

# Don Bosco's devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

*Don Bosco's devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus originated from the revelations to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque in the monastery of Paray-le-Monial: Christ, showing his pierced Heart crowned with thorns, asked for a feast of reparation on the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi. Despite opposition, the cult spread because that Heart, the seat of divine love, recalls the charity manifested on the cross and in the Eucharist. Don Bosco invites young people to honour it constantly, especially in the month of June, by reciting the Crown and performing acts of reparation that obtain copious indulgences and the twelve promises of peace, mercy, and holiness.*

Devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is growing every day, listen dear young people, to how it originated. There lived in France, in the monastery of the Visitation in Paray-le-Monial, a humble virgin named Margaret Alacoque, dear to God for her great purity. One day, while she was standing before the Blessed Sacrament to adore the blessed Jesus, she saw her Heavenly Spouse in the act of uncovering his breast and showing her his Most Sacred Heart, radiant with flames, surrounded by thorns, pierced by a wound, and surmounted by a cross. At the same time, she heard Him complain of the monstrous ingratitude of men and ordered her to work to ensure that on the Friday after the Octave of *Corpus Christi*, special worship would be given to His Divine Heart in reparation for the offences He receives in the Most Holy Eucharist. The pious virgin, filled with confusion, explained to Jesus how unfit she was for such a great undertaking, but she was comforted by the Lord to continue her work, and the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was established despite the fierce opposition of her adversaries.

There are many reasons for this devotion: 1) Because Jesus Christ offered us His Sacred Heart as the seat of His affections; 2) Because it is a symbol of the immense charity He showed especially by allowing His Most Sacred Heart to be wounded by a lance; 3) Because from this Heart the faithful are moved to meditate on the sufferings of Jesus Christ and to profess their gratitude to Him.

Let us therefore constantly honour this Divine Heart, which, for the many and great benefits it has already bestowed upon us and will bestow upon us, well deserves all our most humble and loving veneration.

### **Month of June**

Those who consecrate the entire month of June to the honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with some daily prayer or devout act will gain seven years of indulgence for each day and a Plenary indulgence at the end of the month.

### **Chaplet to the Sacred Heart of Jesus**

Intend to recite this Crown to the Divine Heart of Jesus Christ to make reparation for the outrages He receives in the Most Holy Eucharist from infidels, heretics, and bad Christians. Say it alone or with other people gathered together, if possible before an image of the Divine Heart or before the Blessed Sacrament:

*V. Deus, in adiutorium meum intende* (O God, come to my aid).

*R. Domine ad adjuvandum me festina* (Lord, make haste to help me).

*Glory be to the Father, etc.*

1. O most lovable Heart of my Jesus, I humbly adore your sweet kindness, which you show in a special way in the Divine Sacrament to souls who are still sinners. I am sorry to see you so ungratefully repaid, and I intend to make up for the many offences you receive in the Most Holy Eucharist from heretics, infidels, and bad Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

2. O most humble Heart of my Sacramental Jesus, I adore your profound humility in the Divine Eucharist, hiding yourself for our love under the species of bread and wine. I beg you, my Jesus, to instil this beautiful virtue in my heart; meanwhile, I will endeavour to make reparation for the many offences you receive in the Most Holy Sacrament from heretics, infidels, and bad Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

3. O Heart of my Jesus, so eager to suffer, I adore those desires so ardent to encounter your most painful Passion and to subject yourself to those wrongs foreseen by you in the Blessed Sacrament. Ah, my Jesus! I truly intend to make reparation with my very life; I would like to prevent those offences which you unfortunately receive in the Most Holy Eucharist from heretics, infidels, and bad Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

4. O most patient Heart of my Jesus, I humbly venerate your invincible patience in enduring so many pains on the Cross and so many abuses in the Divine Eucharist for love of me. O my dear Jesus! Since I cannot wash with my blood those places where you were so mistreated in both Mysteries, I promise you, O my Supreme Good, to use every means to make reparation to your Divine Heart for the many outrages you receive in the Most Holy Eucharist from heretics, infidels, and bad Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

5. O Heart of my Jesus, most loving of our souls in the admirable institution of the Most Holy Eucharist, I humbly adore that immense love which you bear us in giving us your Divine Body and Divine Blood as our nourishment. What heart is there that should not be consumed at the sight of such immense charity? O my good Jesus, give me abundant tears to weep and make reparation for the many offences you receive in the Most Holy Sacrament from heretics, infidels, and bad

Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

6. O Heart of my Jesus, thirsting for our salvation, I humbly venerate that most ardent love which prompted you to perform the ineffable Sacrifice of the Cross, renewing it every day on the Altars in the Holy Mass. Is it possible that the human heart, filled with gratitude, should not burn with such love? Yes, alas, my God; but for the future I promise to do all I can to make reparation for the many outrages you receive in this Mystery of love from heretics, infidels and bad Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

Whoever recites even the above 6 *Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glory's* before the Blessed Sacrament, the last *Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be*, being said according to the intention of the Supreme Pontiff, will gain 300 days of Indulgence each time.

**Promises made by Jesus Christ  
to Blessed Margaret Alacoque for the devotees of his Divine  
Heart**

I will give them all the graces necessary in their state of life.

I will make peace reign in their families.

I will console them in all their afflictions.

I will be their safe refuge in life, but especially at the hour of death.

I will fill every undertaking with blessings.

Sinners will find in my Heart the source and infinite ocean of mercy.

Lukewarm souls will become fervent.

Fervent souls will quickly rise to great perfection.

I will bless the house where the image of my Sacred Heart is exposed and honoured.

I will give priests the gift of moving the most hardened hearts.

The names of those who propagate this devotion will be written in my Heart and will never be erased.

**Act of reparation against blasphemies.**

God be blessed.

Blessed be His Holy Name.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.

Blessed be the Name of Jesus.

Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

Blessed be His Most Loving Heart.

Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary Most Holy.

Blessed be the Name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.

Blessed be her Holy and Immaculate Conception.

Blessed be God in His Angels and in His Saints.

An indulgence of *one year* is granted for each time: and *Plenary* to those who recite it for a month, on the day they make Holy Confession and Communion.

**Offered to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus before His Holy Image**

I, NN., to be grateful to You and to make reparation for my infidelities, I give You my heart and consecrate myself entirely to You, my beloved Jesus, and with your help I resolve never to sin again.

Pope Pius VII granted one hundred days of indulgence once a day, reciting it with a contrite heart, and a plenary indulgence once a month to those who recite it every day.

## **Prayer to the Most Sacred Heart of Mary**

God save you, Most August Queen of Peace, Mother of God; through the Most Sacred Heart of your Son Jesus, Prince of Peace, may His wrath be appeased and may He reign over us in peace. Remember, O Most Pious Virgin Mary, that it has never been heard in the world that anyone who implores your favours has been rejected or abandoned by you. Encouraged by this confidence, I present myself to you: do not despise my prayers, O Mother of the Eternal Word, but hear them favourably and grant them, O Clement, O Pious, O Sweet Virgin Mary.

Pius IX granted an indulgence of 300 days each time this prayer is recited devoutly, and a plenary indulgence once a month to those who recite it every day.

O Jesus, burning with love,  
I never wanted to offend You;  
O my sweet and good Jesus,  
I never want to offend You again.

Sacred Heart of Mary,  
Save my soul.  
Sacred Heart of my Jesus,  
Make me love you more and more.

To you I give my heart,  
Mother of my Jesus – Mother of love.

*(Source: 'Il Giovane Provveduto' (The Young Provided for') the practice of his duties in the exercises of Christian piety for the recitation of the Office of the b. Virgin of vespers all year round and the office of the dead with the addition of a choice of sacred lauds, per Priest John Bosco, 101a edition, Turin, 1885, Salesian Printing and Bookstore, S. Benigno Canavese – S. Per d'Arena – Lucca – Nizza Marittima – Marsiglia – Montevideo – Buenos-Aires', pp. 119-124 [Published Works, pp. 247-253])*

*Photo: Gilded bronze statue of the Sacred Heart on the bell tower of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome, a gift from former Salesian students of Argentina. Erected in 1931, it was crafted in Milan by Riccardo Politi based on a design by sculptor Enrico Cattaneo of Turin.*

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## **Don Bosco attends a devils meeting (1884)**

*The following pages take us into the heart of Saint John Bosco's mystical experience, through two vivid dreams he had between September and December 1884. In the first, the Saint crosses the plain towards Castelnuovo with a mysterious person and reflects on the scarcity of priests, warning that only tireless work, humility, and morality can make authentic vocations flourish. In the second dream cycle, Bosco witnesses an infernal council: monstrous demons plot to annihilate the nascent Salesian Congregation, spreading gluttony, greed for riches, freedom without obedience, and intellectual pride. Amidst omens of death, internal threats, and signs of Providence, these dreams become a dramatic mirror of the spiritual struggles that await every educator and the entire Church, offering both severe warnings and bright hopes.*

Two dreams he had in September and December provide a precious teaching. The first, which he had the night of September 29th, was a lesson to priests. He had found himself walking through a plain on his way to Castelnuovo. An old priest, whose name he did not recall, was walking beside him. Their conversation was about priests. "Work, work, work" they both said. "That should be the purpose and the glory of a priest! Never grow weary of working. How

many souls might thereby be saved! How much one could accomplish for the glory of God! If only the missionary were truly a missionary, the pastor a pastor. How many miracles of holiness would be shown forth everywhere! But unfortunately, many are work-shy and prefer their own comforts."

