

St Francis de Sales. Gentleness (7/8)

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GENTLENESS IN SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES (7/8)

Some episodes from Francis's life leads us to contemplate "Salesian gentleness".

In order to improve the situation of the clergy in the parishes, Francis had decided that at least three candidates for a parish would be named. The best would be chosen.

Now, it had happened that a Knight of Malta, furious because one of his servants had been excluded from the selection (this candidate knew more about courting women than commenting on the Gospel!) had abruptly entered the bishop's study and had insulted and threatened him, and Francis had remained standing, hat in hand. The bishop's brother then asked him if anger had ever taken hold of him at any time and the holy man did not hide from him that "then and often anger boiled in his brain like water boiling in a pot on the fire; but that by the grace of God, even if he had to die for having violently resisted this passion, he would never have said a word favour of it."

The first monastery was being built in the city (the *Sainte Source*) and work was not progressing because the Dominicans were protesting with the workers. According to them, there was not the required distance between the two buildings. The protests were lively and the bishop kindly and patiently rushed in to calm tempers. This calmness and gentleness did not please Jane de Chantal, who blurted:

"Your gentleness will only increase the insolence of these malicious people." "Not so, not so" Francis replied, "so, Mother, do you want me to destroy the inner peace I have been

working on for more than eighteen years in just a quarter of an hour?"

There is an important premise for understanding what Salesian gentleness is. An expert, Salesian Fr Pietro Braido, tells us about it:

"It is not sentimentalism, which evokes mushy kinds of expressions; it is not the kindness that is typical of people who are happy to close their eyes to reality so as not to have problems and annoyances; it is not the short-sightedness of people who see everything beautiful and good and for whom everything is always fine; it is not the inert attitude of people who have no suggestions to offer... Salesian gentleness (Don Bosco would use the term loving-kindness) is something else: it undoubtedly stems from a deep and solid charity and demands careful control of one's emotional and affective resources; it expresses itself in constant, serene humour, sign of someone with a rich humanity; it requires a capacity for empathy and dialogue and creates a serene atmosphere, free of tension and conflict. So Francis' gentleness is not to be confused with weakness; on the contrary, it is strength that requires control, goodness of mind, clarity of purpose and a strong presence of God."

But Francis was not born this way! Endowed with marked sensitivity, he was easy given to mood swings and outbursts of anger.

Lajeunie writes:

"Francis de Sales was a true Savoyard, habitually calm and gentle, but capable of terrible rages; a volcano beneath the snow. By nature he was very quick to anger, but committed himself daily to correction.

Given his lively and sanguine temperament, his habitual gentleness was often put to the test. He was much hurt by insolent and unpleasant words and vulgar gestures. In 1619 in Paris, he confessed that he still had outbursts of anger in his heart and had to rein it in with both hands! 'I made a

pact with my tongue not to say a word when I was in a rage. By the grace of God I was able to have the strength to curb the passion of anger, to which I was naturally inclined.' It was by the grace of God that he had acquired the ability to master the angry passions to which his temper was prone. His gentleness was thus a strength, the fruit of a victory."

It is not difficult to discover the saint's personal experience in the following quotations, made up of patience, self-control, inner struggle ...

He said to one woman:

"Be very gentle and affable in the midst of the occupations you have, because everyone expects this good example from you. It is easy to steer the boat when it is not hindered by the winds; but in the midst of troubles, problems, it is difficult to remain serene, just as it is difficult to steer a course in the midst of gales."

To Madame de Valbonne, whom Francis described as "a pearl", he wrote:

"We must always remain steadfast in the practice of our two dear virtues: gentleness towards our neighbour and loving humility towards God."

We find the two virtues dear to the Heart of Jesus together: gentleness and humility.

It is necessary to practise gentleness **to self as well**.

"Whenever you find your heart without gentleness, content yourself with taking it very gently in your fingertips to put it back in its place, and do not take it with closed fists or too abruptly. We must be willing to serve this heart in its illnesses and also to use some kindness in its regard; and we must bind our passions and inclinations with chains of gold, that is, with the chains of love.

"He who can maintain meekness amid pain and weariness, and peace amid worry and over-whelming cares, is well nigh perfect. Perfect evenness of temper, true gentleness and sweetness of heart, are more rare than perfect chastity, but

they are so much the more to be cultivated. I commend them to you, my dearest daughter, because upon these, like the oil of a lamp, depends the flame of good example. Nothing is so edifying as a loving good temper."

Francis reminded parents, educators, teachers, superiors in general to practise gentleness especially when it comes to making some **remark or reproaching** someone. Here the Salesian spirit emerges:

"Even when reprimanding them, as is necessary, one must use much love and gentleness with them. In this way, reprimands easily obtain some good results.

Correction dictated by passion, even when it has a reasonable basis, is much less effective than that which comes solely from reason."

"I assure you that every time I have resorted to sharp retorts, I have had to regret them. People do much more out of love and charity than out of severity and rigour."

Gentleness goes hand in hand with another virtue: **patience**. Here, then, are a few letters recommending it:

"As long as we remain down here [on earth], we must resign ourselves to putting up with ourselves until God takes us to heaven. We must therefore be patient and never think that we can correct in a day the bad habits we have contracted because of the meagre care we have taken of our spiritual health [...]. We must, let us admit it, be patient with everyone, but first of all with ourselves."

To Madame de Limonjon he wrote: "It is not possible to get to where you aspire to in one day: we must gain a point today, tomorrow another; and so, step by step, we will arrive at being masters of ourselves; and it will be no small victory."

Patience, for Francis, is the first virtue to be put in place in building a solid spiritual edifice.

"The effect of patience is to possess one's soul well, and patience is all the more perfect the more it is free from restlessness and haste."

“Have patience with regard to your inner cross: the Saviour allows it so that, one day, you may better know who you are. Do you not see that the restlessness of the day is calmed by the rest of the night? This means that our soul needs nothing more than to abandon itself completely to God and be willing to serve Him amidst roses as well as thorns.”

Here are two practical letters: to Madame de la Fléchère he wrote:

‘What do you want me to say about the return of your miseries, except that you must take up arms and courage again and fight more decisively than ever? You will have to use a lot of patience and resignation to get your affairs in order. God will bless your work.’

