then, as still happens in some lands, children were sold—men procured and traded them like horses in our countries.

Respect for others is subtly threatened by gossip and slander. Francis de Sales insists heavily on “sins of the tongue.” A chapter in Philothea which deals explicitly with this subject, is titled Honesty in Words and Respect Due to Persons states that ruining someone’s reputation is “spiritual murder,” robbing them of “civil life.” When condemning vice, one should spare the person involved as much as possible.

Certain groups are easily scorned. Francis de Sales defends the dignity of common people, citing the Gospel. He comments that “St. Peter was rough, coarse, an old fisherman of low station; a trader of low condition. Saint John, on the contrary, was a gentleman, sweet, lovable, wise; saint Peter, instead, was ignorant.” Well, it was St Peter who was chosen to guide others and to be the “universal superior”.

He proclaims the dignity of the sick, saying that, “the souls who are on the cross are declared queens.” Denouncing “cruelty towards the poor” and exalting the “dignity of the poor”, he

justifies and specifies the attitude to be taken towards them, explaining “how we must honour them and, therefore, visit them as representatives of our Lord.” No one is useless; no one is insignificant. “There is no object in the world that cannot be useful for something; but you must know how to find its use and place.”

### The “one-different” Salesian”

The eternal human that has always tormented human society is reconciling individual dignity and freedom with that of the others. Francis de Sales offered an original solution by coining a term. In fact, assuming that the universe is made up of “all things created, visible and invisible” and that “their diversity is brought back into unity”, the Bishop of Geneva proposed to call it “one-diverse”, that is, “unique and diverse, unique with diversity and diverse with unity.”

For him, every being is unique. People are like Pliny’s pearls, “so unique in quality that no two are perfectly equal.” His two major works, *Introduction to the Devout Life* and *Treatise on the Love of God*—are addressed to individuals, Philothea and Theotimus. What variety and diversity among beings! “Without doubt, as we see that two men are never perfectly equal as to the gifts of nature, so they are never perfectly equal as to the supernatural gifts.” The variety also enchanted him from a purely aesthetic point of view, but he feared an indiscreet curiosity about its causes:

If someone asked why God made melons larger than strawberries, or lilies bigger than violets; why rosemary isn’t a rose or a carnation a marigold; why peacocks are prettier than bats, or figs sweet and lemons sour—we’d laugh and say: poor man, the world’s beauty requires variety, it is necessary that in things there are diverse and differentiated perfections and that the one is not the other. This is why some are small, others large; some harsh, others sweet; some more beautiful, others less. [...] All have their value, their grace, their splendour, and all, seen in the totality of their varieties,

constitute a wonderful spectacle of beauty.

Diversity does not hinder unity; on the contrary, it makes it richer and more beautiful. Each flower has its characteristics that distinguish it from all the others. "It is not exactly of the roses to be white, it seems to me, because those vermilions are more beautiful and have a better scent, which however is proper to the lily." Of course, Francis de Sales does not tolerate confusion and disorder, but he is equally an enemy of uniformity. The diversity of beings can lead to dispersion and rupture of communion, but if there is love, "bond of perfection", nothing is lost, on the contrary, diversity is exalted by the union.

In Francis de Sales there is certainly a real culture of the individual, but this is never a closure to the group, the community or society. He spontaneously sees each person marked by their "state of life," which marks the identity and belonging of each one. It will not be possible to establish an equal programme or project for all, simply because it will be applied and implemented in a different way "for the gentleman, the artisan, the servant, the prince, the widow, the maiden, the married." It must also be adapted "to the strengths and duties of each individual. The bishop of Geneva sees society divided into vital spaces characterized by social belonging and group solidarity, as when he deals with "the company of soldiers, the workshop of craftsmen, the court of princes, the family of married people."

Love personalizes and, therefore, individualizes. The affection that binds one person to another is unique, as demonstrated by Francis de Sales in his relationship with Chantal's wife, "Every affection has a peculiarity that differentiates it from the others. What I feel for you possesses a certain particularity that comforts me infinitely, and, to say everything, is very fruitful for me." The sun illuminates each and every one, "illuminating a corner of the earth, it does not illuminate it less than what it would do if it did not shine elsewhere, but only in that corner."

The human being is in a state of becoming

A Christian humanist, Francis de Sales ultimately believed in the human person's capacity for self-improvement. Erasmus had coined the phrase: *Homines non nascuntur sed finguntur* (Men are not born but made). While animals are predetermined beings driven by instinct, humans, in contrast, are in perpetual evolution. Not only do they change, but they can also change themselves, for better or for worse.

What entirely preoccupied the author of *Theotimus* was perfecting himself and helping others to perfect themselves, not only in religious matters but in all things. From birth to the grave, man is in a state of apprenticeship. Let us imitate the crocodile, which "never stops growing as long as it lives." Indeed, "remaining in the same state for long is impossible. in this traffic, whoever does not advance falls behind; on this ladder, whoever does not climb, descends; in this battle, whoever does not conquer is conquered." He quotes St. Bernard, who said, "It is written especially for man that he will never be found in the same state: he must either advance or regress." Let us move forward:

Do you not know that you are on a journey and that the path is not made for sitting but for moving forward? He is so made for progress, that moving forward is called walking.

This also means that the human person is educable, capable of learning, correcting themselves, and improving themselves. And this holds true at all levels. Age sometimes has nothing to do with it. Look at these choirboys of the cathedral, who far surpass their bishop's abilities in this domain. "I admire these children," he said, "who can barely speak yet already sing their parts; they understand all musical signs and rules, while I, a grown man who might pass for a great figure, would not know how to manage." No one in this world is perfect:

There are people naturally frivolous, others rude, others still reluctant to listen to others' opinions, and others prone to indignation, others to anger, and others to love. In

short, few are free people are free from one or another of these imperfections.

Should we despair of improving our temperament, correcting some of our natural inclinations? Not at all.

For though these traits may be innate and natural in each of us, if they can be corrected and regulated through disciplined effort, or even eradicated, then, I tell you, Philothea, it must be done. Bitter almonds have been made sweet by piercing them at the base to drain their juice; why should we not drain our own perverse inclinations to become better?

Hence, the optimistic yet demanding conclusion. "There is no good nature that cannot be corrupted by vicious habits, nor any nature so perverse that it cannot, first by God's grace and then through diligent effort, be tamed and overcome." If man is educable, we must never despair of anyone and guard ourselves well against prejudice in regard to people:

Do not say: That man is a drunkard, even if you have seen him drunk; 'an adulterer,' for having witnessed his sin; 'incestuous,' for catching him in that disgrace, because one action is not enough to define a thing. [...] And even if a man were long steeped in vice, you'd risk falsehood by calling him vicious.

The human person has never finished tending their garden. This was the lesson the founder of the Visitation nuns instilled when urging them to "cultivate the soil and garden" of their hearts and minds, for no one is "so perfect as to need no effort to grow in perfection or preserve it."

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# Female education with Saint Francis de Sales

*The educational thinking of Saint Francis de Sales reveals a profound and innovative vision of the role of women in the Church and society of his time. Convinced that the education of women was fundamental for the moral and spiritual growth of the entire community, the holy bishop of Geneva promoted a balanced education that respected female dignity but was also attentive to fragility. With a paternal and realistic gaze, he was able to recognise and value the qualities of women, encouraging them to cultivate virtue, culture, and devotion. Founder of the Visitation with Jane de Chantal, he vigorously defended the female vocation even in the face of criticism and prejudice. His teaching continues to offer relevant insights into education, love, and freedom in choosing one's own life.*

During his trip to Paris in 1619, Francis de Sales met Adrien Bourdoise, a reformist priest, who reproached him for paying too much attention to women. The bishop calmly replied that women were half of humanity and that by forming good Christian women, there would be good young people, and with good young people, there would be good priests. After all, did not St. Jerome devote a great deal of time and various writings to them? Francis de Sales recommended the reading of his letters to Madame de Chantal, who found in them, among other things, numerous instructions "for educating her daughters". It can be deduced that, in his eyes, the role of women in education justified the time and attention devoted to them.

## **Francis de Sales and the women of his time**

"We must help the female sex, which is despised," the Bishop of Geneva once said to Jean-François de Blonay. To understand Francis de Sales' concerns and thinking, it is necessary to place him in his own time. It must be said

that a number of his statements still seem very much in line with the thinking of the current time. In the women of his time, he deplored "this feminine tenderness towards themselves," their ease "in pitying themselves and desiring to be pitied," a greater propensity than men "to give credence to dreams, to be afraid of spirits, and to be credulous and superstitious," and above all, the "twists and turns of their vain thoughts." Among the advice he gave to Madame de Chantal on the education of her daughters, he wrote without hesitation, "Remove vanity from their souls; it is born almost at the same time as sex."

However, women are endowed with great qualities. He wrote about Madame de La Fléchère, who had just lost her husband, "If I had only this perfect sheep in my flock, I would not be distressed at being the shepherd of this afflicted diocese. After Madame de Chantal, I do not know if I have ever met a stronger soul in a female body, a more reasonable spirit and a more sincere humility." Women are by no means the last in the practice of virtue. "Have we not seen many great theologians who have said wonderful things about virtue, but not in order to practise it, while, on the contrary, there are many holy women who cannot speak of virtue, but who nevertheless know very well how to practise it?"

Married women are the worthiest of admiration, "Oh my God! How pleasing to God are the virtues of a married woman; for they must be strong and excellent to endure in such a vocation!" In the struggle to preserve chastity, he believed that "women have often fought more courageously than men."

Founder of a congregation of women together with Jeanne de Chantal, he was in constant contact with the first religious. Alongside praise, criticism began to rain down. Pushed into these trenches, the founder had to defend himself and defend them, not only as religious women, but also as women. In a document that was to serve as a preface to the Constitutions of the Visitandines, we find the polemical vein he was capable of displaying, directing himself no longer

against 'heresiarchs' but against malicious and ignorant 'censors':

*The presumption and inappropriate arrogance of many children of this century, who ostentatiously condemn everything that is not in accordance with their spirit [...], gives me the opportunity, or rather compels me, to write this Preface, my dearest Sisters, to arm and defend your holy vocation against the barbs of their pestilent tongues, so that good and pious souls, who are undoubtedly attached to your lovable and honoured Institute, may find here how to repel the arrows shot by the temerity of these bizarre and insolent censors.*

Perhaps foreseeing that such a preamble might damage the cause, the founder of the Visitation wrote a second, softened edition, with the aim of highlighting the fundamental equality of the sexes. After quoting Genesis, he commented as follows, "Woman, therefore, no less than man, has the grace of having been made in the image of God; equal honour in both sexes; their virtues are equal."