As they were talking on this subject, they came to a place known as Filippelli. Here, Don Bosco deplored the current scarcity of priests.

"It is true that priests are few," the other said, "but if all priests would only act as priests, there would be enough of them. Yet how many priests there are who do nothing for the ministry, whereas if they were to be active in their ministry, if they would pass their examinations as confessors, they would fill an immense void within the church. God gives us vocations in keeping with our needs. When clerics were subjected to military draft, everyone was scared, as if no one would ever become a priest.

But when these fantastic ideas subsided, we saw that instead of diminishing, the number of vocations were increasing."

"What can be done now to increase the number of vocations among boys?" Don Bosco asked.

"Nothing more than to safeguard their morality jealously," his companion said. "Morals represent the nursery garden of vocations."

*"Presbyter discat domum regere et sanctificare.* No greediness, no excessive preoccupation with temporal things. Let a priest first become a model in his own home, and then he will be the first model outside of it."

At a certain moment as they were walking, the other priest asked Don Bosco where he was going. Don Bosco pointed toward Castelnuovo.

Then, he let the other priest go ahead of him, lingering behind with a group of people who walked on ahead. After walking only a few steps, Don Bosco woke up. In the dream, we see a recollection of his former walks in that area.

## **Predicting the death of Salesians**



The second dream concerned the Congregation, and forewarned against threats that might undermine its existence. More than a dream, this was a theme that recurred in a series of dreams.

The night of December 1st, the cleric Viglietti was abruptly awakened by piercing screams coming from Don Bosco's room. He leapt out of bed immediately and listened.

In a voice choked by sobs, Don Bosco was calling, "Ah! Oh, help! Help!"

Viglietti entered his room at once and asked, "Are you sick, Don Bosco?"

"Oh, Viglietti!" he said as he woke up. "No I am not sick, but I was unable to breathe, you know. That is enough, now. Go back to bed and sleep peacefully."

Next morning when Viglietti brought him his usual cup of coffee after Mass, Don Bosco confessed, "Oh, Viglietti, I cannot take it anymore. My whole chest is sore from having screamed so much last night. I have been dreaming now for four consecutive nights. These dreams force me to scream out and they tire me out. Four nights ago I saw a long line of Salesians walking one after the other, every one of them carrying a flagstaff with placards with a printed number on them. On one I saw 73, on another 30, 62 on a third, and so on. When many of them had gone by, the moon appeared in the sky, and as soon as a Salesian appeared you could have spotted a number, which was never higher than 12, and behind it there were many little black dots. All the Salesians that I saw went by and sat down beside an empty grave."

This is the explanation of his dream as it was given him: the number on the placards represented the number of years that each of them was to live; the appearance of the moon in different shapes and phases indicated the last month of their existence; the black dots represented the days of the month in which they were to die. He kept on seeing more and more of them, at times standing in groups; these were Salesians who were to die all together, on the same day. He said that if he were to mention all the accessory details and circumstances

minutely, it would take him at least ten full days.

### **He witnesses a devils council**

"I dreamed again three nights ago," he continued. "I will tell you about it in brief. I thought I was in a big hall where many great devils were gathered as though for a convention. They were discussing how they could destroy the Salesian Congregation. They looked like lions, tigers, serpents and other animals, though their appearance was somewhat muddled, looking somewhat like human beings. They also looked like shadows, now higher, now lower; now smaller and now taller – just like bodies would look behind a lamp if one were to move it this way or that way. Now lowered to ground level and then raised up again. The whole fantastic vision was terrifying.

"One of the devils stepped forward to open the session. He proposed one way by which the pious Society might be destroyed: gluttony. He expounded on the consequences of this vice: sluggishness in doing good, corruption of morals, scandal, no spirit of sacrifice, and no concern for the boys.

"But another devil responded, 'Your suggestion is neither general nor effective, nor can all members of the Society be undermined by it collectively, for the dining table of religious is always frugal, the wine measured, their regular meals are set by their rules, their superiors are alert so as to prevent disorder. Instead of causing scandal, anyone who was to eat or drink to excess would sooner arouse disgust. No, this is not a weapon to use against the Salesians. I will find some other way that is more effective, and more likely to help us in our intent: love of riches. When the love of riches enters a religious Congregation, the love for comforts will also enter with it and the members will attempt everything to secure money (peculium) for themselves, the bond of love will be shattered. Since everyone will think only about his own needs, the poor will be neglected in order to dedicate themselves only to those who have means, and there will be stealing from the Congregation.'

"This devil would have continued speaking, but a third stood up and said, 'Gluttony? Get lost! Riches? Get lost! The love of riches will affect only a few among the Salesians! The Salesians are all poor; they have but a few opportunities of making money for themselves. On the whole, their structure is so designed, their needs so immense with all the boys and the houses they have, that no matter how big any sum of money may be, it will soon be used up. It is impossible that they hoard anything. But I do have one infallible means by which we can conquer the Salesian Society for ourselves, and this is freedom. So let us teach the Salesians to disregard their rules, refuse certain assignments because they are burdensome and less glamorous, create division from their superiors by proposing conflicting opinions, and go home on the pretext they have been invited, and so on.'

"While the devils were discussing among themselves, Don Bosco was thinking I am all ears to hear what you are saying. I want to know. Go ahead – talk! By all means, talk because this will enable me to upset your conspiracy.

"Just then a fourth devil leapt to his feet, shouting, 'Rubbish! You are only proposing broken weapons! The superiors will know how to check such a freedom, and will expel from their houses anyone who ventures to rebel against the rules. Maybe a few will be led astray by their craving for freedom, but the vast majority will remain steadfast in their duty. Now I have a weapon that will surely undermine the whole Congregation down to its foundations. It is a weapon against which the Salesians will hardly be able to defend themselves. It will carry the rot to their very roots. Now listen to me carefully – convince them that their main glory should consist in their learning! This means inducing them to study for the sake of study, learning for the sake of attaining fame and not for the sake of practicing what they preach and not for using their learning for the benefit of their neighbor. They will become arrogant in their attitude toward the poor, ignorant and lazy as far as their sacred ministry. No more Festive Oratories, no more catechism classes for the boys, no more

humble classrooms where they could teach poor, abandoned boys, no more long hours in the confessional. They will hold onto only preaching, but only occasionally, in a form well measured and sterile because it will only be an outlet for their own vanity, aimed at being praised by their listeners, not at saving souls.'

"This devil's suggestion was hailed by applause. Don Bosco foresaw the day when the Salesians might really be led to believe that the interests of the Congregation and its honor lay solely in learning, and he grew afraid that not only would they act accordingly, but they would also preach that such a belief should be shared far and wide.

"Don Bosco was again standing in a corner of the room, watching everything and listening to all that was said. One of the devils discovered him, and shouted, pointing him out to the others. At his scream, all the devils rushed at him and yelled, 'We will put an end to this!'

"A whirl of infernal ghosts pushed and seized him by his arms, and at this point, he began to yell, 'Let me go! Help!'

"At last he woke up, his chest all sore from so much screaming."

### **Lions, tigers and monsters dressed as lambs**

The following evening, he saw that the devil had begun working on the Salesians in their most essential core, urging them to neglect their rules. He was able to see them all distinctly, some were keeping the rules and others were breaking them.

The last night, the dream became more fearful than ever. Don Bosco saw a big flock of sheep and lambs representing so many Salesians. He approached them, trying to caress the lambs, but as he drew nearer, he saw that their wool was not real. It was not a lamb's wool, for hidden under it there were lions, tigers, pigs, panthers, and bears. Every one of them had a hideous, ferocious monster at their sides.

Some were standing in a huddle talking in the midst of the flock. Unnoticed, Don Bosco approached the group to hear what

they were saying. They were discussing what to do in order to destroy the Salesian Congregation.

One was saying, "We must cut the Salesians' throats."

Another chuckled and said, "We should strangle them."

But just then, someone saw that Don Bosco was standing by listening. This demon sounded the alarm and they all shrieked together that they should start by killing Don Bosco. At that, they all rushed at him to choke him. It was then that he uttered the terrible cry that had awakened Viglietti.

Don Bosco had a heavy heart, not only because of the diabolical violence with which he had been attacked, but also because he had seen a great banner floating over the heads of the flock, and on it was written "*BESTIIS COMPARATI SUNT*" [They are like beasts]. As he said this, he bowed his head and wept.

Viglietti took his hand and pressed it against his own heart. He said, "Ah, Don Bosco! With the help of God, all of us will always be faithful, devoted sons, will we not?"

"Dear Viglietti, be good and get ready to see what is going to happen. I have barely outlined these dreams to you. It would have taken me much longer were I to have told you everything in detail. How many things did I see! Some of the confreres of our houses will not live to see another Christmas Novena.

"Oh, if I could only talk to the boys. If I only had the strength to be among them, if I could only make a tour of all our houses, do all that I used to do, revealing the secrets of individual consciences to everyone as I saw them in the dream. If I could only say to some, 'Break the ice, make a good confession for once!' They would answer, 'But I do make a good confession!' Then I could reply by telling them all that they concealed, and that would stop them from opening their lips again. If I could only say a word to some of our Salesians, as well, to show them how much they need to put their own conscience in order by repeating their confessions.