And to Madame de Travernay he said:

“You must know how to accept the annoyances that touch you in the course of the day with patience and gentleness, and for the love of Him who permits them. Therefore lift up your heart often to God, implore his help, and consider the good fortune you have to be his as the main foundation of your consolation!”

Finally, this text I call **the hymn to charity according to St Francis de Sales**.

“He who is gentle offends no one, bears willingly those who do him harm, suffers with patience the blows he receives, and does no evil for evil. He who is gentle never becomes upset, but conforms all his words to humility, overcoming evil with good. Always make corrections from the heart and with gentle words.

In this way corrections will produce better effects. Never resort to retaliation against those who have displeased you. Never resent or be angry for any reason, for that is always an imperfection.”

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The Heart of Gold of Education

Why devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is part of the DNA of the Salesian Congregation

A beautiful church that cost Don Bosco much “blood and tears”. He was already worn out by fatigue, and spent his last energies and years building this church requested by the Pope. It is also a place dear to all Salesians for many other reasons.

The golden statue in the bell tower, for example, is a sign of gratitude: it was donated by former students from Argentina to thank the Salesians for coming to their land.

Also because in a letter from 1883, Don Bosco wrote the memorable phrase: “Remember that education is a thing of the heart, and that God alone is its master, and we will not be able to succeed in anything if God does not teach us the skill, and does not put the keys in our hands.” The letter ended: “Pray for me, and always believe in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.”

Because devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is part of the Salesian DNA.

The feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus encourages us to have a vulnerable heart. Only a heart that can be wounded is able to love. Thus, on this feast, we contemplate the open heart of Jesus to open our hearts to love as well. The heart is the ancestral symbol of love and many artists have painted the wound in Jesus’ heart with gold. The golden radiance of love streams out from the open heart towards us, and the gilding also shows us that our labours and wounds can be transformed

into something precious.

Every church named after him and every devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus speaks of the Love of that divine heart, the heart of the Son of God, for each of his sons and daughters. And it speaks of pain, it speaks of a love of God that is not always reciprocated. Today let me add another aspect. I think it also speaks of the pain of this Lord Jesus in the face of the suffering of many people, the discarding of others, the immigration of others without horizons, the loneliness and violence that many people suffer.



The statue of Jesus in attitude of blessing, standing above the bell tower of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome

I think it can be said that it speaks of all this, and at the same time it blesses, without a doubt, all that is done for the least, that is, the same thing that Jesus did when he walked the roads of Judea and Galilee.

That is why it is a beautiful sign that the Sacred Heart House is now the headquarters of the Congregation.

So many silver hearts

One of the joyful things that undoubtedly gladdens the “Heart of God himself” is one that I was able to see for myself, namely what is being done at the Salesian Don Bosco Foundation on the islands of Tenerife and Gran Canaria. I was there last week and, among the many things I experienced, I was able to see 140 educators working in the Foundation’s various projects (reception, accommodation, job training and subsequent job placement). And then I met another hundred or so teenagers and young adults who benefit from this Don Bosco service as the least among them. At the end of our precious meeting, they gave me a gift.

I was moved by it, because back in 1849 two young boys, Carlo Gastini and Felice Reviglio, had had the same idea and, in

great secrecy, saving on food and jealously guarding their small tips, had managed to buy a gift for Don Bosco's name day. On St John's night they had gone to knock on the door of Don Bosco's room. Think of his wonder and emotion at being presented with two small silver hearts, accompanied by a few awkward words.

The hearts of young people are always the same, and even today, in the Canary Islands, in a small heart-shaped cardboard box, they placed more than a hundred hearts with the names of Nain, Rocio, Armiche, Mustapha, Xousef, Ainoha, Desiree, Abdjalil, Beatrice and Ibrahim, Yone and Mohamed and a hundred others, simply expressing something that came from the heart; sincere things of great value like these:

- Thank you for making this possible.
- Thank you for the second chance you gave me in life.
- I keep fighting. With you it is easier.
- Thank you for giving me joy again.
- Thank you for helping me to believe that I can do everything I set my mind to.
- Thank you for the food and the home.
- Thank you from the bottom of my heart.
- Thank you for helping me.
- Thank you for this opportunity to grow.
- Thank you for believing in us young people despite our situation....

And hundreds of similar expressions, addressed to Don Bosco and to the educators who in Don Bosco's name are with them every day.

I listened to what they shared with me, I heard some of their stories (many of them full of pain); I saw their looks and their smiles; and I felt very proud to be a Salesian and to belong to such a splendid family of brothers, educators and young people.

I thought, once again, that Don Bosco is more relevant and necessary than ever; and I thought of the educational finesse with which we accompany so many young people with great respect and sensitivity to their dreams.

Together we said a prayer addressed to the God who loves us all, to the God who blesses his sons and daughters. A prayer that made Christians, Muslims and Hindus feel at ease. At that moment, without any doubt, the Spirit of God embraced us all.

I was happy because, just as Don Bosco welcomed his first boys at Valdocco, the same thing is happening today in so many Valdocco's around the world.

When we speak of God's love, for many it is too abstract a concept. In the Sacred Heart of Jesus, God's love for us has become concrete, visible and perceivable. For us God has taken a human heart, in the Heart of Jesus he has opened his heart to us. Thus, through Jesus, we can bring our young people to the heart of God.

Don Bosco to Fr Orione: We will always be friends

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

An emotional recollection of the saintly Father Orione.

Who does not know the song *Giù dai colli, un dì lontano con la sola madre accanto* (Down from the hills, one day a long time ago, with just his mother beside him)? Very few, I would say, since it is still sung in dozens of languages in over 100 countries around the world. But I would think that very few would know the comment made by the elderly Fr (St) Louis Orione during the (sung!) mass on 31 January 1940 by the *Orionians* from Tortona at 4.45 a.m. (exactly the time when Don Bosco had died 52 years earlier). Here are his precise words (taken from Orione sources):

"The hymn to Don Bosco that begins with the words *Giù dai*

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

His memories of that day

Fr Orione continued: "The Lord gave me the grace to be present, in 1929, at that glorious moment, which was a triumph in Turin in celebration, amidst unspeakable joy and enthusiasm, I too was close to the triumphal float. The whole journey was made on foot from Valsalice to the Oratory. And with me, immediately behind it, was a man in a red shirt, a Garibaldino; we were close together, side by side. He was one of the oldest of Don Bosco's first pupils; when he heard that it was Don Bosco's body that was being transported, he too was behind the carriage. And they all sang: 'Don Bosco returns among the young once more.' It was a moment of joy; the young people sang and the people of Turin waved handkerchiefs and threw flowers. We also passed in front of the Royal Palace. I remember that the Prince of Piedmont stood on the balcony, surrounded by generals; the carriage stopped for a moment and he nodded his approval; the Salesian superiors bowed their heads, as if to thank him for that act of homage to Don Bosco. Then the carriage reached Mary Help of Christians. And a few

minutes later the Prince also came, surrounded by members of the Royal Household, to pay an act of devotion to the new Blessed."