### **The education of daughters**

The enemy of true love is "vanity". This was the flaw that Francis de Sales, like the moralists and educators of his time, feared most in the education of young women. He points out several manifestations of it. Look at "these young ladies of the world, who, having established themselves well, go about puffed up with pride and vanity, with their heads held high, their eyes open, eager to be noticed by the worldly."

The Bishop of Geneva amuses himself a little in mocking these "society girls", who "wear loose, powdered hats", with their heads "shod like horses' hooves", all "plumed and flowered beyond description" and "laden with frills". There are those who "wear dresses that are tight and very uncomfortable, just to show that they are slim; this is true madness that mostly makes them incapable of doing

anything.”

What then are we to think of certain artificial beauties transformed into “boutiques of vanity”? Francis de Sales prefers a “clear and clean face;” he wants “nothing affected, because everything that is embellished is displeasing.” Should we therefore condemn all “artifice”? He readily admits that “in the case of some defect of nature, it must be corrected so that the correction can be seen, but stripped of all artifice.”

And perfume? the preacher asked himself when speaking of Mary Magdalene. “It is an excellent thing,” he replied, “even the one who is perfumed perceives something excellent in it,” adding, as a connoisseur, that “Spanish musk is highly prized throughout the world.” In the chapter on “decency in dress,” he allows young women to wear clothes with various adornments, “because they may freely desire to be pleasing to many, but with the sole purpose of winning a young man with a view to holy matrimony.” He concluded with this indulgent observation, “What do you want? It is only fitting that young ladies should be a little pretty.”

It should be added that reading the Bible had prepared him not to be harsh in the face of female beauty. In the lover of the *Song of Songs*, admired “the remarkable beauty of her face, like a *bouquet* of flowers.” He describes Jacob who, meeting Rachel at the well, “wept tears of joy when he saw a virgin who pleased him and enchanted him with the grace of her face.” He also loved to tell the story of St. Brigid, born in Scotland, a country where “the most beautiful creatures one can see” are admired; she was “an extremely attractive young woman,” but her beauty was “natural,” our author points out.

The Salesian ideal of beauty is called ‘good grace,’ which designates not only “the perfect harmony of the parts that make something beautiful,” but also the “grace of movements, gestures, and actions, which is like the soul of life and beauty,” that is, goodness of heart. Grace requires “simplicity and modesty.” Now, grace is a perfection that

comes from within the person. It is beauty combined with grace that makes Rebecca the feminine ideal of the Bible. She was "so beautiful and graceful at the well where she drew water for the flock," and her "familiar goodness" inspired her to give water not only to Abraham's servants but also to his camels.

### **Education and preparation for life**

In the time of St. Francis de Sales, women had little opportunity to pursue higher education. Girls learned what they heard from their brothers and, when the family could afford it, attended a convent. Reading was certainly more common than writing. Colleges were reserved for boys, so learning Latin, the language of culture, was practically forbidden to girls.

We must believe that Francis de Sales was not opposed to women becoming educated, but on condition that they did not fall into pedantry and vanity. He admired Saint Catherine, who was "very learned, but humble in her great knowledge," Among the bishop of Geneva's female interlocutors, the Lady of La Fléchère had studied Latin, Italian, Spanish, and the fine arts, but she was an exception.

In order to find their place in life, both socially and religiously, young women often needed special help at a certain point. Georges Rolland reports that the bishop personally took care of several difficult cases. A woman from Geneva with three daughters was generously assisted by the bishop, "with money and credit; he placed one of her daughters as an apprentice with an honest lady in the city, paying her board for six years, in grain and money." He also donated 500 florins for the marriage of the daughter of a printer in Geneva.

The religious intolerance of the time sometimes caused tragedies, which Francis de Sales tried to remedy. Marie-Judith Gilbert, educated in Paris by her parents in the 'errors of Calvin,' discovered the book *Filotea* at the age of nineteen, which she dared to read only in secret. She

took a liking to the author, whom she had heard about. Closely watched by her father and mother, she managed to be taken away by carriage, was instructed in the Catholic religion, and entered the Visitation Sisters.

The social role of women was still rather limited. Francis de Sales was not entirely opposed to women's involvement in public life. He wrote in these terms, for example, to a woman who was given to intervene in public affairs, both appropriately and inappropriately:

*Your sex and your vocation allow you to repress evil outside yourselves, but only if this is inspired by good and accomplished with simple, humble, and charitable remonstrances towards transgressors and by warning your superiors as far as possible.*

On the other hand, it is significant that a contemporary of Francis de Sales, Mademoiselle de Gournay, an early feminist *ante litteram*, an intellectual and author of controversial texts such as her treatise *L'égalité des hommes et des femmes* (The Equality of Men and Women) and *La plainte des femmes* (The Complaint of Women), expressed great admiration for him. She devoted her entire life to demonstrating this equality, gathering all possible evidence on the subject, without forgetting that of the "good and holy bishop of Geneva".

## **Education to love**

Francis de Sales spoke a lot about God's love, but he was also very attentive to the manifestations of human love. For him, in fact, love is one, even if its 'object' is different and unequal. To explain God's love, he could do no better than start from human love.

Love arises from the contemplation of beauty, and beauty can be perceived by the senses, especially by the eyes. An interactive phenomenon is established between the gaze and beauty. "Contemplating beauty makes us love it, and

love makes us contemplate it." The sense of smell reacts in the same way; in fact, "perfumes exercise their unique power of attraction through their sweetness."

After the intervention of the external senses, the internal senses take over, the imagination and fantasy, which exalt and transfigure reality. "By virtue of this reciprocal movement of love towards sight and sight towards love, just as love makes the beauty of the beloved more resplendent, so the sight of the beloved makes love more enamoured and pleasant." We can then understand why "those who have painted Cupid have blindfolded him, affirming that love is blind." At this point, love-passion arrives; it makes us "seek dialogue, and dialogue often nourishes and increases love;" moreover, "it desires secrecy, and when lovers have no secrets to tell each other, they sometimes take pleasure in telling them secretly;" and finally, it leads us to "utter words that would certainly be ridiculous if they did not spring from a passionate heart."

Now, this love-passion, which perhaps boils down to nothing more than 'amorucci' (little loves) and 'galanterie' (gallantries), is exposed to various vicissitudes, to such an extent that it prompts the author of the *Filotea* to intervene with a series of considerations and warnings about "frivolous friendships that are formed between people of the opposite sex and without any intention of marriage." Often, they are nothing more than "abortions or, rather, semblances of friendship."

St. Francis de Sales also expressed his views on kissing, wondering, for example, along with the ancient commentators, why Rachel allowed Jacob to embrace her. He explains that there are two kinds of kisses: one bad, the other good. Kisses that are easily exchanged between young people and that are not bad at first can become so later because of human frailty. But a kiss can also be good. In certain places, it is required by custom. "Our Jacob embraces his Rachel very innocently; Rachel accepts this kiss of courtesy from this man of good character and clean face."

“Oh!” concluded Francis de Sales, “give me people who have the innocence of Jacob and Rachel, and I will allow them to kiss each other.”

On the question of dancing, which was also on the agenda, the Bishop of Geneva avoided absolute commands, as did the rigorists of the time, both Catholic and Protestant, while still showing great prudence. He was even harshly reproached for writing that “dances and ballroom dancing are in themselves indifferent things.” As with certain games, they too become dangerous when one becomes so attached to them that one can no longer detach oneself from them. Dancing “must be done for recreation and not for passion; for a short time and not to the point of exhaustion and dizziness.” What is more dangerous is that these pastimes often become occasions that provoke “quarrels, envy, mockery, and love affairs.”

### **The choice of lifestyle**

When the little daughter grows up, “the day comes when it is necessary to talk to her, I mean to refer to the decisive word, the one in which one tells young women that one wants to marry them off.” A man of his time, Francis de Sales largely shared the idea that parents had an important role in determining their children’s vocation, whether to marriage or religious life. “One does not usually choose one’s prince or bishop, one’s father or mother, and often, not even one’s husband,” noted the author of *Filotea*. However, he clearly states that “daughters cannot be given in marriage as long as they say no.”

The current practice is well explained in this passage from the *Philothea*: “For a marriage to truly take place, three things are necessary with regard to the young woman who is to be given in marriage. First, that the proposal be made to her; second, that she accepts it; and third, that she consents to it.” Since girls often married at a very young age, their emotional immaturity is not surprising. “Girls who marry very young truly love their husbands, if they have them, but they never cease to love their rings, their jewellery, and



their friends with whom they have so much fun playing, dancing, and acting foolishly.”

The problem of freedom of choice arose equally for children who were destined for religious life. La Franceschetta, daughter of the Baroness of Chantal, was to be placed in a convent by her mother, who wanted her to become a nun, but the bishop intervened. “If Franceschetta willingly wants to be a nun, fine; if not, I do not approve of her will being anticipated by decisions that are not hers.” Moreover, it would not be appropriate for the reading of St. Jerome’s letters to lead the mother too much in the direction of severity and coercion. He therefore advised her to “use moderation” and to proceed with “gentle inspiration”.

Some young women hesitate between religious life and marriage, without ever making up their minds. Francis de Sales encouraged the future Mrs. de Longecombe to take the step of marriage, which he wanted to celebrate himself. He did this good work, her husband would later say, in response to his wife’s request “that she wished to marry by the hands of the bishop, and without his presence, she would never have been able to take this step, because of the great aversion she felt towards marriage.”

### **Women and ‘devotion’**

Unfamiliar with any form of feminism *ante litteram*, Francis de Sales was aware of the exceptional contribution of femininity on a spiritual level. It has been pointed out that by encouraging devotion in women, the author of *Philothea* also encouraged the possibility of greater autonomy, a “private life for women”.

It is not surprising that women have a particular disposition for ‘devotion’. After listing a number of doctors and experts, he was able to write in the preface to *Teotimo*: “But in order that it may be known that this kind of writing is better composed with the devotion of lovers than with the doctrine of the wise, the Holy Spirit has caused many women to perform wonders in this regard. Who has ever better

manifested the heavenly passions of divine love than Saint Catherine of Genoa, Saint Angela of Foligno, Saint Catherine of Siena, and Saint Matilda?" The influence of Chantal's mother in the writing of the *Teotimo* is well known, particularly in the ninth book, "your ninth book on the *Love of God*," according to the author's expression.