I saw how some kept their rules and others didn't. I saw many youths who would go to San Benigno and become Salesians, but then leave us again.

Even some, who are now already Salesians, will defect. There will be those who will seek only knowledge, the brand of knowledge that inflates the ego and craves praise. This will have them disregard the advice of those whom they consider less learned as they are.”

These sorry thoughts were interwoven with providential consolations that filled Don Bosco’s heart with joy.

The evening of December 3rd, the bishop of Para (that is the focal point of his dream about the missions) arrived at the Oratory. The following day, he said to Viglietti, “How mighty Divine Providence is! Listen and then tell me if God does not protect us. Father Paul Albera wrote to tell me that he could no longer go on, but needed one thousand francs immediately. That same day, a religious lady in Marseille, who was looking to see her brother in Paris, gave Father Paul Albera a thousand francs, delighted for having obtained from our Lady the grace of seeing him again. Father Joseph Ronchail is in a serious predicament, and has urgent need of four thousand francs. Today, a lady wrote to Don Bosco and told him that she is holding four thousand francs at his disposal. Father Francis Dalmazzo does not know where to turn for money. Today, a lady donated a substantial sum of money for the Church of the Sacred Heart.”

Then on December 7th, he experienced a great joy for Bishop John Cagliero’s consecration. All of these things were even more encouraging because they were manifest signs of God’s hand over the work of His servant.

(BM XVII 352-358)

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## **Educating the Human Heart**

# with Saint Francis de Sales

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

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

On one hand, this phenomenon can be explained by the common, universal use of the noun “*heart*” to designate the inner self of a person, especially in reference to their sensitivity. On the other hand, Francis de Sales owes much to the biblical tradition, which considers the heart as the seat of the highest faculties of man, such as love, will, and intelligence.

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

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

Alongside the faculties of the spirit, such as

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

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

However, the will exercises its authority in very different ways, and the obedience due to it is considerably variable. Thus, some of our limbs, not hindered from moving, obey the will without problem. We open and close our mouths, move our tongues, hands, feet, eyes at our pleasure and as much as we want. The will exerts power over the functioning of the five senses, but it is an indirect power: to not see with the eyes, I must turn them away or close them; to practice abstinence, I must command the hands not to bring food to the mouth.

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



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

### **The "affections" that move the will**

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

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

finally *triumph* ("exalt," "glorify").

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

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

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

For Saint Francis de Sales, love always appears first both in the list of passions and in that of affections. What is love? Jean-Pierre Camus asked his friend, the bishop of Geneva, who replied: "Love is the first passion of our sensitive appetite and the first affection of the rational one, which is the will; since our will is nothing other than the love of good, and love is willing the good."

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

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

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

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

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

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

To will is to choose. As long as one is a child, one is still entirely dependent and incapable of choosing, but as one grows up, things soon change and choices become unavoidable. Children are neither good nor bad because they are not able to choose between good and evil. During

childhood, they walk like those leaving a city and for a while go straight ahead; but after a while, they discover that the road splits in two directions; it is up to them to choose the right or left path at will, to go where they want.

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

Choice also arises in the face of other passions and affections: "Trample underfoot your sensations, distrusts, fears, aversions," advises Francis de Sales to someone he guided, asking them to side with "inspiration and reason against instinct and aversion." Love uses the strength of the will to govern all faculties and all passions. It will be an "armed love," and such armed love will subdue our passions. This free will "resides in the highest and most spiritual part of the soul" and "depends on nothing but God and oneself; and when all other faculties of the soul are lost and subjected to the enemy, only it remains master of itself so as not to consent in any way."

However, choice is not only about the goal to be reached but also about the intention that governs the action. This is an aspect to which Francis de Sales is particularly sensitive because it touches on the quality of acting. Indeed, the pursued end gives meaning to the action. One can decide to perform an act for many reasons. Unlike animals, "man is so master of his human and reasonable actions as to perform them all for an end"; he can even change the natural end of an action by adding a secondary end, "as when, besides the intention to help the poor to whom alms are given, he adds the intention to oblige the indigent to do the same." Among pagans, intentions were rarely disinterested, and in us,

intentions can be tainted “by pride, vanity, temporal interest, or some other bad motive.” Sometimes “we pretend to want to be last and sit at the end of the table, but to pass with more honour to the head of the table.”

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

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

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

Similarly, speaking of the “steadfastness of the will,” the bishop of Geneva states that one cannot be content with “sensible steadfastness”; an “effective steadfastness” located in the higher part of the spirit is necessary. The time comes when one must no longer “speculate with reasoning,” but “harden the will.” “Whether our soul is sad or joyful, overwhelmed by sweetness or bitterness, at peace or disturbed, bright or dark, tempted or calm, full of pleasure or disgust, immersed in dryness or tenderness, burned by the sun or refreshed by dew,” it does not matter; a strong will is not easily diverted from its purposes. “Let us remain firm in our purposes, inflexible in our resolutions,” asks the author

of *Filotea*. It is the master faculty on which the value of the person depends: "The whole world is worth less than one soul, and a soul is worth nothing without our good purposes."

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

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

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

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

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

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

A good teacher knows that to lead his pupil toward the proposed goal, whether knowledge or virtue, it is essential to present a project that mobilizes his energies. Francis de Sales proves to be a master in the art of motivation, as he teaches his “daughter,” Jeanne de Chantal, one of his favourite maxims: “One must do everything for love and nothing by force.” In the *Teotimo*, he states that “joy opens the heart as sadness closes it.” Love is indeed the life of the heart.

However, strength must not be lacking. To the young man about to “set sail on the vast sea of the world,” the bishop of Geneva advised “a vigorous heart” and “a noble heart,” capable of governing desires. Francis de Sales wants a sweet and peaceful heart, pure, indifferent, a “heart stripped of affections” incompatible with the vocation, a “right” heart, “relaxed and without any constraint.” He does not like the “tenderness of heart” that amounts to self-seeking and instead requires “firmness of heart” in action. “To a strong heart, nothing is impossible,” he writes to a lady, encouraging her not to abandon “the course of holy resolutions.” He wants a “manly heart” and at the same time a heart “docile, malleable, and submissive, yielding to all that is permitted and ready to take on every commitment out of obedience and charity”; a “sweet heart toward others and humble before God,” “nobly proud” and “perpetually humble,” “sweet and peaceful.”

Ultimately, the education of the will aims at full self-mastery, which Francis de Sales expresses through an image: to take the heart in hand, to possess the heart or soul. “The

great joy of man, *Filotea*, is to possess his own soul; and the more patience becomes perfect, the more perfectly we possess our soul." This does not mean insensitivity, absence of passions or affections, but rather a striving for self-mastery. It is a path directed toward self-autonomy, guaranteed by the supremacy of the will, free and reasonable, but an autonomy governed by sovereign love.

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

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## **Don Bosco and the Sacred Heart. Protect, atone, love**

*In 1886, on the eve of the consecration of the new Basilica of the Sacred Heart in the centre of Rome, the 'Salesian Bulletin' wanted to prepare its readers – co-workers, benefactors, young people, families – for a vital encounter with 'the pierced Heart that continues to love'. For a whole year, the magazine presented the Salesian world with a veritable 'rosary' of meditations: each issue linked an aspect of devotion to a pastoral, educational or social urgency that Don Bosco – already exhausted but still lucid – considered strategic for the future of the Church and Italian society. Almost 140 years later, that series remains a small treatise on the spirituality of the heart, written in simple but ardent tones, capable of combining contemplation and practice. Here we present a unified reading of that monthly journey, showing how Salesian intuition still speaks to us today.*



## **February – The guard of honour: in vigil over wounded Love**

The new liturgical year opens in the *Bulletin* with a surprising invitation: not only to adore Jesus, present in the tabernacle, but to 'keep watch over Him' – a freely chosen hour in which every Christian, without interrupting their daily activities, becomes a loving sentinel who consoles the Heart pierced by the indifference of the carnal. The idea, which originated in Paray-le-Monial and flourished in many dioceses, became an educational programme: to transform time into a space for reparation; to teach young people that fidelity comes from small, constant acts; to make the day a widespread liturgy. The related vow – to donate the proceeds from the *Manual of the Guard of Honour* to the construction of the Roman Basilica – reveals the Salesian logic: contemplation that immediately translates into bricks and mortar, because true prayer (literally) builds the house of God.

## **March – Creative charity: the Salesian stamp**

In his great conference on 8 May 1884, Cardinal Parocchi summarised the Salesian mission in one word: 'charity'. The *Bulletin* takes up that discourse to remind us that the Church conquers the world more with gestures of love than with theoretical disputes. Don Bosco did not establish elite schools but simple hospices. He did not take children out of their environment just to protect them, but to return them to society as solid citizens. It is charity 'according to the needs of the century': a response to materialism not with controversy, but with works that show the power of the Gospel. Hence the urgency of a large sanctuary dedicated to the Heart of Jesus, to make an outstanding visible sign of the love that educates and transforms in the heart of Rome.