"My best years"

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



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

A total friendship, theirs, which is why it is not surprising that shortly afterwards 15-year-old Louis immediately joined the list of boys at Valdocco who offered their lives to the Lord so that their beloved Father's life may be preserved. The Lord did not accept his heroic request, but "reciprocated" his generosity with Don Bosco's first miracle after his death: on contact with his corpse, the index finger of Louis' right hand was reattached and healed. The boy, who was left-handed, had cut it while he was preparing small pieces of bread to be placed on Don Bosco's body which was displayed in the church of St Francis de Sales, to distribute as relics to the many devotees.

Nonetheless, the young man did not become a Salesian: on the contrary, he had the certainty that the Lord was calling him to another vocation, precisely after having "consulted" with Don Bosco before his tomb at Valsalice. And so Providence

wanted there to be one less Salesian, but one more religious Family, the Orione Family, which would radiate, in new and original ways, the “imprint” received from Don Bosco: love for the Blessed Sacrament and the sacraments of confession and communion, devotion to Our Lady and love for the Pope and the Church, the preventive system, apostolic charity towards “poor and abandoned” young people, etc.

And Fr Rua?

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

When the news of his death reached him, he sent a telegram to Fr (Blessed) Philip Rinaldi: “a past pupil pupil of the venerable Don Bosco, I join with the Salesians in mourning the death of Fr Rua who was an unforgettable spiritual father to me. We are all praying here. Fr Orione.” The Salesians wanted to bury Fr Rua at Valsalice, next to Don Bosco, but there were difficulties from the city authorities. Immediately with another telegram, on 9 April, Fr Orione offered Fr Rinaldi his help: “If difficulties arise for burying Fr Rua at Valsalice, please telegraph me, I could easily help them.”

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

Don Bosco's benefactors

Doing good for the young requires not only dedication but also huge material and financial resources. Don Bosco used to say "I trust in Divine Providence without limit, but Providence also wants to be helped by our own immense efforts"; said and done.

Don Bosco gave 20 precious "Reminders" to his departing missionaries, on 11 November 1875. The first was: "Seek souls, but not money, nor honours nor dignity."

Don Bosco himself had to go in search of money all his life, but he wanted his sons not to toil in seeking money, not to worry when they lacked it, not to lose their heads when they found some, but to be ready for every humiliation and sacrifice in the search for what was needed, with full trust in Divine Providence who would never fail them. And he gave them the example.

"The Saint of millions!"

Don Bosco handled large sums of money in his lifetime, collected at the price of enormous sacrifices, humiliating begging, lotteries that were hard to organise, endless wanderings. With this money he gave bread, clothing, lodging and work to many poor boys, bought houses, opened hospices and colleges, built churches, launched great printing and publishing initiatives, launched Salesian missions in America and, finally, already weakened by the aches and pains of old age, he erected the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome, in obedience to the Pope.

Not everyone understood the spirit that animated him, not everyone appreciated his multifaceted activities and the anticlerical press indulged in ridiculous insinuations. On 4 April 1872 the Turin satirical periodical *Il Fischietto* said

Don Bosco had "fabulous funds", while at his death Luigi Pietracqua published a blasphemous sonnet in *Il Birichin* in which he called Don Bosco a cunning man "capable of drawing blood from a turnip" and described him as "the Saint of millions" because he would have counted millions by the handful without earning them through his own sweat.

Those who know the style of poverty in which the Saint lived and died can easily understand how unfair Pietracqua's satire was. Yes, Don Bosco was a skilful steward of the money that the charity of good people brought him, but he never kept anything for himself. The furniture in his little room at Valdocco consisted of an iron bed, a small table, a chair and, later, a sofa, with no curtains on the windows, no carpets, not even a bedside table. In his last illness, tormented by thirst, when they provided him with seltzer water to give him relief. He did not want to drink it, believing it to be an expensive drink. They needed to assure him that it only cost seven cents a bottle. A few days before he died, he ordered Fr Viglietti to look in the pockets of his clothes and give Fr Rua his purse, so that he could die without a penny in his pocket.

Philanthropic Aristocracy

Don Bosco's *Biographical Memoirs* and the *Epistolario* provide a wealth of documentation regarding his benefactors. There we find the names of almost 300 aristocratic families. It is impossible to list them all here.

Certainly, we must not make the mistake of limiting Don Bosco's benefactors to the aristocracy alone. He obtained help and disinterested collaboration from thousands of other people from the ecclesiastical and civil classes, the middle class and ordinary people, starting with the incomparable benefactor who was Mamma Margaret.

But let us look at one aristocrat who distinguished himself in supporting Don Bosco's work, pointing to the simple and delicate and at the same time, courageous

and apostolic attitude that he knew how to keep in order to receive and do good.

In 1866 Don Bosco addressed a letter to Countess Enrichetta Bosco di Ruffino, née Riccardi, who had been in contact with the Valdocco Oratory for years. She was one of the women who met weekly to repair the clothes of the young boarders. Here is the text:

“Worthy Countess,

I cannot go and visit you as I would like to, but I am coming in the person of Jesus Christ hidden beneath these rags which I recommend to you, so that in your charity you may mend them. It is a poor thing in temporal terms, but I hope that it will be a treasure for eternity for you.

God bless you, your labours and all your family, while I have the honour to be able to profess myself with full esteem

Your most obliged servant”.

Fr Bosco Gio. Turin, 16 May 1866



Don Bosco's letter to benefactors

In this letter Don Bosco apologises for not being able to go in person to visit the Countess. In return he sends her a bundle of rags from the Oratory boys to be patched up... *roba grama* (Piedmontese for rubbish) before human beings, but a precious treasure to those who clothe the naked for the love of Christ!

