 Reading time: 6 min.

(continuation from previous article)

2. Some traits of the theological virtues in Fr Rua

2.1. Fr Rua man of faith

His love for God was rooted in the fundamental choice for Him: "…he lived in continuous union with God… The very close union with God was matched by complete detachment from the things of the world and disregard for anything that did not serve to glorify God and save souls… It seems to me that the union with God was so consummate in him that he had nothing but this generous, ardent, continuous thought: to love and make God loved, God always, God in everything, no rest in this, never diversion, always this sublime uniformity. God. Nothing but God." This love for God was the profound motivation of his every action and took the form of doing God's will exactly, promptly, joyfully and perseveringly. The love of God was the motivation for his many actions and actions and sustained his great commitment to the promotion and cultivation of priestly and religious vocations.

The source that nourished this union was prayer: "Fr Rua found his rest in prayer" (Fr Francesia). "Fr Rua in prayer, in contact with God, in rest found renewed strength to implement day by day what was the father's programme made one hundred per cent his own by his most faithful son: I seek souls and only souls." This source was nourished in the Eucharist and in filial love for the Virgin Help of Christians. The life of faith was expressed in the intimate union between prayer and action, nourished by the practice and spirit of mental prayer, which for him was "the essential element of the life of the good religious", to such an extent that even during an earthquake tremor while everyone was fleeing "he alone had not moved and had remained there at his usual place, in his usual attitude." With meditation on the Word, it was the Eucharist that was the animating fire. The Eucharist, celebrated, adored, visited and kept in one's heart: "Let us form a tabernacle in our heart," he would repeat, "and let us always be united to the Blessed Sacrament." He expressed an intense faith and piety for the Eucharist, nourished by a series of recommendations and instructions: visits, adoration, genuflections, recollection.

Fr Rua as a man of God and faith was distinguished by a testimony that was made credible not so much by eloquence, but by the intimate conviction that transpired from his words and above all from his life. It was nourished by a knowledge of the Scriptures and a great familiarity with the Church Fathers: sources he drew from in their original Greek and Latin texts. This formation manifested itself

as an adolescent in his commitment to teaching catechism and Christian instruction not only in its ordinary forms, but also in missions and spiritual exercises, considering them constitutive elements of the Salesian mission to which all its members were bound, as Fr Amadei testified: “ have found in his letters explicit declarations that all Salesian priests, clerics, and coadjutors should willingly lend their work in catechising because,” he said, “if they neglected catechism classes they would be failing in their vocation.” The work of teaching catechism was the true purpose of the Salesian institution and propagation of oratories, avoiding the risk of reducing them to mere recreation centres or sports centres. This commitment to the propagation of the faith animated the great front of missionary action, another constitutive element of the Salesian charism, which he sustained with intense apostolic ardour and with considerable employment of people and resources. A great instrument for spreading the Salesian spirit and supporting Salesian works, especially in mission lands, was the circulation of the *Salesian Bulletin*.

2.2. Man of hope

The virtue of hope kept the ultimate goal, paradise, alive, and at the same time sustained the daily commitment to do good and fight evil, as he often told young people: “Be good, trust in God and paradise will be yours.” He wanted people to deserve this reward, especially by fleeing guilt and by doing God’s holy will every moment. This hope translated daily into an unconditional trust in divine Providence as Don Bosco’s third successor, Blessed Philip Rinaldi, attested: “Son and follower of the Venerable Don Bosco, the servant of God lived by the day, he did not hoard funds, the founder’s principle being to always trust in Providence, even in material things.” And Fr Barberis said: “In conversations, in admonitions, in the letters he wrote, the most insistent exhortation was trust in divine Providence. Once I remember him telling us: ‘It does not cost the Lord any effort to provide us with the necessary means; He is so good that when He sees the need, He will do it.’” Even in very great hardships, he always maintained an imperturbability and tranquillity that also infected others.

2.3. Man of charity

His love for God was manifested in his love for his neighbour: “He spoke to the lowly as he did to the great, to the poor as he did to the rich, always seeking to do good. Indeed, it seemed that the more lowly a person was, the more affably he treated them and sought their good.” This aspect grew in a special way after Don Bosco’s death, considering it an inheritance he had received from Don Bosco and

wanted to pass on to future generations:

“The great charity that informed the heart of our beloved Don Bosco of holy memory set in motion by example and word the spark of love that God blessed had placed in mine, and I was electrified by his love, so that, if succeeding him I could not inherit the great virtues of our holy founder, his love for his spiritual children I feel the Lord granted me. All the days, all the moments of the day I consecrate to you… therefore I pray for you, I think of you, I act for you like a mother for her only-begotten son.” This is a text of great value that reveals how the spiritual inheritance received is the fruit of a profound communion of souls, which sets off that vital spark that unleashes a fire of true charity. Fr Rua is aware of the difference in gifts between himself and Don Bosco, but he truthfully affirms that the core of the spirit has been passed on: a charity communicated vitally and by word that drives to a life offered and consecrated for people with traits of maternal love.

Love of neighbour took concrete form in an ordered, liberal and generous love, with a special predilection for the poorest young people and those at spiritual, moral and material risk, and with a preference for the poorest and most destitute geographical areas such as southern Italy. Charity was exercised with great dedication in the ministry of reconciliation, to the point of exhaustion, especially during spiritual exercises, because he would say: “These are my harvests.” Similarly, he devoted himself to the ministry of advice and consolation. Everyone was the recipient of his love, even enemies and detractors. His concern for his neighbour was inspired by a great kindness and gentleness, typical of the Salesian tradition and aimed at protecting the good reputation of people and neutralising the disruptive expressions of slander and judgement: “In his good manner, without offending, he tried to stifle from the beginning the discourse as soon as he realised it was misdirected. When he then caught some criticism directed at a known person, he never failed, almost as if to destroy the effect of the criticism itself, to point out the good qualities, the works, the merits of the person being criticised.”

He had a solicitous and personalised love for every confrere in the Congregation, with the heart of a caring father and the gaze of a true overseer of his flock: “He knew the confreres in the individual houses one by one, even the most distant ones, and was interested in the needs and greatest profit of each one, as if he were under his gaze in the Oratory.” A concrete example was the dispatch of spare linen for confreres engaged in military service. This amiable fatherhood excelled in the exercise of spiritual charity: “I found him always ready to listen to me; with a smile he took an interest in what was close to my heart, and he knew how to advise and guide me in such a way that my soul was completely at peace.” The example of a life lived in charity led him to write to confreres at odds with one

another: “Love one another as confreres, and pray to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to kindle in all of you that sacred fire that he came to bring to earth, the fire of charity.”

Such love took the form of predilection for young people: “He was interested in the health and needs of each one.… Fr Rua was for each of us the good father, who lived for us, so that even the humblest and lowliest could freely turn to Him. “A love that knew no bounds: missionaries, emigrants, people in need, workers, members of the Salesian Family, young workers, distinguishing himself for his active interest in labour disputes: “unemployed workers came to him, and he recommended them according to need to the various industrialists.” Every day after hearing so many people in the confessional, he would spend many hours receiving numerous people: “Every day I observed many people whom I myself brought to an audience with the servant of God, people who came to ask for material and moral help, recommendations, etc.” The servant of God treated everyone affably, took an interest in their cases, and helped everyone as much as he could.” Truly as Fr Saluzzo said, “His heart was open to all good.”