## **April – Eucharist: 'masterpiece of the Heart of Jesus'**

Nothing, for Don Bosco, is more urgent than bringing Christians back to frequent Communion. The *Bulletin* reminds us that 'there is no Catholicism without Our Lady and without the Eucharist'. The Eucharistic table is the 'genesis of Christian

society': from there fraternity, justice, and purity are born. If faith languishes, the desire for the living Bread must be rekindled. It is no coincidence that St. Francis de Sales entrusted the Visitation Sisters with the mission of guarding the Eucharistic Heart. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is not an abstract sentiment, but a concrete path that leads to the tabernacle and from there pours out into the streets. And it is once again the Roman construction site that serves as a test. Every lira offered for the basilica becomes a 'spiritual brick' that consecrates Italy to the Heart that gives itself.

### **May – The Heart of Jesus shines in the Heart of Mary**

The Marian month leads the *Bulletin* to intertwine the two great devotions. There is a profound communion between the two Hearts, symbolised by the biblical image of the 'mirror'. The Immaculate Heart of Mary reflects the light of the Divine Heart, making it bearable to human eyes. Those who dare not look at the Sun, look at its light reflected in the Mother. Latria for the Heart of Jesus, 'hyperdulia' for that of Mary: a distinction that avoids the misunderstandings of the Jansenist polemicists of yesterday and today. The *Bulletin* refutes the accusations of idolatry and invites the faithful to a balanced love, where contemplation and mission feed each other. Mary introduces us to her Son and her Son leads us to His Mother. In view of the consecration of the new temple, it asks that the two invocations that stand out on the hills of Rome and Turin be united: Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary Help of Christians.

### **June – Supernatural consolations: love at work in history**

Two hundred years after the first public consecration to the Sacred Heart (Paray-le-Monial, 1686), the *Bulletin* affirms that the devotion responds to the illness of the times: 'the cooling of charity due to an excess of iniquity'. The Heart of Jesus – Creator, Redeemer, Glorifier – is presented as the centre of all history: from creation to the Church; from the Eucharist to eschatology. Those who adore that Heart, enter

into a dynamism that transforms culture and politics. This is why Pope Leo XIII asked everyone to contribute to the Roman shrine: a monument of reparation but also a 'bulwark' against the 'impure flood' of modern error. It is an appeal that sounds timely: without ardent charity, society falls apart.

### **July – Humility: the physiognomy of Christ and of Christians**

The summer meditation chooses the most neglected virtue: humility, 'a gem transplanted by the hand of God into the garden of the Church.' Don Bosco, spiritual son of St. Francis de Sales, knows that humility is the door to other virtues and the seal of every true apostolate. Those who serve young people without seeking visibility make present, 'Jesus' hidden life for thirty years.' The *Bulletin* unmask pride disguised as false modesty and invites us to cultivate a double humility: of the intellect, which opens itself to mystery; and of the will, which obeys recognised truth. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is not sentimentality. It is a school of humble thinking and concrete action, capable of building social peace because it removes the poison of pride from the heart.

### **August – Meekness: the strength that disarms**

After humility comes meekness: a virtue that is not weakness but self-control, 'the lion that produces honey', says the text, referring to the enigma of Samson. The Heart of Jesus appears meek in welcoming sinners, firm in defending the temple. Readers are invited to imitate this twofold movement: gentleness towards people, firmness against error. St. Francis de Sales returns as a model. With a calm tone, he poured out rivers of charity in turbulent Geneva, converting more hearts than harsh polemics would have won over. In a century that 'sins by being heartless,' building the sanctuary of the Sacred Heart means erecting a training ground for social meekness—an evangelical response to the contempt and verbal violence that already poisoned public debate at that time.

### **September – Poverty and the social question: the Heart that reconciles rich and poor**

The rumblings of social conflict, warns the *Bulletin*, threaten to 'smash the civil edifice to pieces.' We are in the midst of the 'labour question'. Socialists are stirring up the masses, capital is concentrated. Don Bosco does not deny the legitimacy of honest wealth, but he reminds us that true revolution begins in the heart. The Heart of Jesus proclaimed the poor blessed and He experienced poverty firsthand. The remedy lies in evangelical solidarity nourished by prayer and generosity. Until the Roman Basilica is completed, writes the newspaper, the visible sign of reconciliation will be missing. In the following decades, the social doctrine of the Church will develop these insights, but the seed is already here. Charity is not almsgiving; it is justice that comes from a transformed heart.

#### **October – Childhood: sacrament of hope**

'Woe to those who scandalise one of these little ones.' On the lips of Jesus, the invitation becomes a warning. The *Bulletin* recalls the horrors of the pagan world against children and shows how Christianity changed history by entrusting a central place to children. For Don Bosco, education is a religious act; the treasure of the future Church is preserved in schools and oratories. Jesus' blessing of the children, reproduced on the front pages of the newspaper, is a manifestation of the Heart that "closes itself like a father's" and announces the Salesian vocation: to make youth a "sacrament" that makes God present in the city. Schools, colleges, and workshops are not optional: they are the concrete way of honouring the Heart of Jesus alive in young people.

#### **November – Triumphs of the Church: humility conquers death**

The liturgy commemorates the saints and the dead. The *Bulletin* meditates on the 'gentle triumph' of Jesus entering Jerusalem. The image becomes the key to understanding Church history. Successes and persecutions alternate, but the Church, like the Master, always rises again. Readers are

invited not to let themselves be paralysed by pessimism. The shadows of the moment (anticlerical laws, reduction of orders, Masonic propaganda) do not cancel out the dynamism of the Gospel. The Basilica of the Sacred Heart, built amid hostility and poverty, will be the tangible sign that, 'the stone with the seals has been turned over'. Collaborating in its construction means betting on God's future.

### **December – Beatitude of sorrow: the Cross welcomed by the heart**

The year ends with the most paradoxical of the beatitudes: 'Blessed are those who mourn'. Pain, scandalous to pagan reason, becomes in the Heart of Jesus a path to redemption and fruitfulness. The *Bulletin* sees in this logic, the key to understanding the contemporary crisis. Societies based on entertainment at all costs produce injustice and despair. Accepted in union with Christ, however, pain transforms hearts, strengthens character, stimulates solidarity, and frees us from fear. Even the stones of the sanctuary are 'tears transformed into hope'; small offerings, sometimes the fruit of hidden sacrifices, which will build a place from which, the newspaper promises, 'torrents of chaste delights will rain down.

### **A prophetic legacy**

In the monthly montage of the *Salesian Bulletin* of 1886, the pedagogy of crescendo is striking. It starts with the little hour of watch and ends with the consecration of pain; from the individual faithful to the national building site; from the turreted tabernacle of the oratory to the ramparts of the Esquiline Hill. It is a journey that intertwines three main axes:

*Contemplation* – The Heart of Jesus is first and foremost a mystery to be adored: vigil, Eucharist, reparation.

*Formation* – Every virtue (humility, meekness, poverty) is proposed as a social medicine, capable of healing collective wounds.

*Construction* – Spirituality becomes architecture: the basilica is not an ornament, but a laboratory of Christian citizenship. Without forcing it, we can recognise here the pre-announcement of themes that the Church would develop throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the apostolate of the laity, social doctrine, the centrality of the Eucharist in the mission, the protection of minors, and the pastoral care of those who suffer. Don Bosco and his collaborators recognised the signs of the times and responded with the language of the heart.

On 14 May 1887, when Leo XIII consecrated the Basilica of the Sacred Heart through his vicar Cardinal Lucido Maria Parocchi, Don Bosco—too weak to ascend the altar—watched hidden among the faithful. At that moment, all the words of the 1886 *Bulletin* became living stone: the guard of honour, educative charity, the Eucharist as the centre of the world, the tenderness of Mary, reconciling poverty, the blessedness of suffering. Today, those pages call for new breath. It is up to us, consecrated or lay, young or old, to continue the vigil, to build sites of hope, to learn the geography of the heart. The programme remains the same, simple and bold: **to guard, to atone, to love.**

*In the photo: Painting of the Sacred Heart, located on the main altar of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome. The work was commissioned by Don Bosco and entrusted to the painter Francesco de Rohden (Rome, 15 February 1817 – 28 December 1903).*

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## Don Bosco and Eucharistic

# processions

*A little-known but important aspect of St John Bosco's charism is Eucharistic processions. For the Saint of young people, the Eucharist was not only a personal devotion but also a pedagogical tool and public witness. In a Turin undergoing transformation, Don Bosco saw processions as an opportunity to strengthen the faith of young people and proclaim Christ in the streets. The Salesian experience, which has continued throughout the world, shows how faith can be embodied in culture and respond to social challenges. Even today, when lived with authenticity and openness, these processions can become prophetic signs of faith.*

When we speak of St. John Bosco (1815-1888), we immediately think of his popular oratories, his passion for educating young people, and the Salesian family born of his charism. Less well known, but no less decisive, is the role that Eucharistic devotion – and in particular Eucharistic processions – played in his work. For Don Bosco, the Eucharist was not only the heart of his inner life; it was also a powerful pedagogical tool and a public sign of social renewal in a Turin undergoing rapid industrial transformation. Retracing the link between the saint of young people and the processions with the Blessed Sacrament means entering a pastoral workshop where liturgy, catechesis, civic education, and human promotion are intertwined in an original and, at times, surprising way.