Some have tried to interpret Don Bosco's relations with the rich as ingratiating himself with the wealthy. But there is an authentic evangelical spirit here!

Father Carlo Crespi “apóstol de los pobres”

On 23 March 2023, the Church – after the examination of the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity shown God and neighbour, and the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance and the other related virtues, practised to a heroic degree –recognised the Servant of God Carlo Crespi Croci, Professed Priest of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco as Venerable.

Like John Bosco a dream marked his life

Going to Cuenca, in the square in front of the shrine of Mary Help of Christians, one’s gaze immediately falls on an interesting and imposing group of sculptures dedicated to an Italian whom the people of Cuenca still remember as the “apóstol de los pobres”. More specifically, it is a monument depicting a priest and a child at his side looking at him with filial affection. This extraordinary man who marked the human, spiritual and cultural rebirth of a people previously brought to its knees by poverty, backwardness and political conflicts is Father Carlo Crespi, a Salesian missionary. Originally from Legnano (Milan), he was born in 1891 as the third of thirteen children, to a wealthy and influential family. From an early age he showed particular intelligence, curiosity and generosity, which he put at the service of his father, a farmer on a local estate, and his mother Luigia, from whom he learnt at a very early age to pray the rosary and to keep the name of Mary always “on his lips”, as one of his former pupils would testify many years later. Like his brother Delfino, also a future missionary, he showed a particular interest in the beauty of creation, an inclination that would come in handy many years later when he found himself in the unexplored forests of Ecuador classifying new plant species. He attended the local school and at the age of twelve had his first

encounter with Salesians at the St Ambrose Institute in Milan. During his college years, following the teachings of St John Bosco, he learnt to put into practice the inseparable combination of joy and work. In this same period a "revelatory dream" marked the first important turning point in his life. He wrote in some notebooks: "The Virgin appeared in a dream and showed me a scene: on one side, the devil who wanted to grab me and drag me; on the other, the Divine Redeemer, with the cross, was showing me another way. I was dressed as a priest and had a beard; I stood on an old pulpit, around me a multitude of people eager to hear my words. The pulpit was not in a church, but in a hut." These were the first steps of the call to Salesian life that grew stronger and stronger. In 1903, he completed his studies at the Salesian high school in Valsalice. He told his father, who was worried about his future, confirming his priestly vocation in the Society of St John Bosco: "You see, father, a vocation is not imposed on you by anyone; it is God who calls; I feel called to become a Salesian." On 8 September 1907 he made his first religious profession, in 1910 his perpetual profession. In 1917 he was ordained a priest. These were the years dedicated to the passionate study of philosophy, theology and the teaching of natural sciences, music and mathematics. At the University of Padua he made an important scientific discovery: the existence of a hitherto unknown microorganism. In 1921 he received a doctorate in natural sciences, specialising in botany, and shortly afterwards a diploma in music.

Missionary in Ecuador

It was 1923 when he left as a missionary and landed in Guayaquil, Ecuador. He reached Quito and finally settled in Cuenca, where he remained until his death. "Bless me in the Lord and pray for me so that I may become a saint, so that I may immolate myself on the altar of pain and sacrifice every moment of my life," he wrote in 1925 to the then Rector Major Fr Philip Rinaldi, manifesting his desire to sacrifice himself completely for the missionary cause. Father Crespi spent the

first six months of 1925 in the forests of the Sucúa-Macas area. He set out to gain an in-depth knowledge of the language, territory, culture and spirituality of the Shuar ethnic group. Using his knowledge in the different areas of culture, he began a revolutionary and innovative work of evangelisation, made up of exchange and mutual enrichment of very different cultures. He was initially greeted with distrust, but Father Carlo brought interesting objects with him such as cloth, ammunition, mirrors, needles, and had the manner of someone who cared. He got to know the indigenous myths and re-presented them in a new interpretation, transformed and enriched by the light of the Catholic faith. Father Carlo soon became a friend, and the Christian message, conveyed with care and respect, was no longer the religion of the foreigner, but something that the people recognised as their own. Father Crespi realised that “only the man who approaches others, not to draw them into his own life, but to help them become ever more fully themselves, can truly be called a father” (Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter ‘Fratelli tutti’, 3 October 2020).

A hundred-year-old child!



The dream dimension marked his life again in 1936 when he fell ill with typhus and, despite the doctors’ predictions, recovered saying: “Around three o’clock in the morning, the door opened and Saint Teresa came in and said to me: *puer centum annorum, infirmitas haec non est ad mortem, longa tibi restat vita* (hundred-year-old child: this illness is not for death, you have a long life left).” Father Carlo was then 45 years old, and would live another 46 years. Now settled for good in Cuenca, the Servant of God brought about a real “*Revolución blanca*”. He set up an unprecedented work of human development, founding several works: the festive oratory, the Orientalist School for the formation of Salesian missionaries, the Cornelio Merchán primary school, the school of arts and

crafts (later the Salesian Technical College), the Quinta Agronomica or the first agricultural institute in the region, the Salesian Theatre, the Gran Casa of the community, the Dominic Savio Orphanage, the Carlo Crespi museum, still famous today for its numerous scientific exhibits. From Italy he brought in means and specialised personnel to invest in his projects.

Using his extraordinary knowledge in science and music, he organised conferences and concerts in embassies, theatres and forged friendships with leading families in Guayaquil and the capital. He established a relaxed relationship with the local government, although the latter was strongly anti-clerical. He obtained free customs clearance and coverage of transport costs to Cuenca for hundreds of crates of materials.

His works quickly became the beating heart of epoch-making social and cultural changes for the benefit of the population, especially the poorest. Father Carlo created new possibilities for life and did so through a project of evangelisation and development that gave the Cuenca population first and foremost autonomy for growth. As St John Paul II authoritatively stated in his 1991 Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, "It is not merely a matter of 'giving from one's surplus', but of helping entire peoples which are presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development."