Could women get involved in matters concerning religion? "Here is this woman who acts as a theologian," says Francis de Sales, speaking of the Samaritan woman in the Gospel. Must we necessarily see this as disapproval of women theologians? Not necessarily. Especially since he strongly affirms, "I tell you that a simple and poor woman can love God as much as a doctor of theology." Superiority does not always reside where one thinks it does.

There are women who are superior to men, starting with the Blessed Virgin. Francis de Sales always respected the principle of order established by the religious and civil laws of his time, to which he preached obedience, but his practice testified to a great freedom of spirit. Thus, for the government of women's monasteries, he believed that it was better for them to be under the jurisdiction of the bishop rather than dependent on their religious brothers, who risked weighing excessively on them.

The Visitation Sisters, for their part, would not depend on any male order and would have no central government, each monastery being under the jurisdiction of the local bishop. He dared to give the unexpected title of 'apostles' to the sisters of the Visitation setting out on a new foundation.

If we interpret the thinking of the Bishop of Geneva correctly, the ecclesial mission of women consists in proclaiming not the word of God, but 'the glory of God' through the beauty of their witness. The heavens, prays the psalmist, tell of God's glory only by their splendour. "The beauty of the heavens and the firmament invites men to admire the greatness of the Creator and to proclaim his wonders;" and "is it not a greater wonder to see a soul adorned with many

virtues than a sky studded with stars?"

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# Joseph Augustus Arribat: Righteous Among the Nations

## 1. Biographical Profile

The Venerable Joseph Augustus Arribat was born on 17 December 1879 in Trédou (Rouergue – France). The poverty of his family forced the young Augustus to begin secondary school at the Salesian oratory in Marseilles only at the age of 18. Due to the political situation at the turn of the century, he began Salesian life in Italy and received the cassock from the hands of Blessed Michael Rua. Back in France he began, like all his confreres, Salesian life in a semi-clandestine state, first in Marseilles and then in La Navarre, founded by Don Bosco in 1878.

Ordained a priest in 1912, he was called to arms during the First World War and worked as a stretcher-bearer nurse. After the war Fr Arribat continued to work intensively at La Navarre until 1926, after which he went to Nice where he stayed until 1931. He returned to La Navarre as rector and at the same time was in charge of the parish of St Isidore in the valley of Sauvebonne. His parishioners called him “the saint of the valley”.

At the end of his third year, he was sent to Morges, in the canton of Vaud, Switzerland. He then received three successive mandates of six years each, first in Millau, then in Villemur and finally in Thonon in the diocese of Annecy. His most dangerous and grace-filled period was probably his assignment in Villemur during the Second World War. Returning to La Navarre in 1953, Fr Arribat remained there until his death on 19 March 1963.

## **2. Profoundly a man of God**

A man of daily duty, nothing was secondary for him, and everyone knew that he got up very early to clean the pupils' toilets and the courtyard. Having become rector of the Salesian house, and wanting to do his duty to the end and to perfection, out of respect and love for others, he often finished his days very late, shortening his hours of rest. On the other hand, he was always available, welcoming to all, knowing how to adapt to everyone, be it benefactors and large landowners, or house servants, maintaining a permanent concern for the novices and confreres, and especially for the young people entrusted to him.

This total gift of self manifested itself to the point of heroism. During the Second World War he did not hesitate to host Jewish families and young people, exposing himself to the grave risk of indiscretion or denunciation. Thirty-three years after his death, those who had directly witnessed his heroism recognised the value of his courage and the sacrifice of his life. His name is inscribed in Jerusalem, where he was officially recognised as a "Righteous Among the Nations".

He was recognised by everyone as a true man of God, who did "everything out of love, and nothing by constraint" as St Francis de Sales used to say. Here is the secret of his affect on people, the full extent of which he himself perhaps did not realise.

All witnesses noted the living faith of this servant of God, a man of prayer, without ostentation. His faith was the radiant faith of a man always united with God, a true man of God, and in particular a man of the Eucharist.

When celebrating Mass or when praying, a kind of fervour emanated from him that could not go unnoticed. One confrere declared that: "seeing him make his great sign of the cross, everyone felt a timely reminder of God's presence. His recollection at the altar was impressive." Another Salesian recalls that "he made his genuflections to perfection with a courage, an expression of adoration that led to devotion." The

same person said that "He strengthened my faith."

His vision of faith shone through in the confessional and in spiritual conversations. He communicated his faith. A man of hope, he relied on God and his Providence at all times, keeping calm in the storm and spreading a sense of peace everywhere.

This deep faith was further refined in him during the last ten years of his life. He no longer had any responsibilities and could no longer read easily. He lived only on the essentials and testified to this with simplicity by welcoming all those who knew well that his semi-blindness did not prevent him from seeing clearly into their hearts. At the back of the chapel, his confessional was a place besieged by young people and neighbours from the valley.

### **3. "I did not come to be served..."**

The image that witnesses have preserved of Fr Augustus is that of the servant of the Gospel, but in the most humble sense. Sweeping the courtyard, cleaning the pupils' toilets, washing the dishes, caring for and watching over the sick, spading the garden, raking the park, decorating the chapel, tying the children's shoes, combing their hair, nothing repulsed him and it was impossible to divert him from these humble exercises of charity. The "good father" Arribat, was more generous with concrete actions than with words: he willingly gave his room to the occasional visitor, who risked being less comfortably accommodated than him. His availability was permanent, of all times. His concern for cleanliness and dignified poverty did not leave him alone, because the house had to be cosy. As a man who made friends easily, he took advantage of his long trips to greet everyone and engage in conversation, even with people who hated priests.

Fr Arribat lived over thirty years at Navarre, in the house that Don Bosco himself wanted to place under the protection of St Joseph, head and servant of the Holy Family, a model of faith in hiddenness and discretion. In his solicitude for the material needs of the house and through his

closeness to all the people dedicated to manual labour, peasants, gardeners, workers, handymen, kitchen or laundry people, this priest made people think of St Joseph, whose name he also bore. And did he not die on 19 March, the feast of St Joseph?

#### **4. An authentic Salesian educator**

"Providence has entrusted me in a special way with the care of children," he said to sum up his specific vocation as a Salesian, a disciple of Don Bosco, at the service of the young, especially the most needy.

Fr Arribat had none of the particular qualities that easily impress young people outwardly. He was not a great sportsman, nor a brilliant intellectual, nor a talker who drew crowds, nor a musician, nor a man of the theatre or cinema, none of this! How to explain the influence he exerted on young people? His secret was none other than what he had learned from Don Bosco, who conquered his small world with three things considered fundamental in the education of youth: reason, religion and loving-kindness. As the "father and teacher of youth" he knew how to speak the language of reason with the young, to motivate, explain, persuade, convince his pupils, avoiding the impulses of passion and anger. He placed religion at the centre of his life and action, not in the sense of forced imposition, but in the luminous testimony of his relationship with God, Jesus and Mary. As for loving kindness, with which he won the hearts of young people, it is worth recalling about the servant of God what St Francis de Sales said: "You catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a barrel of vinegar."

Particularly authoritative is the testimony of Fr Peter Ricaldone, Don Bosco's future successor, who wrote after his canonical visit in 1923-1924: "Fr Augustus Arribat is a catechist, confessor and reads the conduct marks! He is a holy confrere. Only his kindness can make his various duties less incompatible'. Then he repeats his praise: "He is an excellent confrere, not too healthy. Because of his good manners he

enjoys the confidence of the older young men who almost all go to him.”.

One thing that was striking was the almost ceremonious respect he showed to everyone, but especially to the children. He would call a little eight-year-old “Monsieur”. One lady testified: “He respected the other so much that the other was almost forced to elevate himself to the dignity that was bestowed on him as a child of God, and all this without even talking about religion.”

Open-faced and smiling, this son of St Francis de Sales and Don Bosco bothered no one. While his thin body and asceticism recalled the holy curé of Ars and Fr Rua, his smile and gentleness were typically Salesian. As one witness put it: “He was the most natural man in the world, full of humour, spontaneous in his reactions, young at heart.”

His words, which were not those of a great orator, were effective because they emanated from the simplicity and fervour of his soul.

One of his former students testified: “In our children’s heads, in our childhood conversations, after hearing the stories of the life of John Mary Vianney, we used to think of Fr Arribat as if he were the Holy Curé of Ars to us. The hours of catechism, presented in simple but true language, were followed with great attention. During Mass, the pews at the back of the chapel were always full. We had the impression that we were meeting God in his goodness and this marked our youth.”

## **5. Fr Arribat an ecologist?**

Here is an original trait to complete the picture of this seemingly ordinary figure. He was regarded almost as an ecologist before this term was widespread. A small farmer, he had learnt to deeply love and respect nature. His youthful compositions are full of freshness and very fine observations, with a touch of poetry. He spontaneously shared the work of this rural world, where he lived much of his long life.

Speaking of his love for animals, how many times

was he seen as “the good father, with a box under his arm, full of breadcrumbs, laboriously making the path from the refectory to his doves with very painful little steps.” An incredible fact for those who did not see it, says the person who witnessed the scene, were the doves – as soon as they saw him, they came forward as if to welcome him. He opened the cage and immediately they came to him, some of them standing on his shoulders. “He spoke to them with words I cannot remember, but it was as if he knew them all. When a young boy brought him a baby sparrow that he had taken from the nest, he told him: “You must give it freedom”. A story is also told of a rather ferocious wolfhound which only he was able to tame, and which came to lie next to his coffin after his death.

Fr Augustus Arribat’s brief spiritual profile has shown us some of the spiritual features of the faces of saints he felt close to: the loving kindness of Don Bosco, the asceticism of Fr Rua, the gentleness of St Francis de Sales, the priestly piety of the holy curé of Ars, the love of nature of St Francis of Assisi and the constant and faithful work of St Joseph.