## **Eucharistic processions in the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

To understand Don Bosco, it is necessary to remember that the 19th century in Italy was marked by intense debate on the public role of religion. After the Napoleonic era and the Risorgimento, religious demonstrations in the streets were no longer a given. In many regions, a liberal State was emerging that viewed any public expression of Catholicism with

suspicion, fearing mass gatherings or 'reactionary' resurgence. Eucharistic processions, however, retained a powerful symbolic force. They recalled Christ's lordship over all reality and, at the same time, brought to the fore a popular Church, visible and embodied in the neighbourhoods. Against this backdrop stood the stubbornness of Don Bosco, who never gave up accompanying his boys in witnessing their faith outside the walls of the oratory, whether on the avenues of Valdocco or in the surrounding countryside.

From his formative years at the seminary in Chieri, John Bosco developed a 'missionary' sensitivity to the Eucharist. The chronicles tell us that he often stopped in the chapel after lessons and spent a long time in prayer before the tabernacle. In his Memoirs of the Oratory, he himself acknowledges that he learned from his spiritual director, Fr. Cafasso, the value of 'becoming bread' for others. Contemplating Jesus giving himself in the Eucharist meant for him, learning the logic of gratuitous love. This line runs through his entire life, "Keep Jesus in the sacrament and Mary Help of Christians as your friends," he would repeat to young people, pointing to frequent Communion and silent adoration as the pillars of a path of lay and daily holiness.

### **The Valdocco oratory and the first internal processions**

In the early 1840s, the Turin oratory did not yet have a proper church. Celebrations took place in wooden huts or in adapted courtyards. Don Bosco, however, did not give up organising small internal processions, almost 'dress rehearsals' for what would become a regular practice. The boys carried candles and banners, sang Marian hymns and, at the end, gathered around a makeshift altar for the Eucharistic benediction. These first attempts had an eminently pedagogical function, to accustom young people to devout but joyful participation, combining discipline and spontaneity. In working-class Turin, where poverty often led to violence, marching in an orderly fashion with a red handkerchief around



one's neck was already a sign of going against the tide. It showed that faith could teach respect for oneself and others.

Don Bosco knew well that a procession cannot be improvised. It requires signs, songs, and gestures that speak to the heart even before they speak to the mind. For this reason, he personally took care of explaining the symbols. The canopy became the image of the tent of meeting, a sign of the divine presence accompanying the people on their journey. The flowers scattered along the route recalled the beauty of the Christian virtues that must adorn the soul. The street lamps, indispensable for evening outings, alluded to the light of faith that illuminates the darkness of sin. Each element was the subject of a small 'sermon' in the refectory or during recreation, so that the logistical preparation was intertwined with systematic catechesis. The result? For the boys, the procession was not a ritual duty but an occasion for celebration full of meaning.

One of the most characteristic aspects of Salesian processions was the presence of a band formed by the students themselves. Don Bosco considered music an antidote to idleness and, at the same time, a powerful tool for evangelisation. "A cheerful march performed well," he wrote, "attracts people like a magnet attracts iron." The band preceded the Blessed Sacrament, alternating sacred pieces with popular tunes adapted with religious lyrics. This 'dialogue' between faith and popular culture reduced the distance between passers-by and created an aura of shared celebration around the procession. Many secular chroniclers testified to having been 'intrigued' by that group of young, disciplined musicians, so different from the military or philharmonic bands of the time.

### **Processions as a response to social crises**

Nineteenth-century Turin experienced cholera epidemics (1854 and 1865), strikes, famines, and anti-clerical tensions. Don Bosco often reacted by proposing extraordinary processions of reparation or supplication. During the cholera epidemic of

1854, he led young people through the most affected streets, reciting litanies for the sick aloud and distributing bread and medicine. It was at that juncture that he made his promise – which he later kept – to build the church of Mary Help of Christians. “If Our Lady saves my boys, I will raise a temple to her.” The civil authorities, initially opposed to religious processions for fear of contagion, had to recognise the effectiveness of the Salesian assistance network, which was spiritually nourished by the processions themselves. The Eucharist, brought to the sick, thus became a tangible sign of Christian compassion.

Contrary to certain devotional models confined to sacristies, Don Bosco’s processions claimed a right of citizenship for the faith in the public space. It was not a question of ‘occupying’ the streets, but of restoring them to their community vocation. Passing under balconies, crossing squares and porticoes meant remembering that the city is not only a place of economic exchange or political confrontation, but also of fraternal encounter. This is why Don Bosco insisted on impeccable order: brushed cloaks, clean shoes, regular rows. He wanted the image of the procession to communicate beauty and dignity, persuading even the most sceptical observers that the Christian proposal elevated the person.

### **The Salesian legacy of processions**

After Don Bosco’s death, his spiritual sons spread the practice of Eucharistic processions throughout the world: from agricultural schools in Emilia to missions in Patagonia, from Asian colleges to the working-class neighbourhoods of Brussels. What mattered was not to slavishly duplicate a Piedmontese ritual, but to transmit its pedagogical core: youth protagonism, symbolic catechesis, openness to the surrounding society. Thus, in Latin America, the Salesians included traditional dances at the beginning of the procession. In India, they adopted flower carpets in accordance with local art; in sub-Saharan Africa, they

alternated Gregorian chants with tribal polyphonic rhythms. The Eucharist became a bridge between cultures, realising Don Bosco's dream of "making all peoples one family."

From a theological point of view, Don Bosco's processions embody a strong vision of the real presence of Christ. Taking the Blessed Sacrament 'outside' means proclaiming that the Word did not become flesh to remain locked up, but to "pitch his tent among us" (cf. Jn 1:14). This presence demands to be proclaimed in understandable forms, without being reduced to an intimate gesture. In Don Bosco, the centripetal dynamic of adoration (gathering hearts around the Host) generates a centrifugal dynamic: young people, nourished at the altar, feel sent forth to serve. Micro-commitments spring from the procession: assisting a sick companion, pacifying a quarrel, studying with greater diligence. The Eucharist is prolonged in the 'invisible processions' of daily charity.

Today, in secularised or multi-religious contexts, Eucharistic processions can raise questions. Are they still communicative? Do they risk appearing like nostalgic folklore? Don Bosco's experience suggests that the key lies in the quality of relationships rather than in the quantity of incense or vestments. A procession that involves families, explains symbols, integrates contemporary artistic languages, and above all connects with concrete gestures of solidarity, maintains a surprising prophetic power. The recent Synod on Young People (2018) repeatedly recalled the importance of "going out" and "showing faith with our flesh." The Salesian tradition, with its itinerant liturgy, offers a tried and tested paradigm of the "Church going forth."

For Don Bosco, Eucharistic processions were not simply liturgical traditions, but true educative, spiritual, and social acts. They represented a synthesis of lived faith, an educating community, and public witness. Through them, Don Bosco formed young people capable of adoring, respecting, serving, and witnessing.

Today, in a fragmented and distracted world, re-proposing the value of Eucharistic processions in the light of the Salesian charism can be an effective way to rediscover the meaning of what is essential: Christ present among His people, who walk with Him, adore Him, serve Him, and proclaim Him.

In an age that seeks authenticity, visibility, and relationships, the Eucharistic procession – if lived according to the spirit of Don Bosco – can be a powerful sign of hope and renewal.

*Photo: Shutterstock*

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## **St Francis de Sales instructs him. Future of vocations (1879)**

*In the prophetic dream Don Bosco recounted on 9 May 1879, Saint Francis de Sales appeared as a caring teacher and gave the Founder a booklet full of warnings for novices, professed members, directors, and superiors. The vision was dominated by two epic battles: first young men and warriors, then armed men and monsters, while the banner of “Mary Help of Christians” guaranteed victory to those who followed it. The survivors set off for the East, North, and South, foreshadowing the Salesian missionary expansion. The Saint’s words emphasised obedience, chastity, educational charity, love of work, and temperance, indispensable pillars for the Congregation to grow, withstand trials, and leave its children a legacy of active holiness. It concluded with a coffin, a stern reminder to be vigilant and prayerful.*

Think as we may of this particular dream, Don Bosco had

another dream which he narrated on May 9. In it he saw the fierce battles which faced the men called to his Congregation, and he was given several valuable instructions for all his sons and sound advice for the future.

[I saw] a hard-fought, long-drawn-out battle between youngsters and a varied array of warriors who were armed with strange weapons. Survivors were few.

A second fiercer and more terrifying battle was being waged by gigantic monsters fully armed, well-trained tall men who unfurled a huge banner, the center of which bore an inscription in gold, *Maria Auxilium Christianorum*. The combat was long and bloody, but the soldiers fighting under the banner were protected against hurt and conquered a vast plain. The boys who had survived the previous battle linked forces with them, each combatant holding a crucifix in his right hand and a miniature of the banner in his left. After engaging together in several sallies over that vast plain, they split, some heading eastward, a few to the north, and many for the south. Once they all left, the same skirmishes, maneuvers and leave-takings were repeated by others.

I recognized some boys who fought in the first skirmishes, but none of the others, who nevertheless seemed to know me and asked me many questions.

Shortly afterward I witnessed a shower of flashing, fiery tongues of many colors, followed by thunder and then clear skies. Then I found myself in a charming garden. A man who looked like Saint Francis de Sales silently handed me a booklet. I asked him who he was. "Read the book," was the reply.

I opened it, but had trouble reading, managing only to make out these precise words:

*"For the Novices:* Obedience in all things. Through obedience they will deserve God's blessings and the good will of men. Through diligence they will fight and overcome the snares set by the enemies of their souls.

*"For the Confreres:* Jealously safeguard the virtue of

chastity. Love your confreres' good name, promote the honor of the Congregation.