Cuenca took on the face of a Church capable of inserting the teaching of the Gospel into an experiential model: the teaching of scripture and fundamental work activities (farming, livestock breeding and weaving) became the channel of access for making Jesus known to everyone. In perfect adherence to the teaching of St John Bosco, the Servant of God applied the "preventive system", offering young people in particular a kind of "preventive grace", an advance of trust to give possibilities for change, conversion, growth. Looking to Don Bosco, he knew how to harmonise pedagogy and theology, animating young people with games, films, theatrical

activities, celebrations and not least, catechism. For Father Carli, it was already possible to glimpse future good fathers of families. His exquisitely Eucharistic and Marian spirituality guided him in other exceptional undertakings, such as the organisation of the First Diocesan Eucharistic Congress in Cuenca in 1938 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the death of St John Bosco. By virtue of its devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, Cuenca was once again confirmed as a Eucharistic City in those years. Immersed in apostolic labours and official business, Father Carlo never forgot his poor. Generations of Cuencans found in him a generous heart, capable of hospitality and fatherliness. In one hand he held a bell to “awaken” some young man in need of correction with a tap on the head; in the other he clutched food and money to donate to his poor. The old and faded cassock, the worn-out shoes, the frugal diet, the special dedication to children and the poor did not go unnoticed in the eyes of the Cuencans. Father Crespi was poor among the poor. The people welcomed him as a chosen Cuencan and begin to call him “Saint Carlo Crespi”. The civil authorities, won over by Father Crespi’s work, responded with numerous honours: he was declared “most illustrious inhabitant of Cuenca in the 20th century”. He received a doctorate *Honoris Causa post mortem* from the Salesian Polytechnic University.

Moved by hope

In 1962, a fire, probably the work of an arsonist, destroyed the Cornelio Merchàn Institute, the fruit of many years’ hard work. Father Carlo Crespi’s certainty that Mary Help of Christians would help him this time too became contagious: the inhabitants of Cuenca regained confidence and participated without hesitation in the reconstruction. A witness will recount years later: “the day after (the fire) Father Crespi was seen with his little bell and his big saucer collecting contributions from the city.”

By now elderly and tired, he was still in the shrine of Mary Help of Christians spreading devotion to the Virgin with the

same enthusiasm as in the past. He heard confessions and counselled endless lines of faithful. When it came to listening to them, schedules, meals and even sleep no longer counted. It was not even uncommon for Father Carlo to get up in the middle of the night to hear the confession of a sick or dying person. People had no doubts: he only looked at his neighbour with God's eyes. He knew how to recognise sin and weakness, without ever being scandalised or crushed by it. He did not judge, but understood, respected, loved. For the Cuencans, his confessional became the place where, in the words of Pope Francis, Father Carlo alleviated the wounds of humanity "with the oil of consolation" and "bandaged them with mercy" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 2015). And as he healed, he w in turn healed by the experience of mercy received. The programme foretold in his youth by the "revelatory dream" from the Virgin Mary had finally found total fulfilment.

On 30 April 1982, at the age of 90, Father Carlo Crespi, in the silence and seclusion of the Santa Inés Clinic in Cuenca, held the rosary in his hands as his mother had taught him. It was time to close his eyes to this world to open them on eternity. A stream of moved and grieving people attended the funeral. Certain that it was a saint who had died, many flocked to touch his body one last time with some object; they hoped to still receive the protection of the father who had just left them. Even his confessional was stormed to preserve some small part of him.

Thus ended the earthly life of a man who, although aware of the remarkably comfortable life he could have led in his own home, accepted the Salesian call and, as a true imitator of Don Bosco, became a witness to a Church that exhorts one "to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel" (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013). Father Carlo Crespi's life tells the Christians of yesterday and today how prayer can and must be inserted into the concrete of daily action, stimulating and inspiring it. While remaining totally Salesian

and totally Marian, he was a credible witness of an “evangelising style capable of impacting life” (Pope Francis, Address to Italian Catholic Action, 3 May 2014). To this day, his tomb and monument continue to be perennially adorned with fresh flowers and plaques of thanksgiving. While the reputation for sanctity of this illustrious son of Cuenca shows no sign of diminishing, the completion of the *Positio super virtutibus* marks an important step in the Cause of Beatification. All that remains is to await the wise judgement of the Church with confidence.

Mariafrancesca Oggianu

Collaborator of the Salesian Postulation



St Francis de Sales. The Eucharist (6/8)

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

THE EUCHARIST IN SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES (6/8)

Francis received his First Communion and Confirmation at the age of about nine. From then on he received Communion every week or at least once a month.

God took possession of his heart and Francis would remain faithful to this friendship that would gradually become the love of his life.

His fidelity to Christian life continued and was strengthened during the ten years in Paris. “He received communion at least

once a month, if he could not do so more often.” And this for ten years!

Regarding his time in Padua we know that he went to Mass every day and that he received communion once a week. The Eucharist united with prayer became the nourishment of his Christian life and vocation. It is in this profound unity with the Lord that he perceived His will: it is here that the desire to be “all of God” matured.

Francis was ordained a priest on 18 December 1593 and the Eucharist would be at the heart of his days, and his strength for spending himself for others.

Here are some testimonies taken from the Beatification Process:

“It was easy to notice how he kept himself in deep recollection and attention before God: his eyes modestly lowered, his face recollected with a sweetness and serenity so great that those who observed him carefully were struck and moved by it.”

“When he celebrated Holy Mass he was completely different from how he usually was: a serene face, without distraction and, at the moment of communion, those who saw him were deeply impressed by his devotion.”

St Vincent de Paul adds:

“When I repeated his words to myself, I felt such an admiration for him that I was led to see in him the man who best reproduced the Son of God living on earth.”

We already know of his departure in 1594 as a missionary to the Chablais.

He spent his first months in the shelter of the Allinges fortress. Visiting what remains of this fortress, one is impressed by the chapel which has remained intact: small, dark, cold, made of stone. Here Francis celebrated the

Eucharist every morning at around four o'clock and paused in prayer before going down to Thonon with a heart full of charity and mercy, drawn from the divine sacrament.

Francis treated people with respect, indeed with compassion, and "Some wished to make themselves feared; but he desired only to be loved, and to enter men's hearts through the doorway of affection" (J.P. Camus).

It is the Eucharist that sustained his initial struggles: he did not respond to insults, provocations, lynching; he related to everyone with warmth.

His first sermon as a sub-deacon had been on the subject of the Eucharist and it would certainly serve him well in the Chablais, because "this august sacrament" would be his warhorse: in the sermons he gave in the church of St Hippolytus, he would often address this subject and expound the Catholic point of view with clarity and passion.