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## **Venerable      Ottavio      Ortiz Arrieta Coya, Bishop**

*Octavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya, born in Lima, Peru, on 19 April 1878, was the first Peruvian Salesian. As a young man, he trained as a carpenter, but the Lord called him to a higher mission. He made his first Salesian profession on 29 January 1900 and was ordained a priest in 1908. In 1922, he was consecrated bishop of the diocese of Chachapoyas, a role he held with dedication until his death on 1 March 1958. Twice he refused appointment to the more prestigious see of Lima,*



*preferring to remain close to his people. A tireless shepherd, he travelled throughout the diocese to personally know the faithful and promoted numerous pastoral initiatives for evangelisation. On 12 November 1990, under the pontificate of St John Paul II, his cause for canonisation was opened, and he was granted the title of Servant of God. On 27 February 2017, Pope Francis recognised his heroic virtues, declaring him Venerable.*

The Venerable Bishop Ottavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya spent the first part of his life as an Oratory boy, a student and then became a Salesian himself, engaged in the works of the Sons of Don Bosco in Peru. He was the first Salesian formed in the first Salesian house in Peru, founded in Rimac, a poor neighbourhood, where he learned to live an austere life of sacrifice. Among the first Salesians to arrive in Peru in 1891, he got to know the spirit of Don Bosco and the Preventive System. As a Salesian of the first generation he learnt that service and the gift of self would be the horizon of his life; that is why as a young Salesian he took on important responsibilities, such as opening new works and directing others, with simplicity, sacrifice and total dedication to the poor.

He lived the second part of his life, from the beginning of the 1920s, as bishop of Chachapoyas, an immense diocese, vacant for years, where the prohibitive conditions of the territory added up to a certain closure, especially in the most remote villages. Here the field and the challenges of the apostolate were immense. Ortiz Arrieta was of a lively temperament, accustomed to community life; moreover, he was delicate of spirit, to the point of being called “pecadito” in his younger years, for his exactitude in detecting shortcomings and helping himself and others to amend themselves. He also possessed an innate sense of rigour and moral duty. The conditions under which he had to carry out his episcopal ministry, however, were diametrically opposed to him: loneliness and the substantial impossibility of sharing a

Salesian and priestly life, despite repeated and almost pleading requests to his own Congregation; the need to reconcile his own moral rigour with an increasingly docile and almost disarmed firmness; a fine moral conscience continually put to the test by coarseness of choices and lukewarmness in following, on the part of some collaborators less heroic than himself, and of a people of God that knew how to oppose the bishop when his word became a denunciation of injustice and a diagnosis of spiritual evils. The Venerable's path towards the fullness of holiness, in the exercise of the virtues, was therefore marked by hardships, difficulties and the continual need to convert his gaze and heart, under the action of the Spirit.

While we certainly find episodes in his life that can be defined as heroic in the strict sense, we must also, and perhaps above all, highlight those moments in his virtuous journey when he could have acted differently, but did not; giving in to human despair, while renewing hope; being content with great charity, but not fully willing to exercise that heroic charity that he practised with exemplary fidelity for several decades. When, twice, he was offered a change of See, and in the second case he was offered the primatial See of Lima, he decided to remain among his poor, those whom no one wanted, truly on the periphery of the world, remaining in the diocese he had always espoused and loved as it was, committing himself wholeheartedly to making it even a little better. He was a 'modern' pastor in his style of presence and in his use of means of action such as associationism and the press. A man of decisive temperament and firm convictions of faith, Bishop Ortiz Arrieta certainly made use of this "don de gobierno" (gift of leadership) in his leadership, always combined, however, with respect and charity, expressed with extraordinary consistency.

Although he lived before the Second Vatican Council, the way in which he planned and carried out the pastoral tasks entrusted to him is still relevant today: from the pastoral care of vocations to the concrete support of his

seminarians and priests; from the catechetical and human formation of the youngest to the pastoral care of families through which he met married couples in crisis or cohabiting couples reluctant to regularise their union. Bishop Ortiz Arrieta, on the other hand, did not only educate by his concrete pastoral action, but by his very behaviour: by his ability to discern for himself, first of all, what it means and what it entails to renew fidelity to the path taken. He truly persevered in heroic poverty, in fortitude through the many trials of life, and in radical fidelity to the diocese to which he had been assigned. Humble, simple, always serene; between the serious and the gentle; the gentleness of his gaze let all the tranquillity of his spirit shine through: this was the path of holiness he travelled.

The beautiful characteristics that his Salesian superiors found in him before his ordination to the priesthood – when they described him as a ‘Salesian pearl’ and praised his spirit of sacrifice – returned as a constant throughout his life, including as a bishop. Indeed, Ortiz Arrieta can be said to have “made himself all things to all people, in order to save someone at any cost” (1 Cor 9:22): authoritative with the authorities, simple with children, poor among the poor; meek with those who insulted him or tried to delegitimise him out of resentment; always ready not to return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good (cf. Rom 12:21). His whole life was dominated by the primacy of the salvation of souls: a salvation to which he would also like to actively dedicate his priests, whose temptation to retreat into easy security or entrench themselves behind more prestigious positions, to commit them instead to pastoral service, he tried to fight. He can truly be said to have placed himself in that “high” measure of Christian life which makes him a pastor who embodied pastoral charity in an original way, seeking communion among the people of God, reaching out to those most in need and witnessing a poor evangelical life.

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# Beatification of Camille Costa de Beauregard. And afterwards...?

*The diocese of Savoy and the city of Chambéry experienced three historic days on 16, 17, and 18 May 2025. An account of the events and future prospects.*

The relics of Camille Costa de Beauregard were transferred from Bocage to the Church of Notre-Dame (the site of Camille's baptism) on Friday, 16 May. A magnificent procession then wound through the city streets from 8 pm onwards. After the Alpine horns, bagpipes took over to lead the march, followed by a flower-decked carriage carrying a giant portrait of the "father of orphans." Next came the relics, borne on a stretcher by young students from Bocage secondary school, dressed in splendid red sweaters emblazoned with Camille's words: "*The higher the mountain, the further we see.*" Several hundred people of all ages followed in a cheerful, family-friendly atmosphere. Along the route, respectful onlookers paused in awe at this unusual parade.

Upon arrival at Notre-Dame, a priest led a prayer vigil accompanied by hymns from a beautiful youth choir. The ceremony unfolded in a relaxed yet solemn atmosphere. At the vigil's close, everyone filed past to venerate the relics and entrust personal intentions to Camille. A truly moving moment!

Saturday, 17 May. The big day! Since Pauline Marie Jaricot (beatified in May 2022), France had not welcomed a new "Blessed." Thus, the entire Apostolic Region was represented by its bishops: Lyon, Annecy, Saint-Étienne, Valence, etc.

They were joined by two former archbishops of Chambéry: Monsignor Laurent Ulrich, now Archbishop of Paris, and Monsignor Philippe Ballot, Bishop of Metz. Two bishops from Burkina Faso had travelled to attend the celebration. Numerous diocesan priests came to concelebrate, along with several religious figures, including seven Salesians of Don Bosco. The Apostolic Nuncio to France, Monsignor Celestino Migliore, was tasked with representing Cardinal Semeraro (Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints), detained in Rome for the enthronement of Pope Leo XIV. Needless to say, the cathedral was packed, as were the side chapels, forecourt, and Bocage—over 3,000 people in total.

What emotion when, after the reading of the papal decree (signed just the day before by Pope Leo XIV) by Father Pierluigi Cameroni, postulator of the cause, Camille's portrait was unveiled in the cathedral! What fervour filled that great nave! What solemnity, upheld by the hymns of a magnificent inter-diocesan choir and the grand organ, masterfully played by Thibaut Duré! In short, a majestic ceremony for this humble priest who devoted his entire life to serving the least among us!

Coverage was provided by RCF Savoie (a French regional radio station part of the RCF network, Radios Chrésiennes Francophones), with interviews of key figures involved in Camille's cause, and by KTO (the French-language Catholic TV channel), which broadcast the glorious celebration live.

A third day, Sunday 18 May, crowned the festivities. Held at Bocage under a large marquee, it featured a thanksgiving Mass presided over by Monsignor Thibault Verny, Archbishop of Chambéry, flanked by the two African bishops, the Salesian Provincial, and several priests—including Father Jean François Chiron (13-year president of the Camille Committee founded by Monsignor Philippe Ballot), who delivered a remarkable homily. A considerable crowd gathered to pray and

participate. After Mass, a “Camille Costa de Beauregard, Founder of Bocage” rose—selected by alumni and offered to dignitaries—was blessed by Father Daniel Féderspiel, Provincial of the Salesians of France (now available for purchase at Bocage’s greenhouses).

After the ceremony, Alpine horns performed a concert until Pope Leo, during his *Regina Coeli* discourse, declared his joy at the first beatification of his pontificate: Chambéry’s priest, Camille Costa de Beauregard. Thunderous applause erupted under the marquee!

That afternoon, various youth groups from Bocage—secondary school pupils, children’s home residents, and scouts—took turns on stage to enliven the festivities. What a celebration!

And now? Is it all over? Or is there more to come?

Camille’s beatification is just one step toward canonisation. The work continues, and you are invited to contribute. What remains to be done? Spread awareness of the new Blessed through every means, for many must pray for his intercession to obtain another miracle unexplained by science, which would allow the consideration of a new process and a rapid canonisation. Camille’s holiness would then be proclaimed to the world. It’s possible; we must believe! Let’s not stop halfway!

Resources of various kinds include:

- the book “Blessed Camille Costa de Beauregard: Nobility of Heart” by Françoise Bouchard (Éditions Salvator);
- the book “Praying Fifteen Days with Camille Costa de Beauregard” by Father Paul Ripaud (Éditions Nouvelle Cité);
- the comic book: “Blessed Camille Costa de Beauregard” by Gaëtan Evrard (Éditions Triomphe);
- Videos on the “Amis de Costa” website and the beatification footage;

– Visits to memorial sites at Bocage in Chambéry, are possible by contacting either the Bocage welcome desk or directly, Mr. Gabriel Tardy, Director of *La Maison des Enfants*).

To everyone, thank you for supporting Blessed Camille's cause—he deserves it!

*Fr. Paul Ripaud, SDB*

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## **Educating the Human Heart with Saint Francis de Sales**

*St. Francis de Sales places the heart at the centre of human formation, as the seat of will, love, and freedom. Drawing from the biblical tradition and engaging with the philosophy and science of his time, the Bishop of Geneva identifies the will as the “master faculty” capable of governing passions and senses, while affections—especially love—fuel its inner dynamism. Salesian education therefore aims to transform desires, choices, and resolutions into a path of self-mastery, where gentleness and firmness come together to guide the whole person toward the good.*

At the centre and pinnacle of the human person, Saint Francis de Sales places the heart, to the point that he says: “Whoever conquers the heart of a man conquers the whole man.” In Salesian anthropology, one cannot help but notice the abundant use of the term and concept of the *heart*. This is even more surprising because among the humanists of the time, steeped in languages and thoughts drawn from antiquity, there does not seem to be a particular emphasis on this symbol.