*"For the Directors:* Take every care, make every effort to observe and promote observance of the rules through which everyone's life is consecrated to God.

*"For the Superior:* Total self-sacrifice, so as to draw himself and his charges to God."

The book said many other things, but I couldn't read any further, for the paper turned as blue as the ink.

"Who are you?" I again asked the man who serenely gazed at me.

"Good people everywhere know me. I have been sent to tell you of future events."

"What are they?"

"Those you have already seen and those which you will ask about."

"How can I foster vocations?"

"The Salesians will harvest many vocations by their good example, by being endlessly kind toward their pupils, and by urging them constantly to receive Holy Communion often."

"What should we bear in mind when admitting novices?"

"Reject idlers and gluttons."

"And when admitting to vows?"

"Make sure that they are well grounded in chastity."

"How are we to maintain the right spirit in our houses?"

"Let superiors very often write, visit and welcome the confreres, dealing kindly with them."

"What of our foreign missions?"

"Send men of sound morality and recall any who give you serious reason to doubt; look for and foster native vocations."

"Is our Congregation on the right path?"

"Let those who do good keep doing good. [Rev. 22, 11] Not to go forward is to go backward. [St. Gregory the Great] The man who stands firm to the end will be saved." [Mt. 10, 22]

"Will the Congregation grow?"

"It will reach out so that no one will be able to check its growth, as long as the superiors meet their obligations."

"Will it have a long life?"

"Yes, but only as long as its members love work and temperance.

Should either of these two pillars fall, your entire edifice will collapse and crush superiors, subjects and followers beneath it."

Just then four men showed up bearing a coffin and approaching me.

"Whom is that for?" I asked.

"For you."

"How soon?"

"Do not ask. Just remember that you are mortal."

"What are you trying to tell me with this coffin?"

"That while you are still living you must see to it that your sons practice what they must continue to practice after your death. This is the heritage, the testament you must bequeath to them; but you must work on it and leave it [to your sons] as a well-studied and well-tested legacy."

"Can we expect roses or thorns?"

"Many roses and joys are in store, but very sharp thorns also threaten.

They will cause all of you acute distress and sorrow. You must pray much."

"Should we open houses in Rome?"

"Yes, but not hurriedly; proceed with extreme prudence and caution."

"Is the end of my mortal life near at hand?"

"Don't be concerned. You have the rules and other books. Practice what you preach and be vigilant."

I wanted to ask more questions, but muffled thunder rumbled through the air with flashes of lightning. Several men, rather horrid monsters, dashed toward me as if to tear me to pieces. But then a deep darkness enveloped me, shutting everything out. I felt that I must be dead and started to scream frenziedly. I awoke and found I was still alive. It was a quarter to five in the morning.

If we can draw some good from this dream, let us do so. In all things let honor and glory be given to God forever and ever.  
(*BM XIV, 88-90*)

*Photo on the title page. Saint Francis de Sales. Anonymous.  
Sacristy of Chieri Cathedral*

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## The exegetes

A famous biblical scholar had invited a group of colleagues to his home. They sat around a table that had a magnificent vase of flowers in the middle and began to argue over a page of the Bible. They argued animatedly, breaking down every word, hypothesising ancient roots, conjecturing, postulating, comparing, distilling, historicising, demythologising, psychologising, feminising...

They could agree on almost nothing.

Suddenly the host interrupted the discussion and turned to one of the guests who was taking flowers from the vase in the middle of the table and systematically destroying them.

"What are you doing?"

"I am counting the whorls, dividing the stamens and pistils, setting aside stalks and filaments..."

"This scientific zeal does you credit, but you are ruining all the beauty of these beautiful flowers!"

The man smiled bitterly: "That is exactly what you are doing."

*Rabbi Elimelekh had delivered a wonderful sermon on the art of living. Full of enthusiasm, the listeners joyfully accompanied him as he took the carriage back to his village.*

*At one point, the rabbi brought the carriage to a halt and asked the driver to go ahead without him as he mingled with the people.*



*"What an example of humility!" said one of his disciples.*

*"Humility has nothing to do with it," replied Elimelekh. "Here people walk happily, sing, drink wine, chat, make new friends, and all thanks to an old rabbi who came to speak on the art of living. So I prefer to leave my theories in the carriage and enjoy the party."*

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## **Life according to the Spirit in Mamma Margaret (1/2)**

Fr Lemoyne leaves us a truly outstanding portrait in his preface to the life of Mamma Margaret: "We will not describe extraordinary or heroic events, but we will portray a simple life, constant in the practice of good, vigilant in the education of her children, resigned and able to foresee the anxieties of life, resolute in all that duty imposed upon her. Not rich, but with a queen's heart; not instructed in worldly knowledge, but educated in the holy fear of God; deprived at an early age of those who were to be her support, but secure with the energy of her will leaning on heavenly help, she was able to happily carry out the mission that God had entrusted to her."

With these words, we are offered the pieces of a mosaic and a canvas on which we can build the adventure of the Spirit that the Lord gave to this woman who, docile to the Spirit, rolled up her sleeves and faced life with hard-working faith and maternal charity. We will follow the stages of this adventure with the biblical category of the "exodus", an expression of an authentic journey in the obedience of faith. Mamma Margaret also experienced her "exodus"; she too walked towards "a promised land", crossing the desert and overcoming trials. We see this journey reflected in the light of her

relationship with her son and according to two dynamics typical of life in the Spirit: one less visible, consisting of the inner dynamic of self-change, a prior and indispensable condition for helping others; the other more immediate and documentable: the ability to roll up one's sleeves to love one's neighbour in the flesh, coming to the aid of those in need.

## **1. Exodus from Capriglio to the Biglione farmstead**

Margaret was educated in the faith, lived and died in the faith. "God was at the forefront of all her thoughts. She felt she lived in God's presence and expressed this conviction in words that were customary for her: "God sees you." Everything spoke to her of God's fatherhood and great was her trust in Providence, showing gratitude to God for the gifts she had received and gratitude to all those who were instruments of Providence. Margaret spent her life in a continuous and incessant search for God's will, the only real and practical criterion for her choices and actions.

At the age of 23 she married Francis Bosco, who was widowed at 27, with his son Anthony and his semi-paralysed mother. Margaret became not only wife, but adoptive mother and help for her mother-in-law. This step was the most important for the married couple because they knew well that having received the sacrament of marriage in a holy way was a source of many blessings for them: for serenity and peace in the family, for future children, for work and for overcoming difficult moments in life. Margaret lived her marriage to Francis Bosco faithfully and fruitfully. Their rings would be a sign of fruitfulness that would extend to the family founded by her son John. All this would arouse a great sense of gratitude and love for this pair of holy spouses and parents in Don Bosco and his boys.

## **2. Exodus from the Biglione farmstead to the Becchi**

After just five years of marriage, in 1817, her husband Francis died. Don Bosco recalled that as he left the

room his mother in tears "took me by the hand" and led him out. Here is the spiritual and educational icon of this mother. She takes her son by the hand and leads him out. Already from this moment there is that "taking by the hand" which would unite mother and son in both the vocational journey and the educational mission.

Margaret found herself in a very difficult situation from an emotional and financial point of view, including a specious dispute brought by the Biglione family. There were debts to pay, hard work in the fields and a terrible famine to face, but she dealt with all these trials with great faith and unconditional trust in Providence.

*Widowhood* opened up a new vocation for her as an attentive and caring educator of her children. She devoted herself to her family tenaciously and courageously, refusing an advantageous marriage proposal. "God gave me a husband and took him away from me; when he died he entrusted me with three children, and I would be a cruel mother if I abandoned them when they needed me most... The guardian... is a friend, but I am the mother to my children; all the gold in the world could never make me abandon them."

She educated her children wisely, anticipating the pedagogical inspiration of the Preventive System. She was a woman who had made the choice for God and was able to pass on the sense of his presence to her children, in their everyday lives. She did so in a simple, spontaneous, clear way, seizing every small opportunity to educate them to live in the light of faith. She did this by anticipating the "word in the ear" that Don Bosco would later use with the boys to call them to the life of grace, to the presence of God. She did this by helping them to recognise the work of the Creator, who is a providential and good Father. in creatures. She did this by recounting the facts of the gospel and the lives of the saints.

*Christian education.* She prepared her children to receive the sacraments, passing on to them a vivid sense of the greatness of God's mysteries. John Bosco received his

First Communion on Easter 1826: "O dear son, this was a great day for you. I am convinced that God has truly taken possession of your heart. Now promise Him to do all you can to keep you good until the end of your life." These words of Mamma Margaret make her a true spiritual mother of her children, especially of John, who would immediately show himself sensitive to these teachings which have the flavour of a true initiation, an expression of the capacity to introduce the mystery of grace in a woman unlettered, but rich in the wisdom of children.

Faith in God is reflected in the demand for moral rectitude that she practised with herself and inculcated in her children. "Against sin she had declared perpetual war. Not only did she abhor what was evil, but she strove to keep away the offence of the Lord even from those who did not belong to her. So she was always on the alert against scandal, cautious, but resolute and at the cost of any sacrifice."

The heart that animated Mamma Margaret's life was an immense love and devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist. She experienced its salvific and redeeming value in her participation in the holy sacrifice and in accepting the trials of life. She educated her children to this faith and love from an early age, passing on that spiritual and educational conviction that would find in Don Bosco a priest in love with the Eucharist and who would make the Eucharist a pillar of his educational system.