The following testimony, addressed to his friend A. Favre, tells of the quality and ardour of his preaching on such an important subject:

"Yesterday M. d'Avully and the elders of the city, as they are called, came openly to my preaching, because they had heard that I was to speak about the august sacrament of the altar. They had such a desire to hear from me the exposition of what Catholics believe and their proofs concerning this mystery that, not having dared to come publicly, for fear of seeming to be ignoring the law they had imposed on themselves, they listened to me from a place where they could not be seen."

Little by little, the Body of the Lord infused his pastor's heart with gentleness, meekness, goodness, so that even his preacher's voice was affected: a calm and benevolent tone, never aggressive or polemical!

"I am convinced that he who preaches with love, preaches sufficiently against heretics, even if he does not say a single word or argue with them."

More eloquent than any treatise is this experience that took place on 25 May 1595.

At three in the morning, while engrossed in deep meditation on the most holy and august sacrament of the Eucharist, he felt moved to rapture by the Holy Spirit in an abundance of sweetness... and since his heart was overwhelmed by such delight, he was finally forced to throw himself to the ground and exclaim: "Lord, hold back the waves of your grace; withdraw them from me because I can no longer bear the greatness of your sweetness, which forces me to prostrate myself."

In 1596, after more than two years of catechesis, he decided to celebrate the three Christmas Masses. They were celebrated amidst general enthusiasm and emotion. Francis was happy! This midnight Mass on Christmas 1596 was one of the high points of his life. In this Mass was the Church, the Catholic Church re-established in its living foundation.

The Council of Trent had advocated the practice of the **Forty Hour Devotion**, which consisted of the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for three consecutive days by the entire Christian community.

At the beginning of September 1597, they took place in Annemasse, on the outskirts of Geneva, in the presence of the bishop, Francis and other collaborators, with **much greater fruit than hoped for**. They were intense days of prayer, processions, sermons, masses. Over forty parishes participated with an incredible number of people.

Given this success, the following year they were held in Thonon. It was a feast lasting several days that exceeded all expectations. Everything ended late at night, with the last sermon given by Francis. He preached on the Eucharist.

Many scholars of the life and works of the saint maintain that only his great love for the Eucharist can explain the 'miracle' of the Chablais, that is, how this young priest was able to bring the entire vast region back to the Church in

just four years.

And this love lasted all his life, until the end. In the last meeting he had in Lyons with his Daughters, the Visitandines, by then near to death, he spoke to them about confession and communion.

What was the Eucharist for our saint? It was first and foremost:

The heart of his day, which meant he lived in intimate communion with God

"I have not yet told you about the sun of the spiritual exercises: the most holy and supreme Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Mass, the centre of the Christian religion, the heart of devotion, the soul of piety."

It was the confident handing over of his life to God whom he asks for strength to continue his mission with humility and charity.

"If the world asks you why you receive communion so often, answer that it is to learn to love God, to purify you from your imperfections, to free you from your miseries, to find strength in your weaknesses and consolation in your afflictions. Two kinds of people must receive communion often: the perfect, because being well-disposed they would do wrong not to approach the fountain and source of perfection; and the imperfect in order to strive for perfection. The strong not to weaken and the weak to strengthen themselves. The sick to seek healing and the healthy not to become sick."

The Eucharist creates a profound unity in Francis with so many people

"This sacrament not only unites us to Jesus Christ, but also to our neighbour, with those who partake of the same food and makes us one with them. And one of the main fruits is mutual charity and gentleness of heart towards one another since we belong to the same Lord and in Him we are united heart to heart with one another."

It is a gradual transformation in Jesus

“Those who have good bodily digestion feel a strengthening for the whole body, because of the general distribution that is made of the food. So, My daughter, those who have good spiritual digestion feel that Jesus Christ, who is their food, spreads and communicates to all parts of their soul and body. They have Jesus Christ in their brain, in their heart, in their chest, in their eyes, in their hands, in their ears, in their feet. But what does this Saviour do everywhere? He straightens everything, purifies everything, mortifies everything, enlivens everything. He loves in the heart, understands in the brain, breathes in the chest, sees in the eyes, speaks in the tongue, and so on: he does everything in everyone and then we live, not we, but it is Jesus Christ who lives in us.

It also transforms the days and nights, so that ‘Nights are days when God is in our hearts and days become nights when He is not.’”

[\(continued\)](#)

Vera Grita, Mystic of the Eucharist

On the centenary of the birth of the Servant of God Vera Grita, a laywoman and Salesian Cooperator (Rome 28 January 1923 – Pietra Ligure 22 December 1969) we offer a biographical and spiritual profile of her testimony.

Rome, Modica, Savona

Vera Grita was born in Rome on 28 January 1923, the second child of Amleto, a photographer by profession for generations, and Maria Anna Zacco della Pirrera, of noble origins. The close-knit family also included her elder sister Giuseppa (called Pina) and younger sisters Liliana and Santa Rosa (called Rosa). On 14 December of the same year Vera was baptised in the parish of San Gioacchino in Prati, also in Rome.

Even as a child Vera showed a good and mild character that would not be shaken by the negative events that befell her: at the age of eleven she had to leave her family and detach herself from her closest affections together with her younger sister Liliana, to join her paternal aunts in Modica, Sicily, who were willing to help Vera's parents who were hit by financial difficulties due to the economic crisis of 1929-1930. During this period, Vera showed her tenderness towards her younger sister by being close to her when the latter cried in the evenings for her mother. Vera was attracted by a large painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus hanging in the room where she said morning prayers and the Rosary every day with her aunts. She often remained in silence before that painting and frequently said she wanted to become a nun when she grew up. On the day of her First Communion (24 May 1934) she did not want to take off her white dress because she feared she would not sufficiently show Jesus the joy of having Him in her heart. At school she achieved good results and got on well with her classmates.

At the age of seventeen, in 1940, she returned to her family. The family moved to Savona and Vera graduated from Teachers College the following year. Vera was twenty years old when she had to face a new and painful separation due to the premature death of her father Amleto (1943) and renounced pursuing the university studies to which she aspired, in order to help the family financially.

On the day of First Communion

The drama of war

But it was the Second World War with the bombing of Savona in 1944 that would cause Vera irreparable harm: it would determine the subsequent course of her life. Vera was trampled by the fleeing crowd seeking shelter in a tunnel.