On one hand, this phenomenon can be explained by the common,

universal use of the noun "*heart*" to designate the inner self of a person, especially in reference to their sensitivity. On the other hand, Francis de Sales owes much to the biblical tradition, which considers the heart as the seat of the highest faculties of man, such as love, will, and intelligence.

To these considerations, one might perhaps add contemporary anatomical research concerning the *heart* and blood circulation. What is important for us is to clarify the meaning that Francis de Sales attributed to the heart, starting from his vision of the human person whose centre and apex are will, love, and freedom.

### **The Will, the Master Faculty**

Alongside the faculties of the spirit, such as intellect and memory, we remain within the realm of knowing. Now it is time to delve into that of acting. As Saint Augustine and certain philosophers like Duns Scotus had already done, Francis de Sales assigns the first place to the will, probably under the influence of his Jesuit teachers. It is the will that must govern all the "powers" of the soul.

It is significant that the *Teotimo* begins with the chapter titled: "How, because of the beauty of human nature, God gave the will the governance of all the faculties of the soul." Quoting Saint Thomas, Francis de Sales affirms that man has "full power over every kind of accident and event" and that "the wise man, that is, the man who follows reason, will become the absolute master of the stars." Along with intellect and memory, the will is "the third soldier of our spirit and the strongest of all, because nothing can overpower the free will of man; even God who created it does not want to force or violate it in any way."

However, the will exercises its authority in very different ways, and the obedience due to it is considerably variable. Thus, some of our limbs, not hindered from moving, obey the will without problem. We open and close our mouths, move our tongues, hands, feet, eyes at our pleasure and as much as we



want. The will exerts power over the functioning of the five senses, but it is an indirect power: to not see with the eyes, I must turn them away or close them; to practice abstinence, I must command the hands not to bring food to the mouth.

The will can and must dominate the sensitive appetite with its twelve passions. Although it tends to behave like “a rebellious, seditious, restless subject,” the will can and must sometimes dominate it, even at the cost of a long struggle. The will also has power over the higher faculties of the spirit, memory, intellect, and imagination, because it is the will that decides to apply the spirit to this or that object and to divert it from this or that thought; but it cannot regulate and make them obey without difficulty, since the imagination is extremely “changeable and fickle.”

But how does the will function? The answer is relatively easy if one refers to the Salesian model of meditation or mental prayer, with its three parts: “considerations,” “affections,” and “resolutions.” The first consist of reflecting and meditating on a good, a truth, a value. Such reflection normally produces affections, that is, strong desires to acquire and possess that good or value, and these affections are capable of “moving the will.” Finally, the will, once “moved,” produces the “resolutions.”

### **The “affections” that move the will**

The will, being considered by Francis de Sales as an “appetite,” is an “affective faculty.” But it is a rational appetite, not a sensitive or sensual one. The appetite produces motions, and while those of the sensitive appetite are ordinarily called “passions,” those of the will are called “affections,” as they “*press*” or “*move*” the will. The author of the *Teotimo* also calls the former “passions of the body” and the latter “affections of the heart.” Moving from the sensitive realm to the rational one, the twelve passions of the soul transform into reasonable affections.

In the different meditation models proposed in

the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, the author invites Filotea, through a series of vivid and meaningful expressions, to cultivate all forms of voluntary affections: love of the good ("turn one's heart toward," "become attached," "embrace," "cling," "join," "unite"); *hatred* of evil ("detest," "break every bond," "trample"); *desire* ("aspire," "implore," "invoke," "beg"); *flight* ("despise," "separate," "distance," "remove," "abjure"); *hope* ("come on then! Oh my heart!"); *despair* ("oh! my unworthiness is great!"); *joy* ("rejoice," "take pleasure"); *sadness* ("grieve," "be confused," "lower oneself," "humble oneself"); *anger* ("reproach," "push away," "root out"); *fear* ("tremble," "frighten the soul"); *courage* ("encourage," "strengthen"); and finally *triumph* ("exalt," "glorify").

The Stoics, deniers of the passions—but wrongly—admitted the existence of these reasonable affections, which they called "*eupathies*" or good passions. They affirmed "that the wise man did not lust, but willed; that he did not feel joy, but gladness; that he was not subject to fear, but was prudent and cautious; therefore, he was driven only by reason and according to reason."

Recognizing the role of affections in the decision-making process seems indispensable. It is significant that the meditation intended to culminate in resolutions reserves a central role for them. In certain cases, explains the author of the *Filotea*, one can almost omit or shorten the considerations, but the affections must never be missing because they are what motivate the resolutions. When a good affection arises, he wrote, "one must let it run free and not insist on following the method I have indicated," because considerations are made only to excite the affection.

### **Love, the First and Principal "Affection"**

For Saint Francis de Sales, love always appears first both in the list of passions and in that of affections. What is love? Jean-Pierre Camus asked his friend, the bishop

of Geneva, who replied: "Love is the first passion of our sensitive appetite and the first affection of the rational one, which is the will; since our will is nothing other than the love of good, and love is willing the good."

Love governs the other affections and enters the heart first: "Sadness, fear, hope, hatred, and the other affections of the soul do not enter the heart unless love drags them along." Following Saint Augustine, for whom "to live is to love," the author of the *Teotimo* explains that the other eleven affections that populate the human heart depend on love: "Love is the life of our heart [...]. All our affections follow our love, and according to it *we desire, delight, hope and despair, fear, encourage ourselves, hate, flee, grieve, get angry, feel triumphant.*"

Curiously, the will has primarily a passive dimension, while love is the active power that moves and stirs. The will does not decide unless it is moved by a predominant stimulus: love. Taking the example of iron attracted by a magnet, one must say that the will is the iron and love the magnet.

To illustrate the dynamism of love, the author of the *Teotimo* also uses the image of a tree. With botanical precision, he analyses the "five main parts" of love, which is "like a beautiful tree, whose root is the suitability of the will with the good, the stump is pleasure, the trunk is tension, the branches are the searches, attempts, and other efforts, but only the fruit is union and enjoyment."

Love imposes itself even on the will. Such is the power of love that, for the one who loves, nothing is difficult, "for love nothing is impossible." Love is as strong as death, repeats Francis de Sales with the *Song of Songs*; or rather, love is stronger than death. Upon reflection, man is worth only for love, and all human powers and faculties, especially the will, tend toward it: "God wants man only for the soul, and the soul only for the will, and the will only for love."

To explain his thought, the author of the *Teotimo* resorts to

the image of the relationship between man and woman, as it was codified and lived in his time. The young woman, from among the suitors can choose the one she likes best. But after marriage, she loses her freedom and, from mistress, becomes subject to the authority of her husband, remaining bound to the one she herself chose. Thus, the will, which has the choice of love, after embracing one, remains subject to it.

### **The struggle of the will for inner freedom**

To will is to choose. As long as one is a child, one is still entirely dependent and incapable of choosing, but as one grows up, things soon change and choices become unavoidable. Children are neither good nor bad because they are not able to choose between good and evil. During childhood, they walk like those leaving a city and for a while go straight ahead; but after a while, they discover that the road splits in two directions; it is up to them to choose the right or left path at will, to go where they want.

Usually, choices are difficult because they require giving up one good for another. Typically, the choice must be made between what one feels and what one wants, because there is a great difference between feeling and consenting. The young man tempted by a "loose woman," as Saint Jerome speaks of, had his imagination "exceedingly occupied by such a voluptuous presence," but he overcame the trial with a pure act of superior will. The will, besieged on all sides and pushed to give its consent, resisted sensual passion.

Choice also arises in the face of other passions and affections: "Trample underfoot your sensations, distrusts, fears, aversions," advises Francis de Sales to someone he guided, asking them to side with "inspiration and reason against instinct and aversion." Love uses the strength of the will to govern all faculties and all passions. It will be an "armed love," and such armed love will subdue our passions. This free will "resides in the highest and most spiritual part of the soul" and "depends on nothing but God and oneself; and when all other faculties of the soul are lost and subjected to

the enemy, only it remains master of itself so as not to consent in any way.”

However, choice is not only about the goal to be reached but also about the intention that governs the action. This is an aspect to which Francis de Sales is particularly sensitive because it touches on the quality of acting. Indeed, the pursued end gives meaning to the action. One can decide to perform an act for many reasons. Unlike animals, “man is so master of his human and reasonable actions as to perform them all for an end”; he can even change the natural end of an action by adding a secondary end, “as when, besides the intention to help the poor to whom alms are given, he adds the intention to oblige the indigent to do the same.” Among pagans, intentions were rarely disinterested, and in us, intentions can be tainted “by pride, vanity, temporal interest, or some other bad motive.” Sometimes “we pretend to want to be last and sit at the end of the table, but to pass with more honour to the head of the table.”

“Let us then purify, Teotimo, while we can, all our intentions,” asks the author of the *Treatise on the Love of God*. Good intention “animates” the smallest actions and simple daily gestures. Indeed, “we reach perfection not by doing many things, but by doing them with a pure and perfect intention.” One must not lose heart because “one can always correct one’s intention, purify it, and improve it.”

### **The fruit of the will is “resolutions”**

After highlighting the passive character of the will, whose first property consists in being drawn toward the good presented by reason, it is appropriate to show its active aspect. Saint Francis de Sales attaches great importance to the distinction between affective will and effective will, as well as between affective love and effective love. Affective love resembles a father’s love for the younger son, “a little charming child still a baby, very gentle,” while the love shown to the elder son, “a grown man now, a good and noble soldier,” is of another kind. “The latter is loved with

effective love, while the little one is loved with affective love."

Similarly, speaking of the "steadfastness of the will," the bishop of Geneva states that one cannot be content with "sensible steadfastness"; an "effective steadfastness" located in the higher part of the spirit is necessary. The time comes when one must no longer "speculate with reasoning," but "harden the will." "Whether our soul is sad or joyful, overwhelmed by sweetness or bitterness, at peace or disturbed, bright or dark, tempted or calm, full of pleasure or disgust, immersed in dryness or tenderness, burned by the sun or refreshed by dew," it does not matter; a strong will is not easily diverted from its purposes. "Let us remain firm in our purposes, inflexible in our resolutions," asks the author of *Filotea*. It is the master faculty on which the value of the person depends: "The whole world is worth less than one soul, and a soul is worth nothing without our good purposes."