Faith found expression in the life of prayer and in particular prayer in common in the family. Mamma Margaret found the strength of a good education in an intense and caring Christian life. She led by example and guided by word. In her school young John thus learned the preventive power of God's grace in a vital form. "Religious instruction, which a mother imparts by word, by example, by comparing her son's conduct with the particular precepts of the catechism, causes the practice of Religion to become normal and sin to be rejected by instinct, just as goodness is loved by instinct. Being good becomes a habit, and virtue does not cost much

effort. A child so educated must do violence to himself to become evil. Margaret knew the power of such a Christian education and how the law of God, taught in catechism every evening and frequently recalled even during the day, was the sure means of making children obedient to their mother's precepts. She therefore repeated the questions and answers as many times as was necessary for the children to learn them by heart."

*Witness of charity.* In her poverty, she practised hospitality with joy, without making distinctions or exclusions; she helped the poor, visited the sick, and her children learnt from her to love the least of these disproportionately. "She was of a very sensitive nature, but this sensitivity so much became charity that she could rightly be called the mother of those in need." This charity manifested itself in a marked ability to understand situations, to deal with people, to make the right choices at the right time, to avoid excesses and to maintain a great balance throughout: "A woman of much sense" (Fr Giacinto Ballesio). The reasonableness of her teachings, her personal consistency and firmness without anger, touch the souls of the children. Proverbs and sayings flourish with ease on her lips and she condensed precepts for life in them: "A bad laundress never finds a good stone"; "Whoever does not know at twenty does not do by thirty and will die foolish"; "Conscience is like a tickle. Some feel it and some do not."

In particular it should be emphasised that John Bosco was to be a great educator of boys, "because he had had a mother who had educated his affectivity. A good, nice, strong mother. With so much love she educated his heart. One cannot understand Don Bosco without Mamma Margaret. One cannot understand him." Mamma Margaret contributed with her maternal mediation to the work of the Spirit in the shaping and formation of her son's heart. Don Bosco learnt to love, as he himself declared, within the Church, thanks to Mamma Margaret and with the supernatural intervention of Mary, who was given

to him by Jesus as "Mother and Teacher".

### **3. Exodus from the Becchi to the Moglia farmstead**

A moment of great trial for Margaret was the difficult relationship between her children. "Margaret's three sons, Anthony, Joseph and John, were different in temperament and inclinations. Antonio was coarse in manners, of little or no delicacy of feeling, a manic exaggerator, a true portrait of "I couldn't care less"! He lived by bullying. He often let himself go and beat his little brothers, and Mamma Margaret had to run to get them out of his hands. However, she never used force to defend them and true to her maxim, she never laid a hair on Antonio's head. One can imagine what mastery Margaret had over herself to restrain the voice of blood and love she bore to Joseph and John. Antonio had been sent to school and had learned to read and write, but he boasted that he had never studied or gone to school. He had no aptitude for studies, he did the work in the countryside."

On the other hand, Antonio was in a particularly difficult situation: older than his age, he was wounded by being fatherless and motherless. Despite his intemperance, he was generally submissive, thanks to the attitude of Mamma Margaret who managed to control him with reasoned kindness. With time, unfortunately, his intolerance towards young John in particular, who did not easily allow himself to be subdued, would grow and his reactions towards Mamma Margaret would also become harsher and at times stronger. In particular, Antonio did not accept that John should dedicate himself to his studies and tensions would reach a climax: "I want to end this grammar. I've come big and fat, I've never seen these books." Antonio was a child of his time and his peasant condition and could neither understand nor accept that his brother could devote himself to his studies. Everyone was upset, but the one who suffered most was Mamma Margaret, who was personally involved and had war at home day after day: "My mother was distressed, I wept, the chaplain grieved."

In the face of Antonio's jealousy and hostility,

Margaret sought a solution to the family conflict, sending John to the Moglia farmstead for about two years and then, in the face of Antonio's resistance, she adamantly arranged for the division of the property in order to allow John to study. Of course, it was only the 12-year-old John who left home, but his Mother also experienced this profound detachment. Let us not forget that Don Bosco in his *Memoirs of the Oratory* does not speak of this period. Such silence suggests a difficult experience to process, being at that time a twelve-year-old boy, forced to leave home because he could not live with his brother. John suffered in silence, waiting for the hour of Providence and with him Mamma Margaret, who did not want to close off her son's path, but open it up through special ways, entrusting him to a good family. The solution taken by the mother and accepted by the son was a temporary choice in view of a definitive solution. It was trust and abandonment in God. Mother and son live a season of waiting.

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## **St Francis de Sales university student in Padua (1/2)**

Francis went to Padua, a city belonging to the Venetian Republic, in October 1588, accompanied by his younger brother Gallois, a twelve-year-old boy who would study with the Jesuits, and their faithful tutor, Fr Déage. At the end of the 16th century, the law faculty of the University of Padua enjoyed an extraordinary reputation, surpassing even that of the famous Studium in Bologna. When he delivered his Discourse

of Thanksgiving following his promotion to doctor, Francis de Sales weaved its praises in dithyrambic form:

*Up to that time, I had not dedicated any work to the holy and sacred science of law: but when, afterwards, I decided to commit myself to such a study, I had absolutely no need to look for where to turn or where to go; this college of Padua immediately attracted me by its celebrity and, under the most favourable auspices, in fact, at that time, it had doctors and readers such as it never had and never will have greater.*

Whatever he may say, it is certain that the decision to study law did not come from him, but was imposed on him by his father. Other reasons might have played in Padua's favour, namely the need that the Senate of a bilingual state had for magistrates with a dual French and Italian culture.

### **In the homeland of humanism**

Crossing the Alps for the first time, Francis de Sales set foot in the homeland of humanism. In Padua, he could not only admire the palaces and churches, especially the basilica of St Anthony, but also Giotto's frescoes, Donatello's bronzes, Mantegna's paintings and Titian's frescoes. His stay in the Italian peninsula also allowed him to get to know several cities of art, in particular, Venice, Milan and Turin.

On a literary level, he could not fail to be in contact with some of the most famous productions. Did he have in his hand Dante Alighieris *Divine Comedy*, the poems of Petrarch, forerunner of humanism and first poet of his time, the novellas of Boccaccio, founder of Italian prose, Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, or Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*? His preference was for spiritual literature, in particular the thoughtful reading of Lorenzo Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat*. He acknowledged modestly, "I don't think I speak perfect Italian."

In Padua, Francis had the good fortune to meet a



distinguished Jesuit in the person of Father Antonio Possevino. This “wandering humanist with an epic life” who had been charged by the pope with diplomatic missions in Sweden, Denmark, Russia, Poland and France, had taken up permanent residence in Padua shortly before Francis’ arrival. He became his spiritual director and guide in his studies and knowledge of the world.

### **The University of Padua**

Founded in 1222, the University of Padua was the oldest university in Italy after Bologna, of which it was an offshoot. It successfully taught not only law, regarded as the *scientia scientiarum*, but also theology, philosophy and medicine. The 1,500 or so students came from all over Europe and were not all Catholics, which sometimes led to worries and unrest.

Fights were frequent, sometimes bloody. One of the favourite dangerous games was the “Paduan hunt” Francis de Sales would one day tell a friend, Jean-Pierre Camus, “that a student, after striking a stranger, with his sword, took refuge with a woman he discovered was the mother of the young man he had just murdered.” He himself, who did not go round without a sword, was one day involved in a fight by fellow students, who considered his gentleness to be a form of cowardice.

Professors and students alike appreciated the proverbial *patavinam libertatem*, which in addition to being cultivated in intellectual pursuit, also incited a good number of students to “flutter about” by giving themselves up to the good life. Even the disciples closest to Francis were not models of virtue. The widow of one of them would later recount, in her picturesque language, how her future husband had staged a farce in bad taste with some accomplices, aimed at throwing Francis into the arms of a “miserable whore”.

### **The study of law**

In obedience to his father, Francis devoted

himself courageously to the study of civil law, to which he wanted to add that of ecclesiastical law, which would make him a future doctor of *utroque jure*. The study of law also involved the study of jurisprudence, which is "the science by means of which law is administered".

The study focused on the sources of law, that is, ancient Roman law, collected and interpreted in the 6th century by the jurists of the Emperor Justinian. Throughout his life, he would remember the definition of justice, read at the beginning of the *Digesto*: "a perpetual, strong and constant will to render to everyone what belongs to him."

Examining Francis' notebooks, we can identify some of his reactions to certain laws. He is in full agreement with the title of the Code that opens the series of laws: *Of the Sovereign Trinity and the Catholic Faith*, and with the defence that immediately follows: *That no one should be allowed to discuss them in public*. "This title" he noted, "is precious, I would say sublime, and worthy of being read often against reformers, know-it-alls and politicians."

Francis de Sales' legal education rested on a foundation that seemed unquestionable at the time. For the Catholics of his time, "tolerating" Protestantism could take on no other meaning than that of being accomplices to error; hence the need to fight it by all means, including those provided by the law in force. Under no circumstances was one to resign oneself to the presence of heresy, which appeared not only as an error on the level of faith, but also as a source of division and disturbance in Christianity. In the eagerness of his twenties, Francis de Sales shared this view.

