 Reading time: 11 min.

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

Meanwhile, the eve of Bishop Cagliero's departure had arrived. All that day, the idea that Bishop John Cagliero and the others going so far away, and the knowledge of the absolute impossibility that he could accompany them to the place of embarkation as he had done on other occasions, and even that it might even be impossible to say goodbye to them in the church of Mary Help of Christians, caused Don Bosco a great deal of emotion which, at times, left him depressed and certainly exhausted.
On the night of January 31st, Don Bosco had a dream just like the one he had had about the Missions in 1883. He told Father John Baptist Lemoyne about it, who immediately wrote it down:

"I thought that I was accompanying the missionaries on their journey. We talked briefly before setting out from the Oratory. They were gathered around me and asked for advice. I think I said to them, **'Neither with science, nor good health, nor riches, but with zeal and piety you'll be able to do a great deal of good to promote God's glory and the salvation of souls.'**
"We had been at the oratory only a little while before, and then without knowing how we had gone there or by what means, we found ourselves in America almost immediately. At the end of the journey, I found myself alone in the heart of an immense prairie located between Chile and Argentina. All my dear missionaries had scattered here and there over the infinite expanse. I wondered as I looked at them why they seemed so few to me. After all the Salesians I had sent to America on several expeditions, I had expected to see a greater number of missionaries. But then I remembered that it only seemed as if there were so few of them, because they were scattered in so many different places, like seeds that have to be

transplanted for cultivation and multiplication.
“I saw a great many long, long roads in that prairie and a number of houses scattered along the routes. These roads were not like the roads we have here, nor were the houses like the ones we know in this part of the world. They were mysterious, I might say – spiritual houses. There were vehicles, means of transportation, moving along the roads, and as they moved, they assumed a thousand fantastic different forms and aspects, all of them wonderful and magnificent, so that I could not define or describe a single one of them. I looked with wonder and saw that when these vehicles were driven near to any group of dwellings, villages, or cities, they soared into the air, so that anyone traveling in them would see the roofs of the houses beneath them although these houses were very tall. Many of them were below the level of the roads that had run along the ground level through the wasteland, but suddenly became airborne as they reached inhabited areas, almost creating a magic bridge. From the bridges, one could see the people living in the houses, people in the playgrounds and streets, or on their farms in the countryside, busily working.
“Each of these roads led to one of our missions. At the far end of one very long road which came from the direction of Chile, I saw a house [*All the topographic indications prior to and after this would seem to indicate the house at Fort Mercedes on the left bank of the Colorado River*] where there were many Salesians engaged in scientific pursuits, practices of piety, and various trades, crafts and agricultural activities. To the south lay Patagonia. In the opposite
direction, I could see in one single glance all our houses in the Argentine Republic. I could also see Paysandu, Las Piedras and Villa Colon in Uruguay. I could see the School of Niteroy in Brazil and a number of other schools scattered in the various provinces of that same empire. Finally to the west, another long, long road that crossed rivers, seas and lakes leading to unknown lands. I also saw Salesians there, too. I looked very carefully and noticed only two of them.
“Just then, a man of noble, handsome appearance appeared at my side. He was pale and stout, so closely shaven that he seemed beardless although he was a grown man. He was dressed in white, wearing some kind of cloak of rose-colored material, interwoven with golden threads. He was altogether resplendent. I recognized him as my interpreter.”
“‘Where are we?’ I asked, pointing to this territory.”
“‘We are in Mesopotamia,’ my interpreter said.”
“‘In Mesopotamia?’ I echoed, ‘but this is Patagonia.’”
“‘I tell you that this is Mesopotamia,’ the other said.”
“‘And yet … and yet … I cannot believe it.’”

“‘That is what it is. This is Me-so-po-ta-mia,’ the interpreter repeated, spelling it out so that it might well be impressed on my mind.’”
“‘Why do I see only so few Salesians here?’”
“‘What is not there now, it will be in the future,’ the interpreter said.”
“I was standing motionless in the prairie, scanning all those interminable roads, and contemplating quite clearly, but inexplicably, all the places the Salesians were then and were going to be later. How many magnificent things did I not see! I saw each individual school. I saw as if they were all concentrated in one place, all the past, present and future of our missions. Since I saw all of it as a whole in one single glance, it is extremely difficult, indeed altogether impossible, for me to give you even the most vague idea of what it was that I saw. What I saw in that prairie of Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, and the Argentine Republic, would in itself require an immense volume, just to give a few overall pieces of information about it.
“In that immense plain, I also saw all the savages who lived scattered in that territory of the Pacific, down to the gulf of Ancud, the strait of Magellan, Cape Horn, the Diego Islands, and the Malvinas. All this was a harvest awaiting the reaping by the Salesians. I saw that as of now, the Salesians were only sowing, but that those coming after them would reap. Men and women will swell our ranks and become preachers. Their children who, so now it seems, cannot possibly be won over to our faith will themselves become evangelizers of their parents and friends. The Salesians will succeed in everything with humility, work, and temperance.
“All that I saw in that moment and later concerned all the Salesians: regular settlements in those territories; their miraculous expansion; and the conversion of many natives and many Europeans settled there. Europe will stream into South America. European trade began to decline from the very moment that Europeans began stripping their churches, and it has continued to decline more and more ever since. Hence, workers and their families, driven by their own poverty, will go and seek their fortune in those new hospitable lands.
“Once I saw the area assigned to us by Our Lord as well as the glorious future of the Salesian Congregation, I had the impression that I was setting out on a journey again, this time on my way back to Italy. I was carried at an extremely rapid pace along a strange road, which was at a very high level, and in an instant, I found myself above the Oratory. The whole of Turin was beneath my feet and the houses, palaces and towers looked like so many low huts to me, for I was so high up. Squares, streets, gardens, avenues, railways, and the walls of the city to the countryside and adjacent hills, the cities, the towns of the Turin Province, and the gigantic chain of the Alps all covered with snow lay spread out beneath my gaze like a stupendous panorama. I saw the boys down below in the Oratory and they looked