The noun "resolution" indicates a decision reached at the end of a process involving reasoning with its capacity to discern and the heart, understood as an affectivity moved by an attractive good. In the "authentic declaration" that the author of *Introduction to the Devout Life* invites *Filotea* to pronounce, it reads: "This is my will, my intention, and my decision, inviolable and irrevocable, a will that I confess and confirm without reservations or exceptions." A meditation that does not lead to concrete acts would be useless.

In the ten *Meditations* proposed as a model in the first part of *Filotea*, we find frequent expressions such as: "I want," "I no longer want," "yes, I will follow inspirations and advice," "I will do everything possible," "I want to do this or that," "I will make this or that effort," "I will do this or that thing," "I choose," "I want to take part," or "I want to take the required care."

The will of Francis de Sales often assumes a passive aspect; here, however, it reveals all its extremely active dynamism. It is therefore not without reason that one has spoken of Salesian voluntarism.

## **Francis de Sales, educator of the human heart**

Francis de Sales has been considered an “admirable educator of the will.” To say he was an admirable educator of the human heart means roughly the same thing but with the addition of an affective nuance, characteristic of the Salesian conception of the heart. As we have seen, he neglected no component of the human being: the body with its senses, the soul with its passions, the spirit with its faculties, particularly intellectual. But what matters most to him is the human heart, about which he wrote to a correspondent: “It is therefore necessary to cultivate with great care this beloved heart and spare nothing that can be useful to its happiness.”

Now, the human heart is “restless,” according to Saint Augustine’s saying, because it is full of unfulfilled desires. It seems never to have “rest or tranquillity.” Francis de Sales then proposes an education of desires as well. A. Ravier also spoke of a “discernment or a politics of desire.” Indeed, the main enemy of the will “is the quantity of desires we have for this or that thing. In short, our will is so full of demands and projects that very often it does nothing but waste time considering them one after another or even all together, instead of getting to work to realize the most useful one.”

A good teacher knows that to lead his pupil toward the proposed goal, whether knowledge or virtue, it is essential to present a project that mobilizes his energies. Francis de Sales proves to be a master in the art of motivation, as he teaches his “daughter,” Jeanne de Chantal, one of his favourite maxims: “One must do everything for love and nothing by force.” In the *Teotimo*, he states that “joy opens the heart as sadness closes it.” Love is indeed the life of the heart. However, strength must not be lacking. To the young man about to “set sail on the vast sea of the world,” the bishop of Geneva advised “a vigorous heart” and “a noble heart,” capable of governing desires. Francis de Sales wants a sweet and peaceful heart, pure, indifferent, a “heart stripped of affections” incompatible with the vocation, a “right” heart,

“relaxed and without any constraint.” He does not like the “tenderness of heart” that amounts to self-seeking and instead requires “firmness of heart” in action. “To a strong heart, nothing is impossible,” he writes to a lady, encouraging her not to abandon “the course of holy resolutions.” He wants a “manly heart” and at the same time a heart “docile, malleable, and submissive, yielding to all that is permitted and ready to take on every commitment out of obedience and charity”; a “sweet heart toward others and humble before God,” “nobly proud” and “perpetually humble,” “sweet and peaceful.”

Ultimately, the education of the will aims at full self-mastery, which Francis de Sales expresses through an image: to take the heart in hand, to possess the heart or soul. “The great joy of man, *Filotea*, is to possess his own soul; and the more patience becomes perfect, the more perfectly we possess our soul.” This does not mean insensitivity, absence of passions or affections, but rather a striving for self-mastery. It is a path directed toward self-autonomy, guaranteed by the supremacy of the will, free and reasonable, but an autonomy governed by sovereign love.

*Photo: Portrait of Saint Francis de Sales in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome. Oil painting by Roman artist Attilio Palombi, donated by Cardinal Lucido Maria Parocchi.*

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## **The Venerable Father Carlo Crespi “witness and pilgrim**



# of hope”

*ather Carlo Crespi, a Salesian missionary in Ecuador, lived his life dedicated to faith and hope. In recent years, in the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians, he consoled the faithful, instilling optimism even in times of crisis. His exemplary practice of the theological virtues, highlighted by the testimony of those who knew him, was also expressed in his commitment to education. By founding schools and institutes, he offered young people new perspectives. His example of resilience and dedication continues to illuminate the spiritual and human path of the community. His legacy endures and inspires generations of believers.*

In the last years of his life, Father Carlo Crespi (Legnano, May 29, 1891 – Cuenca, April 30, 1982), a Salesian missionary in Ecuador, having gradually put aside the academic aspirations of his youth, surrounded himself with essentiality, and his spiritual growth appeared unstoppable. He was seen in the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians spreading devotion to the Virgin, confessing and advising endless lines of faithful, for whom schedules, meals, and even sleep no longer matter. Just as he had done in an exemplary manner throughout his life, he kept his gaze fixed on eternal goods, which now appeared closer than ever.

He had that eschatological hope that is linked to the expectations of man in life and beyond death, significantly influencing his worldview and daily behaviour. According to Saint Paul, hope is an indispensable ingredient for a life that is given, that grows by collaborating with others and developing one's freedom. The future thus becomes a collective task that makes us grow as people. His presence invites us to look to the future with a sense of confidence, resourcefulness, and connection with others.

This was the hope of the Venerable Father Crespi! A great virtue that, like the arms of a yoke, supports faith

and charity: like the transverse arm of the Cross. It is a throne of salvation. It is the support of the healing serpent raised by Moses in the desert; a bridge of the soul to take flight in the light.

The uncommon level reached by Father Crespi in the practice of all the virtues was highlighted, in a concordant manner, by the witnesses heard during the Diocesan Inquiry for the Cause of Beatification, but it also emerges from the careful analysis of the documents and the biographical events regarding Father Carlo Crespi. The exercise of Christian virtues on his part was, according to those who knew him, not only extraordinary, but also constant throughout his long life. People followed him faithfully because in his daily life the exercise of the theological virtues shone through almost naturally, among which hope stood out in a particular way in the many moments of difficulty. He sowed hope in the hearts of people and lived this virtue to the highest degree.

When the "Cornelio Merchan" school was destroyed in a fire, to the people who rushed in tears before the smoking ruins, he, also weeping, manifested a constant and uncommon hope, encouraging everyone: *"Pachilla is no more, but we will build a better one and the children will be happier and more content."* From his lips never came a word of bitterness or sorrow for what had been lost.

At the school of Don Bosco and Mamma Margherita, he lived and witnessed hope in fullness because, trusting in the Lord and hoping in Divine Providence, he carried out great works and services without a budget, even if he never lacked money. He had no time to agitate or despair, his positive attitude gave confidence and hope to others.

Fr. Carlo was often described as a man with a heart rich in optimism and hope in the face of the great sufferings of life, because he was inclined to relativise human events, even the most difficult ones. In the midst of his people, he was a witness and pilgrim of hope in the journey of life!

In order to understand how and in what areas of

the Venerable's life the virtue of hope found concrete expression, the account that Father Carlo Crespi himself makes in a letter sent from Cuenca in 1925 to the Rector Major Fr. Filippo Rinaldi is also quite edifying. In it, accepting his insistent request, he relates an episode he experienced firsthand, when, in consoling a Kivaro woman for the premature loss of her son, he announces the good news of life without end. *"Moved to tears, I approached the venerable daughter of the forest with her hair loose in the wind: I assured her that her son had died well, that before dying he had only the name of his distant mother on his lips, and that he had been buried in a specially made coffin, his soul certainly having been gathered by the great God in Paradise [...]. I was therefore able to exchange some words calmly, casting into that broken heart the sweet balm of faith and Christian hope."*

Practicing the virtue of hope grew parallel to the practice of the other Christian virtues, encouraging them: he was a man rich in faith, hope, and charity.

When the socio-economic situation in Cuenca in the 20th century worsened considerably, creating significant repercussions on the lives of the population, he had the intuition to understand that by forming young people from a human, cultural, and spiritual point of view, he would sow in them the hope for a better life and future, helping to change the fate of the entire society.

Father Crespi, therefore, undertook numerous initiatives in favour of the youth of Cuenca, starting first of all with school education. The Salesian Popular School "Cornelio Merchán"; the Normal Orientalist College for Salesian teachers; the founding of schools of arts and crafts – which later became the *"Técnico Salesiano"* and the Higher Technological Institute, culminating in the Salesian Polytechnic University – confirm the desire of the Servant of God to offer the Cuenca population better and more numerous prospects for spiritual, human, and professional growth. The young and the poor, considered first of all as children of God destined for eternal beatitude, were therefore reached by

Father Crespi through a human and social promotion capable of flowing into a broader dynamic, that of salvation.

All this was carried out by him with few economic means, but abundant hope in the future of young people. He worked actively without losing sight of the ultimate goal of his mission: to attain eternal life. It is precisely in this sense that Father Carlo Crespi understood the theological virtue of hope, and it is through this perspective that his entire priesthood was based.

The reaffirmation of eternal life was undoubtedly one of the central themes addressed in the writings of Father Carlo Crespi. This fact allows us to grasp the evident importance he assigned to the virtue of hope. This fact clearly shows how the practice of this virtue constantly permeated the earthly path of the Servant of God.

Not even illness could extinguish the inexhaustible hope that always animated Father Crespi.

Shortly before ending his earthly existence, Fr. Carlo asked that a Crucifix be placed in his hands. His death occurred on April 30, 1982, at 5:30 p.m. in the Santa Inés Clinic in Cuenca due to bronchopneumonia and a heart attack.

The personal physician of the Venerable Servant of God, who for 25 years and until his death, was a direct witness to the serenity and awareness with which Father Crespi, who had always lived with his gaze turned to Heaven, lived the long-awaited encounter with Jesus.

In the process he testified: *"For me, a special sign is precisely that attitude of having communicated with us in a simply human act, laughing and joking and, when – I say – he saw that the doors of eternity were open and perhaps the Virgin was waiting for him, he silenced us and made us all pray."*

Carlo Riganti

President of the Carlo Crespi Association

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# The Evangelical Radicality of Blessed Stefano Sándor

*Stefano Sándor (Szolnok 1914 – Budapest 1953) was a Salesian coadjutor martyr. A cheerful and devout young man, he studied metallurgy before joining the Salesians, becoming a master printer and mentor to boys. He enlivened youth centres, founded Catholic Workers' Youth, and transformed trenches and construction sites into "festive oratories". When the communist regime confiscated Church institutions, he continued educating and saving young people and machinery in secret. Arrested, he was hanged on 8 June 1953. Rooted in the Eucharist and devotion to Mary, he embodied the Gospel radicalism of Don Bosco through educational dedication, courage, and unshakable faith. Beatified by Pope Francis in 2013, he remains a model of Salesian lay holiness.*

## 1. Biographical Notes

Sándor Stefano was born in Szolnok, Hungary, on 26 October 1914, to Stefano and Maria Fekete, the first of three brothers. His father was an employee of the State Railways, while his mother was a housewife. Both instilled a deep religiosity in their children. Stefano studied in his hometown, obtaining a diploma as a metallurgical technician. From a young age, he was respected by his peers; he was cheerful, serious, and kind. He helped his younger siblings study and pray, setting an example himself. He fervently received Confirmation, committing to imitate his patron saint and Saint Peter. He served daily Mass with the Franciscan Fathers, receiving the Eucharist.