Vera around 14-15 years old

Her condition was known in medical terms as *crush syndrome*, the physical consequences that follow bombings, earthquakes, structural collapses, as a result of which a limb or the whole body is crushed. What then occurs is muscle damage that affects the whole body, especially the kidneys. As a result of being crushed, Vera would suffer lumbar and back injuries that would cause irreparable damage to her health with fevers, headaches and pleurisy. This dramatic event was the beginning of Vera's 'Way of the Cross' that would last 25 years, during which she would alternate long hospital stays with her work. At the age of 32, she was diagnosed with Addison's disease, which would consume her, making her body weak: Vera would only weigh 40 kilos. At the age of 36, Vera underwent a total hysterectomy (1959), which caused her premature menopause and exacerbated the asthenia she was already suffering from as a result of Addison's disease.

Despite her precarious physical condition, Vera took and won a competition as a primary school teacher. She devoted herself to teaching during the last ten years of her earthly life, serving in schools in the Ligurian hinterland that were difficult to reach (Rialto, Erli, Alpicella, Deserto di Varazze), arousing esteem and affection among her colleagues, parents and pupils.

Salesian Cooperator

In Savona, in the Salesian parish of Mary Help of Christians, she attended Mass and regularly frequented the sacrament of Penance. Since 1963 her confessor was the Salesian Fr Giovanni Bocchi. A Salesian Cooperator since 1967, she realised her call in the total gift of self to the Lord, who in an extraordinary way gave himself to her, in the depths of her heart, with the "Voice", a "Word" telling her about the Work of the Living Tabernacles. She submitted all her writings to her spiritual director, Fr Gabriello Zucconi, also a Salesian, and guarded the secret of her call in the silence of her heart, led by the divine Master and the Virgin Mary who would accompany her along the path of her hidden life, a life stripped of everything, a life of self-emptying.

Under the impulse of divine grace and accepting the mediation of her spiritual guides, Vera Grita responded to God's gift by witnessing through her life marked by the fatigue of illness to the encounter with the Risen One, and by dedicating herself with heroic generosity to teaching and educating her pupils, contributing to the needs of her family and bearing witness to a life of evangelical poverty. Centred and steadfast in the God she loved and who supported her, she showed great inner firmness in bearing the trials and sufferings of life. On the basis of this inner firmness, she bore witness to a Christian life of patience and constancy in goodness.

She died on 22 December 1969 in Pietra Ligure at Santa Corona hospital in a small room where she had spent the last six months of her life, in a crescendo of sufferings accepted and lived in union with the Crucified Jesus. "Vera's soul," wrote Fr Giuseppe Borra, a Salesian, her first biographer, "with her messages and letters, enters the ranks of charismatic souls called to enrich the Church with flames of love for God and for Jesus in the Eucharist for the expansion of the Kingdom. She is one of those grains of wheat that Heaven has let fall to Earth to bear fruit, in her own time, in silence and concealment."



On pilgrimage to Lourdes

Vera of Jesus

Vera Grita's life unfolded over the short span of 46 years marked by dramatic historical events such as the great economic crisis of 1929-1930 and the Second World War, and then ended on the threshold of another significant historical event: *the 1968 protests*, which would have profound repercussions at a cultural, social, political, religious and ecclesial level.



With some family members

Vera's life began, developed and ended in the midst of these historical events and she suffered their dramatic consequences at a family, emotional and physical level. At the same time, her story shows how she went through these events, facing them with the strength of her faith in Jesus Christ, thus bearing witness to *heroic faithfulness* to crucified and risen Love. Fidelity that, at the end of her earthly life, the Lord would repay by giving her a new name: *Vera of Jesus*. "I have given you my Holy Name, and from now on you shall be called and be 'Vera of Jesus'" (Message of 3 December 1968).

Tried by various illnesses that, over time, describe a situation of generalised and irrecoverable physical wear and tear, Vera lived in the world without being of the world, maintaining inner stability and equilibrium due to her union with Jesus in the Eucharist received daily, and to the awareness of the Eucharistic remaining permanently present in her soul. It was therefore the Holy Mass that was the centre of Vera's daily and spiritual life, where, as a small "drop of water", she joined the wine to be inseparably united to the infinite Love that continually gives itself, saves and sustains the world.

A few months before her death, Vera wrote to her

spiritual father, Fr Gabriello Zucconi: "The illnesses I have carried inside me for more than twenty years have degenerated. Devoured by fever and pain in all my bones, *I am alive in the Holy Mass.*" And on another occasion: "The flame of the Holy Mass remains, the divine spark that animates me, gives me life, then work, the children, the family, the impossibility of finding a quiet place where I can isolate myself to pray, or the physical tiredness after school."

The Work of the Living Tabernacles

During the long years of suffering, aware of her frailty and human limitations, Vera learnt to entrust herself to God and to abandon herself totally to his will. She maintained this docile obedience even when the Lord communicated the *Work of the Living Tabernacles* to her in the last 2 years and 4 months of her earthly life. Her love for God's will led Vera to the total gift of herself: first with private vows and the vow of being a "little victim" for priests (2 February 1965); later with the offering of her life (5 November 1968) for the birth and development of the *Work of Living Tabernacles*, always in full obedience to her spiritual director.

On 19 September 1967, she began the mystical experience that invited her to live fully the joy and dignity of being a child of God, in communion with the Trinity and in Eucharistic intimacy with Jesus received in Holy Communion and present in the Tabernacle. "The wine and the water are us: you and I, I and you. We are one: I am digging in you, digging, digging to build me a temple: let me work, do not put obstacles in my way [...] the will of my Father is this: that I remain in you, and you in me. Together we shall bear great fruit." There are 186 messages that make up the *Work of the Living Tabernacles* that Vera, struggling with the fear of being a victim of deception, wrote in obedience to Fr Zucconi.

"*Take me with you*" expresses in a simple way Jesus' invitation to Vera. Take me with you where? Where you

live: Vera was educated and prepared by Jesus to live in union with Him. Jesus wanted to enter Vera's life, her family, the school where she taught. An invitation addressed to all Christians. Jesus wants to come out of the Church of stone and wants to live in our hearts with the Eucharist, with the grace of Eucharistic permanence in our souls. He wants to come with us where we go, to live our family life, and he wants to reach out to those who live far from him by living in us.