But this eagerness also had free rein over those who favoured injustice and persecution, since, with regard to Title XXVI of Book III, he wrote: "As precious as gold and worthy of being written in capital letters is the ninth law which states: 'Let the relatives of the prince be punished with fire if they persecute the inhabitants of the provinces.'"

Later, Francis would appeal to the one he

designated as “our Justinian” to denounce the slowness of justice on the part of the judge who “excuses himself by invoking a thousand reasons of custom, style, theory, practice and caution.” In his lectures on ecclesiastical law, he studied the collection of laws that he would later use, in particular those of the medieval canonist Gratianus, inter alia, to demonstrate that the bishop of Rome is the “true successor of Saint Peter and head of the Church militant”, and that religious men and women must be placed “under the obedience of the bishops.”

Consulting the handwritten notes taken by Francis during his stay in Padua, one is struck by the extremely neat handwriting. He went from the Gothic script, still used in Paris, to the modern script of the humanists.

But in the end, his law studies must have bored him quite a bit. On a hot summer's day, faced with the coldness of the laws and their remoteness in time, he wrote, disillusioned: “Since these matters are old, it did not seem profitable to devote oneself to examining them in this steamy weather, which is too hot to comfortably deal with cold and chilling discussions.”

### **Theological studies and intellectual crisis**

While dedicated to the study of law, Francis continued to take a close interest in theology. According to his nephew, when he freshly arrived in Padua, “he set to work with all possible diligence, and placed on the lectern in his room the Summa of the Angelic Doctor, St Thomas, so that he could have it before his eyes every day and easily consult it to understand other books. He greatly enjoyed reading the books of St Bonaventure. He acquired a good knowledge of the Latin Fathers, especially the ‘two brilliant luminaries of the Church’, ‘the great Saint Augustine’ and Saint Jerome, who were also ‘two great captains of the ancient Church’, without forgetting the ‘glorious Saint Ambrose’ and Saint Gregory the Great. Among the Greek Fathers, he admired St John Chrysostom ‘who, because of his sublime eloquence, was praised and called

Golden Mouth'. He also frequently cited St Gregory of Nazianzus, St Basil, St Gregory of Nyssa, St Athanasius, Origen and others."

Consulting the fragments of notes that have come down to us, we learn that he also read the most important authors of his time, in particular, the great Spanish exegete and theologian Juan Maldonado, a Jesuit who had successfully established new methods in the study of the texts of Scripture and the Church Fathers. In addition to personal study, Francis was able to take theology courses at the university, where Fr Déage was preparing his doctorate, and benefit from the help and advice of Fr Possevino. It is also known that he often visited the Franciscans at the Basilica of St Anthony.

His reflection focused again on the problem of predestination and grace, to the point that he filled five notebooks. In reality, Francis found himself faced with a dilemma: to remain faithful to convictions that had always been his, or to stick to the classical positions of St Augustine and St Thomas, "the greatest and unrivalled doctor." Now he found it difficult to "sympathise" with such a discouraging doctrine of these two masters, or at least with the current interpretation, according to which men have no right to salvation, because it depends entirely on a free decision by God.

By his adolescence, Francis had developed a more optimistic view of God's plan. His personal convictions were reinforced after the appearance in 1588 of the book by Spanish Jesuit Luis Molina, whose Latin title *Concordia* summed up the thesis well: *Concord of Free Will with the Gift of Grace*. In this work, predestination in the strict sense was replaced with a predestination that took into account man's merits, i.e. his good or bad deeds. In other words, Molina affirmed both God's sovereign action and the decisive role of the freedom he bestowed on man.

In 1606, the bishop of Geneva would have the honour of being consulted by the pope on the theological dispute between the Jesuit Molina and the Dominican Domingo

Báñez on the same issue, for whom Molina's doctrine granted too much autonomy to human freedom, at the risk of jeopardising God's sovereignty.

The *Treatise on the Love of God*, which appeared in 1616, contains in Chapter 5 of Book III the thought of Francis de Sales, summarised in "fourteen lines", which, according to Jean-Pierre Camus, had cost him "the reading of one thousand two hundred pages of a large volume." With a commendable effort to be concise and exact, Francis affirmed both the divine liberality and generosity, and human freedom and responsibility in the act of writing this weighty sentence: "It is up to us to be his: for although it is a gift of God to belong to God, yet it is a gift that God never refuses to anyone, on the contrary, he offers it to all, to grant it to those who will willingly consent to receive it."

Making his own the ideas of the Jesuits, who in the eyes of many appeared to be innovators, and whom the Jansenists with Blaise Pascal would soon brand as bad theologians, too lax, Francis de Sales grafted his theology into the current of Christian humanism and opted for the "God of the human heart" Salesian theology, which rests on the goodness of God who wants all to be saved, would likewise present itself with a pressing invitation to the human person to respond with the whole "heart" to the appeals of grace.

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## **What are the requirements for entering the Salesian Society**

*In various parts of the world the time is approaching when some young people, attracted by God's grace, are preparing to*

*say their "Fiat" in the following of Christ, according to the charism that God has instituted through St John Bosco. What would be the dispositions with which they should approach joining the Salesian Society of St John Bosco? The saint himself tells us in a letter addressed to his sons (MB VIII, 828-830).*

On Pentecost Sunday [1867] Don Bosco addressed a letter to all Salesians concerning the goal a candidate should have in mind when seeking admission to the Salesian Society. He also stated that the Society's definitive approval might not be long in coming. However, pertinent documents on hand give no such assurance. Since Don Bosco's personally written letter is dated "May 24, Feast of Mary, Help of Christians," we feel that it may have been this feast which inspired him to write and perhaps gave him a more vivid vision of the future. Be that as it may, he had several copies of his letter made, and then he himself changed the date and addressed each respectively: To Father Bonetti and to My Dear Sons of St. Francis de Sales at Mirabello; To Father Lemoyne and to My Dear Sons of St. Francis de Sales at Lanzo. He also signed them himself and added the postscript: "Let the director read and explain as he judges necessary."

Here is the copy addressed to the Salesians at the Oratory:

"To Father Rua and to My Beloved Sons of St Francis de Sales in Turin.

Before long our Society may be definitively approved. I therefore feel the need frequently to communicate with you, my dear sons. Being unable at times to do so personally, I will try to reach you by letter.

First I shall treat of the general purpose of our Society, leaving the explanation of our rules to some other occasion.

The primary aim of our Society is the sanctification of its members. On entering it, therefore, everyone must discard any

other intention and concern. It would be wrong to enter in order to enjoy a tranquil life, complete one's education, or free oneself of parental or other authority. This would hardly be a response to Christ's call. Such a person would be seeking temporal advantages, not his spiritual good. Our Savior praised the Apostles and promised them an eternal kingdom not because they had abandoned the world, but because they had abandoned it in order to follow Him through thick and thin; this they indeed did, wearing themselves out with work, penance, and suffering, and finally undergoing martyrdom.

It would also be wrong for anyone to enter or remain in this Society with the notion that he is necessary. **From the Superior General down to the last member, let everyone keep well in mind that nobody is necessary to the Society.** God alone is its head, its absolute, necessary master. Its members must therefore turn to Him as to their head, true master and rewarder. Those who join this Society should work, obey, and abandon all worldly possessions exclusively for God's sake so that, at the end of their lives, they can tell their Savior, *"Behold, we have left all and followed You. What then shall we have?"* [Matt. 19:27]

By saying that **one should enter the Society only to serve God more perfectly and do good to himself**, we mean his true good, his spiritual eternal good. Anyone who seeks an easy, comfortable life in our Society is not rightly motivated. Our basic motive must stem from Our Lord's words that whoever wishes to be His disciple must sell his possessions, give to the poor, and then follow Him. But where can we follow Him, since He had nowhere to lay His weary head? He explains that we must follow Him in prayer, in penance, especially in self-denial, in accepting our daily crosses ... *"Let him deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow Me."* [Luke 9, 23] Till when? Till death and, if necessary, even till death on the cross.

This is what one does in our Society when he wears himself out

in the sacred ministry, in teaching or in other priestly work till death, till even a violent death through imprisonment, exile, sword, fire, or water. Then, after having suffered and died with Jesus Christ on earth, he will join Him in the happiness of heaven.

This is how I understand Saint Paul's words to all Christians: *"Whoever wishes to rejoice with Christ must also suffer with Christ."*

After entering the Society with these good dispositions, a member must be undemanding and willing to accept any task-even the most menial- readily and cheerfully because what matters before God is not the task itself but the intention with which it is done. All jobs are equally noble because they are all equally meritorious in God's sight.

My dear sons, trust your superiors. They shall have to give God a strict account of your actions. Hence they study your abilities and inclinations and use them in a manner compatible with your strength, but always in accordance with what seems best for God's greater glory and the good of souls.

If applicants enter our Society with these intentions, our houses will certainly be an earthly paradise. Peace and concord will reign, charity will guide superiors, and obedience and respect will anticipate their decisions, their undertakings, and even their wishes. Thus we shall have a family of brothers around a father, all united to promote God's glory on earth so as to be with Him some day and praise Him in the immense glory of the blessed in heaven.

May God abundantly bless you and your efforts. May He sanctify your activities and help you persevere in doing good.

*Turin, 9 June 1867, Pentecost Day.*  
*Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,*  
*Father John Bosco*