While reading the *Salesian Bulletin*, he learned

about Don Bosco. He felt immediately drawn to the Salesian charism. He discussed it with his spiritual director, expressing his desire to enter the Salesian Congregation. He also spoke to his parents about it. They denied him consent and tried in every way to dissuade him. But Stefano managed to convince them, and in 1936 he was accepted at the *Clarisseum*, the Salesians' headquarters in Budapest, where he spent two years in the Aspirantate. He attended printing courses at "Don Bosco" printing house. He began the novitiate but had to interrupt it due to being called to arms.

In 1939, he obtained his final discharge and, after a year of novitiate, made his first Profession on 8 September 1940, as a Salesian Coadjutor. Assigned to the *Clarisseum*, he actively engaged in teaching in vocational courses. He was also responsible for assisting at the oratory, which he led with enthusiasm and competence. He was the promoter of the Catholic Youth Workers. His group was recognized as the best in the movement. Following Don Bosco's example, he proved to be a model educator. In 1942, he was called back to the front and earned a silver medal for military valor. The trench was for him a festive oratory that he animated in a Salesian manner, encouraging his fellow soldiers. At the end of World War II, he committed himself to the material and moral reconstruction of society, dedicating himself particularly to the poorest youth, gathering them to teach them a trade. On July 24, 1946, he made his perpetual profession. In 1948, he obtained the title of master-printer. At the end of his studies, Stefano's students were hired in the best printing houses in Budapest and Hungary.

When the State, under Mátyás Rákosi, confiscated ecclesiastical property in 1949 and began persecuting Catholic schools, which had to close their doors, Sándor tried to save what could be saved, at least some printing machines and some of the furnishings that had cost so many sacrifices. Suddenly, the religious found themselves with nothing; everything had become State property. Rákosi's Stalinism continued to rage;

the religious were dispersed. Without a home, work, or community, many became clandestine. They adapted to do anything: street cleaners, farmers, laborers, porters, servants... Even Stefano had to "disappear," leaving his printing house, which had become famous. Instead of seeking refuge abroad, he remained in his homeland to save Hungarian youth. Caught in the act (he was trying to save some printing machines), he had to flee quickly and remain hidden for several months. Then, under another name, he managed to get hired in a detergent factory in the capital, but he continued his apostolate fearlessly and clandestinely, knowing it was strictly prohibited. In July 1952, he was captured at his workplace and was never seen again by his confreres. An official document certifies his trial and death sentence, carried out by hanging on June 8, 1953.

The diocesan phase of the Cause of Martyrdom began in Budapest on May 24, 2006, and concluded on December 8, 2007. On March 27, 2013, Pope Francis authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the Decree of Martyrdom and to celebrate the Beatification rite, which took place on Saturday, October 19, 2013, in Budapest.

## **2. Original Testimony of Salesian Holiness**

The brief notes on Sándor's biography have introduced us to the heart of his spiritual journey. Contemplating the features that the Salesian vocation has taken in him, marked by the action of the Spirit and now proposed by the Church, we discover some traits of that holiness: the deep sense of God and the full and serene availability to His will; the attraction to Don Bosco and the cordial belonging to the Salesian community; the encouraging and animating presence among the youth; the family spirit; the spiritual and prayer life cultivated personally and shared with the community; the total dedication to the Salesian mission lived in service to apprentices and young workers, to the boys of the oratory, and to the animation of youth groups. It is an active presence in the educative and social world,

all animated by the charity of Christ that drives him from within!

There were also gestures that were heroic and unusual, culminating in the supreme act of giving his life for the salvation of Hungarian youth. "A young man wanted to jump onto the tram that was passing in front of the Salesian house. Misjudging his move, he fell under the vehicle. The carriage stopped too late; a wheel deeply injured his thigh. A large crowd gathered to watch the scene without intervening, while the poor unfortunate was about to bleed to death. At that moment, the gate of the school opened, and Pista (the familiar name of Stefano) ran out with a folding stretcher under his arm. He threw his jacket on the ground, crawled under the tram, and carefully pulled the young man out, tightening his belt around the bleeding thigh, and placed the boy on the stretcher. At this point, the ambulance arrived. The crowd cheered Pista enthusiastically. He blushed but could not hide the joy of having saved someone's life."

One of his boys recalls, "One day I fell seriously ill with typhus. At the hospital in Újpest, while my parents were worried about my life at my bedside, Stefano Sándor offered to give me blood if necessary. This act of generosity deeply moved my mother and all the people around me."

Even though more than sixty years have passed since his martyrdom and there has been a profound evolution in Consecrated Life, in the Salesian experience, in the vocation and formation of the Salesian Coadjutor, the Salesian path to holiness traced by Stefano Sándor is a sign and a message that opens perspectives for today. This fulfills the affirmation of the Salesian Constitutions: "The confreres who have lived or live fully the evangelical project of the Constitutions are for us a stimulus and help in the journey of sanctification." His beatification concretely indicates that "high measure of ordinary Christian life" indicated by John Paul II in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*.



## **2.1. Under the Banner of Don Bosco**

It is always interesting to try to identify in the mysterious plan that the Lord weaves for each of us the guiding thread of all existence. In a synthetic formula, the secret that inspired and guided all the steps of Stefano Sándor's life can be summarized in these words: following Jesus, with Don Bosco and like Don Bosco, everywhere and always. In Stefano's vocational history, Don Bosco erupts in an original way with the typical traits of a well-identified vocation, as the Franciscan parish priest wrote, presenting the young Stefano. "Here in Szolnok, in our parish, we have a very good young man: Stefano Sándor, of whom I am the spiritual father, and who, after finishing technical school, learned the trade in a metallurgical school; he receives Communion daily and would like to enter a religious order. We would have no difficulty, but he would like to enter the Salesians as a lay brother."

The flattering judgment of the parish priest and spiritual director highlights: the traits of work and prayer typical of Salesian life; a persevering and constant spiritual journey with a spiritual guide; the apprenticeship of the typographic art that he will perfect and specialize over time.

He had come to know Don Bosco through the Salesian Bulletin and the Salesian publications of Rákospalota. From this contact through the Salesian press, perhaps his passion for typography and books was born. In a letter to the Provincial of the Salesians of Hungary, Fr. János Antal, where he asks to be accepted among the sons of Don Bosco, he declared: "I feel the vocation to enter the Salesian Congregation. There is a need for work everywhere; without work, one cannot reach eternal life. I like to work."

From the beginning, the strong and determined will to persevere in the received vocation emerges, as will indeed happen. When on May 28, 1936, he applied for admission to the Salesian novitiate, he declared that he "had known the Salesian Congregation and had been increasingly confirmed in his religious vocation, so much so that he trusted he could

persevere under the banner of Don Bosco.” In a few words, Sándor expresses a high-profile vocational awareness: experiential knowledge of the life and spirit of the Congregation; confirmation of a right and irreversible choice; assurance for the future of being faithful on the battlefield that awaits him.

The record of admission to the novitiate, in Italian (June 2, 1936), unanimously qualifies the experience of the Aspirantate: “With excellent results, diligent, of good piety, and offered himself for the festive oratory, was practical, of good example, received the certificate of printer, but does not yet have perfect practice.” Those traits that, subsequently consolidated in the novitiate, will define his identity as a lay Salesian religious are already present: the exemplarity of life, the generous availability to the Salesian mission, the competence in the profession of printer.

On September 8, 1940, he made his religious profession as a Salesian Coadjutor. On this day of grace, we report a letter written by Pista, as he was familiarly called, to his parents. “Dear parents, I have to report an important event for me that will leave indelible marks in my heart. On September 8, by the grace of good God and with the protection of the Holy Virgin, I committed myself with my profession to love and serve God. On the feast of the Virgin Mother, I made my wedding with Jesus and promised Him with the triple vow to be His, never to separate from Him, and to persevere in fidelity to Him until death. I therefore pray all of you not to forget me in your prayers and Communions, making vows that I may remain faithful to my promise made to God. You can imagine that it was a joyful day for me, never before experienced in my life. I think I could not have given the Madonna a more pleasing birthday gift than the gift of myself. I imagine that our good Jesus looked at you with affectionate eyes, you having been the ones who gave me to God... Affectionate greetings to all. PISTA.”

## **2.2. Absolute Dedication to the Mission**

"The mission gives all our existence its concrete tone...", say the Salesian Constitutions. Stefano Sándor lived the Salesian mission in the field entrusted to him, embodying pastoral educative charity as a Salesian Coadjutor, in the style of Don Bosco. His faith led him to see Jesus in the young apprentices and workers, in the boys of the oratory, in those of the street.

In the printing industry, the competent direction of the administration is considered an essential task. Stefano Sándor was responsible for the direction, practical and specific training of apprentices, and the setting of prices for printing products. "Don Bosco" printing house enjoyed great prestige throughout the Country. The Salesian editions included the *Salesian Bulletin*, *Missionary Youth*, magazines for youth, the *Don Bosco Calendar*, devotional books, and the Hungarian translation of the official writings of the General Directorate of the Salesians. It was in this environment that Stefano Sándor began to love the Catholic books that were not only prepared for printing by him but also studied.

In the service of youth, he was also responsible for the collegiate education of young people. This was also an important task, in addition to their technical training. It was essential to discipline the young, in a phase of vigorous development, with affectionate firmness. At every moment of the apprenticeship period, he stood by them as an older brother. Stefano Sándor distinguished himself for a strong personality; he possessed excellent specific education, accompanied by discipline, competence, and a community spirit.

He was not content with just one specific job but made himself available for every need. He took on the role of sacristan of the small church of the Clarisseum and took care of the direction of the "Little Clergy." A testament to his capacity for endurance was also the spontaneous commitment to voluntary work in the flourishing oratory, regularly attended by the youth from the two suburbs of Újpest and Rákospalota. He enjoyed playing with the boys; in soccer matches, he refereed with great competence.