like so many little mice. But there was an immense number of them; priests, clerics, students, and master craftsmen were evident everywhere. A good many of them were setting out in procession while others were coming in to fill the ranks where the others had gone forth.
“It was one constant procession.
“They all went thronging to the immense prairie between Chile and Argentina to which I myself had now returned in the twinkling of an eye. I stood watching them. One young priest who looked like our Father Joseph Pavia, though he was not, came toward me.
“With his affable manner, courteous speech, candid appearance and boyish complexion, he said, ‘Behold! These are the souls and the territories assigned to the sons of St. Francis of Sales.’”
“I was amazed by such an immense multitude, all gathered there, but it disappeared in an instant and I could barely detect the direction they had all taken in the far distance.
“I must point out that as I relate it, my dream is described only in the summarized form, and that it is impossible to specify the exact chronological order of all the magnificent sights that appeared before me and of all the secondary features. My spirit is incapable, my memory forgetful, my words inadequate. Apart from the mystery in which everything I saw was shrouded, the scenes before me alternated. At times, they were interlocked and repeated according to the variations of amalgamation, division or departure of the missionaries, and the way in which the people they have been called upon to convert to the faith gathered around them or moved away from them. I repeat: I could see the past, the present and the future of the missions with all their phases, hazards, triumphs, defeats or momentary disappointments concentrated as in one single whole; in a word, all the things that will be connected with the Apostolate. At the time, I could understand everything quite plainly, but now it is impossible to unravel these intricate mysteries, ideas and people one from another. It would be like trying to cram into one single narrative and sum up in one sole instance or fact the whole panorama of the firmament, relating the motion, splendor and properties of all the stars with their individual laws and reciprocal aspects; one star by itself would supply enough material for the concentration and study of the most formidable brain. I again must point out that here it is a question of things having no connection with material things.
“Now resuming my narrative, I repeat that I stood bewildered as I saw this great multitude disappear. At that moment, Bishop John Cagliero stood beside me. A few missionaries were at some short distance away. Many others stood around me with a fair number of Salesian cooperators. Among them I saw Bishop Espinosa, Dr.

Torrero, Dr. Caranza and the Vicar General of Chile. [*Perhaps thus alludes to Bishop Domingo Cruz, Capitular Vicar of the diocese of Conception.*] Then my usual interpreter came over to me, talking with Bishop John Cagliero and a number of others, and we tried to ascertain whether all this had meaning.
“Most kindly my interpreter said, ‘Listen and you will see.’”
“At that same moment, the whole immense plain turned into a big hall. I cannot describe exactly how it looked in its splendor and richness. The only thing I can say is that if anybody tried to describe it, he would not be able to withstand its splendor, not even with his imagination. It was so immense that it escaped the eye, nor could one see where its sidewalls were; no one could have estimated its height. The roof ended with immense arches, very wide and magnificent, and no one could see what supported them. There were neither columns nor pillars. It rather looked as if the cupola of this immense hall was made of the finest candid linen, something like tapestry. The same applies to the floor.
“There was neither illumination, nor the sun, moon, or stars, though there was a general brilliance distributed evenly everywhere. The very candor of the linen blazed and made everything visible and beautiful so that one could see every ornament, every window, every entrance and exit. There was a most beautiful fragrance all around formed by a mixture of the loveliest aromas.
“Just at that moment, I became aware of something phenomenal.
“There were many tables of extraordinary length arranged in every direction, but all converging towards one focal point. They were covered with refined tablecloths, and on them were crystal bowls in which many various kinds of flowers were arranged handsomely.
“The first thing that struck the attention of Bishop John Cagliero was that there are tables here, but no food.
“Indeed, there was no food and nothing to drink visible on them, nor were there any dishes, goblets or any other receptacle in which one might place food.
“Then my friend the interpreter spoke, ‘Those who come here, *neque sitient, neque esurient amplius’* (they will never thirst or feel hungry anymore).
“As he said this, people began to stream in, all clothed in white with a simple ribbon of rose hue embroidered with golden threads around the neck and shoulders. The first to enter were small in number, only a few together in small groups.
“As soon as they entered, they went to sit at a table set for them and sang, ‘*Hurrah*!’”
“Behind them, other more numerous groups advanced singing ‘*Triumph*!’ Then a great variety of people began to appear: old and young; men and women of all ages; of different colors, appearances, and attitude, and one could hear canticles on