Following the Salesian charism

In the *Work of the Living Tabernacles* there are explicit references to Don Bosco and his "da mihi animas cetera tolle", to live in union with God and trust in Mary Help of Christians, to give God through tireless apostolate that cooperates in the salvation of humanity. The Work, by the Lord's will, is entrusted in the first instance to the sons of Don Bosco for its realisation and diffusion in parishes, religious institutes and the Church: "I have chosen the Salesians because they live with the young, but their life of apostolate must be more intense, more active, more heartfelt."

The Cause for the Beatification of the Servant of God Vera Grita was launched on 22 December 2019, the 50th anniversary of her death, in Savona with the presentation of the *Supplex libello* to diocesan Bishop Calogero Marino by the Postulator for the Salesian Congregation, Fr Pierluigi Cameroni. The Diocesan Inquest was held from 10 April to 15 May 2022 at the Curia in Savona. The Dicastery for the Causes of Saints gave juridical validity to this Inquest on 16 December 2022.

As the Rector Major wrote in this year's Strenna: "Vera Grita attests first of all to an all-embracing Eucharistic orientation, which became explicit especially in her final years of life. She did not think in terms of programmes, apostolic initiatives, projects: she accepted the fundamental "project" that is Jesus himself, until he made her life his own. Today's world attests to a great need for the

Eucharist. Her journey through the strenuous labour of her days also offers a new lay perspective on holiness: becoming an example of conversion, acceptance and sanctification for the “poor”, the “frail” and the “sick” who can recognise themselves and find hope in her. As a Salesian Cooperator, Vera Grita lived and worked, taught and encountered people with her strong Salesian sensitivity: from the loving-kindness of her discreet but effective presence, to her ability to be loved by children and families; from the pedagogy of kindness that she carried out with her constant smile, to her generous readiness with which, regardless of the inconvenience, she turned in preference to the least, to the little ones, to the distant, the forgotten; from her generous passion for God and His Glory to the way of the cross, letting everything be taken from her in her illness.”



In the garden of Santa Corona in 1966

The invisible other Don Boscós

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

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

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

The other Don Boscos

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

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

Bishops, priests, nuns, lay Salesians, members of the Salesian Family: all figures, men and women, who without being saints – in our research we excluded saints and those already on their way to the altars – have fully realised Don Bosco's

educational mission in different spheres and roles: as educators and priests, as professors and teachers, animators of oratories and youth centres, founders and directors of educational works, formators of vocations and new religious institutes, as writers and musicians, architects and builders of churches and colleges, artists of wood and painting, missionaries *ad gentes*, witnesses of the faith in prison, simple Salesians and simple Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Among them, not a few have often lived a life of hard sacrifices, overcoming obstacles of all kinds, learning very difficult languages, often risking death for lack of acceptable sanitary conditions, impossible climatic conditions, hostile and persecutory political regimes, even actual attacks. The latest of these happened just as I was leaving for Nairobi: Spanish Salesian, [Fr Cesare Fernández](#), murdered in cold blood on 15 February 2018 at the border between Togo and Burkina Faso. One of the most recent Salesians 'martyrs', we could call him, knowing the individual as I did.

A story to learn about



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

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

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

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

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

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

Let us briefly introduce these new faces of Don Bosco.

1	Antonio COJAZZI, Fr.	1880-1953	brilliant educator	Educators in the field	EU
2	Domenico MORETTI, Fr.	1900-1989	experience in Salesian oratories with the poorest young people	Educators in the field	EU
3	Samuele VOSTI, Fr.	1874-1939	creator and promoter of a renewed festive oratory in Valdocco	Educators in the field	EU
4	Karl ZIEGLER, Fr.	1914-1990	nature lover and scout	Educators in the field	EU
5	Alfonsina FINCO, Sr.	1869-1934	dedication to abandoned children	Educators in the field	EU
6	Margherita MARIANI, Sr.	1858-1939	Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Rome	Educators in the field	EU
7	Sisto COLOMBO, Fr.	1878-1938	man of culture and mystical soul	Educators in the field	EU
8	Franc WALLAND, Fr.	1887-1975	theologian and provincial	Educators in the field	EU
9	Maria ZUCCHI, Sr.	1875-1949	made Salesian mark on the Don Bosco Institute in Messina	Educators in the field	EU
10	Clotilde MORANO, Sr.	1885-1963	the teaching of women's physical education	Educators in the field	EU

11	Annetta URI, Sr.	1903-1989	from the desk to building sites: the courage to build the future of the school	Educators in the field	EU
12	Frances PEDRICK, Sr.	1887-1981	the first Daughter of Mary Help of Christians to graduate from Oxford University	Educators in the field	EU
13	Giuseppe CACCIA, Bro.	1881-1963	a life dedicated to Salesian publishing	Educators in the field	EU
14	Rufillo UGUCCIONI, Fr.	1891-1966	writer for children, evangeliser and disseminator of Salesian values	Educators in the field	EU
15	Flora FORNARA, Sr.	1902-1971	a life for educational theatre	Educators in the field	EU
16	Gaspar MESTRE, Bro.	1888-1962	the Salesian school of carving, sculpture and decoration in Sarriá (Barcelona)	Educators in the field	EU
17	Wictor GRABELSKI, Fr.	1857-1902	a forerunner of Salesian work in Poland	Educators in the field	EU
18	Antoni HLOND, Fr.	1884-1963	musician, composer, founder of a school for organists	Initiators	EU

19	Carlo TORELLLO, Fr.	1886-1967	popular devotion and civic memory in Latina	Initiators	EU
20	Jan KAJZER Bro.	1892-1976	engineer co-author of the Polish “art deco” style and moderniser of the Salesian vocational school in Oświęcim	Initiators	EU
21	Antonio CAVOLI, Fr.	1888-1972	founder of religious congregation in Japan inspired by the Salesian charism	Initiators	EU
22	Iside MALGRATI, Sr.	1904-1992	innovative Salesian in printing, school and vocational training	Initiators	EU
23	Anna JUZEK, Sr.	1879-1957	contribution to the establishment of the works of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Poland	Initiators	EU
24	Mária ČERNÁ, Sr.	1928-2011	basis for the rebirth of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Slovakia	Initiators	EU

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

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

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

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

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

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