### 2.3. Religious Educator

Stefano Sándor was an educator of faith for every person, brother, and boy, especially in times of trial and at the hour of martyrdom. Indeed, Sándor had made the mission for young people his educational space, where he daily lived the criteria of Don Bosco's Preventive System – reason, religion, loving-kindness – in the closeness and loving assistance to young workers, in the help provided to understand and accept situations of suffering, in the living testimony of the presence of the Lord and His unfailing love.

In Rákospalota, Stefano Sándor zealously dedicated himself to training young printers and educating the youth of the oratory and the "Pages of the Sacred Heart." On these fronts, he showed a strong sense of duty, living his religious vocation with great responsibility and characterized by a maturity that inspired admiration and esteem. "During his printing activity, he conscientiously lived his religious life, without any desire to appear. He practiced the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, without any forcing. In this field, his mere presence was a testimony, without saying a word. Even the students recognized his authority, thanks to his fraternal ways. He put into practice everything he said or asked of the students, and no one thought of contradicting him in any way."

György Érseki had known the Salesians since 1945 and after World War II moved to Rákospalota, in the Clarisseum. His acquaintance with Stefano Sándor lasted until 1947. For this period, he not only offers us a glimpse of the multiple activities of the young Coadjutor, printer, catechist, and youth educator, but also a deep reading, from which emerges the spiritual richness and educational capacity of Stefano. "Stefano Sándor was a very gifted person by nature. As a pedagogue, I can affirm and confirm his observational skills and his multifaceted personality. He was a good educator and managed to handle the young people, one by one, in an optimal manner, choosing the appropriate tone with everyone. There is still a detail belonging to his

personality: he considered every work a holy duty, dedicating, without effort and with great naturalness, all his energy to the realization of this sacred purpose. Thanks to an innate intuition, he was able to grasp the atmosphere and influence it positively. [...] He had a strong character as an educator; he took care of everyone individually. He was interested in our personal problems, always reacting in the most suitable way for us. In this way, he realized the three principles of Don Bosco: reason, religion, and loving-kindness... The Salesian Coadjutors did not wear the habit outside the liturgical context, but Stefano Sándor's appearance stood out from the crowd. Regarding his activity as an educator, he never resorted to physical punishment, which was prohibited according to the principles of Don Bosco, unlike other more impulsive Salesian teachers, who were unable to control themselves and sometimes slapped students. The apprentice students entrusted to him formed a small community within the school, despite being different from each other in terms of age and culture. They ate in the dining hall together with the other students, where the Bible was usually read during meals. Naturally, Stefano Sándor was also present. Thanks to his presence, the group of industrial apprentices was always the most disciplined... Stefano Sándor remained youthful, showing great understanding towards young people. By grasping their problems, he transmitted positive messages and was able to advise them both personally and religiously. His personality revealed great tenacity and resilience in work; even in the most difficult situations, he remained faithful to his ideals and to himself.

The Salesian school of Rákospalota hosted a large community, requiring work with young people at multiple levels. In the school, alongside the printing house, there lived young Salesians in formation, who were in close contact with the Coadjutors. I remember the following names: József Krammer, Imre Strifler, Vilmos Klinger, and László Merész. These young men had different tasks from those of Stefano Sándor and also

differed in character. However, thanks to their common life, they knew each other's problems, virtues, and flaws. Stefano Sándor always found the right measure in his relationship with these clerics. Stefano Sándor managed to find the fraternal tone to admonish them when they showed some shortcomings, without falling into paternalism. In fact, it was the young clerics who sought his opinion. In my view, he realized the ideals of Don Bosco. From the very first moment of our acquaintance, Stefano Sándor represented the spirit that characterized the members of the Salesian Society: a sense of duty, purity, religiosity, practicality, and fidelity to Christian principles."

A boy from that time recalls the spirit that animated Stefano Sándor: "My first memory of him is linked to the sacristy of the *Clarisseum*, where he, as the main sacristan, demanded order, imposing the seriousness due to the situation, yet always remaining himself, with his behavior, to set a good example for us. One of his characteristics was to give us directives in a moderate tone, without raising his voice, rather politely asking us to do our duties. This spontaneous and friendly behavior won us over. We truly cared for him. We were enchanted by the naturalness with which Stefano Sándor took care of us. He taught us, prayed, and lived with us, witnessing the spirituality of the Salesian Coadjutors of that time. We young people, often did not realize how special these people were, but he stood out for his seriousness, which he manifested in church, in the printing house, and even on the playing field."

### **3. Reflection of God with Evangelical Radicality**

What gave depth to all this – the dedication to the mission and the professional and educative capacity – and what immediately struck those who met him was the inner figure of Stefano Sándor, that of a disciple of the Lord, who lived at every moment his consecration, in constant union with God

and in evangelical fraternity. From the testimonies in the process, a complete figure emerges, also for that Salesian balance whereby the different dimensions converge in a harmonious, unified, and serene personality, open to the mystery of God lived in the everyday.

One striking aspect of such radicality is the fact that from the very novitiate, all his companions, even those aspiring to the priesthood and much younger than him, esteemed him and saw him as a model to imitate. The exemplary nature of his consecrated life and the radicality with which he lived and testified to the evangelical counsels always distinguished him everywhere, so that on many occasions, even during his imprisonment, many thought he was a priest. Such testimony speaks volumes about the uniqueness with which Stefano Sándor always lived with clear identity his vocation as a Salesian Coadjutor, highlighting precisely the specificity of Salesian consecrated life as such. Among the novitiate companions, Gyula Zsédely speaks of Stefano Sándor: "We entered together the Salesian novitiate of Saint Stephen in Mezőnyárád. Our master was Béla Bali. Here I spent a year and a half with Stefano Sándor and was an eyewitness to his life, a model of a young religious. Although Stefano Sándor was at least nine or ten years older than me, he lived with his novitiate companions in an exemplary manner; he participated in the practices of piety with us. We did not feel the age difference at all; he stood by us with fraternal affection. He edified us not only through his good example but also by giving us practical advice regarding the education of youth. It was already evident then how he was predestined for this vocation according to the educational principles of Don Bosco... His talent as an educator stood out even to us novices, especially during community activities. With his personal charm, he inspired us to such an extent that we took for granted that we could easily tackle even the most difficult tasks. The engine of his deep Salesian spirituality was prayer and the Eucharist, as well as devotion to Our Lady Help of Christians. During the novitiate, which lasted a year, we saw in him a

good friend. He became our model also in obedience, as being the oldest, he was tested with small humiliations, but he endured them with composure and without showing signs of suffering or resentment. At that time, unfortunately, there was someone among our superiors who enjoyed humiliating the novices, but Stefano Sándor knew how to resist well. His greatness of spirit, rooted in prayer, was perceptible to all."

Regarding the intensity with which Stefano Sándor lived his faith, with a *continuous union with God*, an exemplary evangelical testimony emerges, which we can well define as a "reflection of God". "It seems to me that his inner attitude stemmed from devotion to the Eucharist and to the Madonna, which had also transformed the life of Don Bosco. When he took care of us, 'Little Clergy,' he did not give the impression of exercising a profession; his actions manifested the spirituality of a person capable of praying with great fervor. For me and my peers, 'Mr. Sándor' was an ideal, and we never dreamed that everything we saw and heard was a superficial act. I believe that only his intimate life of prayer could

have nourished such behavior when, still a very young confrere, he had understood and taken seriously Don Bosco's educational method."

The evangelical radicality expressed itself in various forms throughout the religious life of Stefano Sándor:

- In waiting patiently for the consent of his parents to enter the Salesians.

- In every step of religious life, he had to wait: before being admitted to the novitiate, he had to do the Aspirantate; admitted to the novitiate, he had to interrupt it to serve in the military; the request for perpetual profession, initially accepted, would be postponed after a further period of temporary vows.

- In the harsh experiences of military service and



at the front. The confrontation with an environment that posed many traps to his dignity as a man and a Christian strengthened in this young novice the decision to follow the Lord, to be faithful to his choice of God, no matter the cost. Indeed, there is no more difficult and demanding discernment than that of a novitiate tested and scrutinized in the trench of military life.

– In the years of suppression and then imprisonment, up to the supreme moment of martyrdom.

All this reveals that gaze of faith that will always accompany the story of Stefano: the awareness that God is present and works for the good of His children.

## **Conclusion**

Stefano Sándor, from birth until death, was a deeply religious man, who in all circumstances of life responded with dignity and coherence to the demands of his Salesian vocation. This is how he lived during the period of the Aspirantate and initial formation, in his work as a printer, as an animator of the oratory and liturgy, in the time of clandestinity and imprisonment, up to the moments preceding his death. Eager, from his early youth, to dedicate himself to the service of God and his brothers in the generous task of educating young people according to the spirit of Don Bosco, he was able to cultivate a spirit of strength and fidelity to God and to his brothers that enabled him, in the moment of trial, to resist, first to situations of conflict and then to the supreme test of the gift of life.

I would like to highlight *the testimony of evangelical radicality* offered by this confrere. From the reconstruction of the biographical profile of Stefano Sándor emerges a real and profound journey of faith, begun from his childhood and youth, strengthened by his Salesian religious profession and consolidated in the exemplary life of a Salesian Coadjutor. A genuine consecrated vocation is particularly noticeable, animated according to the spirit of

Don Bosco, by an intense and fervent zeal for the salvation of souls, especially young ones. Even the most difficult periods, such as military service and the experience of war, did not tarnish the upright moral and religious behavior of the young Coadjutor. It is on this basis that Stefano Sándor will suffer martyrdom without second thoughts or hesitations.

The beatification of Stefano Sándor engages the entire Congregation in *promoting the vocation of the Salesian Coadjutor*, welcoming his exemplary testimony and invoking in a communal form his intercession for this intention. As a lay Salesian, he managed to set a good example even for priests, with his activity among young people and with his exemplary religious life. He is a model for young consecrated persons, for the way in which he faced trials and persecutions without accepting compromises. The causes to which he dedicated himself, the sanctification of Christian work, love for the house of God, and the education of youth, are still fundamental missions of the Church and our Congregation.

As an exemplary educator of young people, particularly apprentices and young workers, and as an animator of the oratory and youth groups, he serves as an example and encouragement in our commitment to proclaim to young people *the Gospel of joy through the pedagogy of goodness*.