every side. They sang, '*Hurrah*!'"
"Those already seated sang '*Long live*!' and those entering sang '*Triumph*!' Each group that entered represented yet another nation or section of a nation which will be converted by our missionaries."
"I glanced at those infinitely long tables and saw that there were many of our nuns and confreres sitting there and singing, but they did not have anything to show that they were priests, clerics or nuns for all of them wore the same white robe and rose-colored ribbon. But my wonder grew when I saw men of rough appearances dressed the same as the others who sang '*Long live*! *Triumph*!'"
"Just then, our interpreter said, 'The foreigners, the savages who drank the milk of the divine word from those who educated them, have become heralds of the word of God.'"
"I also saw many boys of strange and rough appearance in the crowds and I asked, 'Who are these boys whose skin is so rough that it looks like that of a toad, and yet at the same time it is beautiful and of a resplendent color?'"
"The interpreter replied, 'They are the children of Cam who have not relinquished the heritage of Levi. They will strengthen the ranks of the armies defending the kingdom of God that has appeared in our midst at last. Their number was small, but the children of their children have made it larger. Now listen and you will see, but you will not be able to understand the mysteries placed before you.' These boys belonged to Patagonia and to the southern part of Africa.
"Just then, there were so many people streaming into this amazing hall that every seat seemed taken. The seats and benches did not have any specific form, but assumed whatever shape the individual wanted. The seating was satisfactory to everyone.
"Just as everyone was shouting '*Hurrah!*' and '*Triumph*!' on all sides, an immense crowd appeared to join the others, and sang, '*Hallelujah, glory, triumph*!' When it looked as if the hall were entirely full and no one could have counted all the thousands of people present, there was a profound silence, and then the multitude began singing in different choirs:
"The first choir sang, '*Appropinquavit in nos regnum Dei: laetentur Coeli et exultet terra. Dominus regnavit super nos. Alleluia'* (The kingdom of God has come among us. Let the heavens and the earth rejoice. The Lord has reigned over us).
"The second choir sang, '*Vincerunt et ipse Dominus dabit edere de ligno vitae et non esurient in aeternum. Alleluia'* (They won and the Lord Himself shall give them food from the tree of life and they shall never go hungry).
"A third choir sang, '*Laudate Dominun omnes gentes, laudate eum omnes populi'* (Praise the Lord all you nations, praise Him all you peoples).

“While they were alternately singing these hymns, a profound silence suddenly fell once more. Then one heard voices from high up and far away. No one could possibly describe the harmony of this new canticle. *Solo Deo honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum* (To God alone honor and glory forever).
“Other voices still higher up and further away replied to these other voices, ‘*Semper gratiarum actio illi qui erat, est, et venturus est. Illi eucharistia, illi soli onor sempiternus’* (Forever thanks to Him who was, is, and will come. To Him alone thanksgiving and honor).
“These choirs seemed to descend from their high level and draw nearer to us. I also noticed Louis Colle among the singers.
Everyone else in the hall also began to sing, joining in, blending voices, sounding like an exceptional musical instrument with sounds with an infinite resonance. The music seemed to have a thousand different high notes simultaneously and a thousand degrees of range which all blended into one single vocal harmony. The high voices of those singing soared so high that one could never have believed it. The voices of the singers in the hall were sonorous, fully rounded and so deep that one could not believe that either. All together they formed one single chorus, one sole harmony, but both the high notes and the low were so fine and beautiful and penetrated so deeply through all the senses and were absorbed by them that one forgot his very existence, and I fell on my knees at the feet of Bishop John Cagliero and exclaimed, ‘Oh, Cagliero! We are in Paradise.’”
“Bishop John Cagliero took me by the hand and answered, ‘This is not Paradise, but only a pale image of what Paradise really will be.’”
“Meanwhile, the voices of the two magnificent choirs continued singing in unison in indescribable harmony: ‘*Soli Deo honor et gloria, et triumphus alleluia, in aeterum in aeterum!’”*
“Here I quite forgot myself and I no longer know what happened to me. I found it difficult to rise from my bed next morning, and as soon as I came to my senses, I went to celebrate Holy Mass.
“The main thought which was impressed on me after this dream was to warn Bishop John Cagliero and all my beloved missionaries of something of the greatest importance regarding the future of our missions: all the efforts of both the Salesians and the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians should concentrate on cultivating vocations for the priesthood and religious life.”
(BM XVII, 273-280)