

# 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.

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## **The Venerable Father Carlo Crespi “witness and pilgrim of hope”**

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

In the last years of his life, Father Carlo Crespi (Legnano, May 29, 1891 – Cuenca, April 30, 1982), a Salesian

missionary in Ecuador, having gradually put aside the academic aspirations of his youth, surrounded himself with essentiality, and his spiritual growth appeared unstoppable. He was seen in the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians spreading devotion to the Virgin, confessing and advising endless lines of faithful, for whom schedules, meals, and even sleep no longer matter. Just as he had done in an exemplary manner throughout his life, he kept his gaze fixed on eternal goods, which now appeared closer than ever.

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

This was the hope of the Venerable Father Crespi! A great virtue that, like the arms of a yoke, supports faith and charity: like the transverse arm of the Cross. It is a throne of salvation. It is the support of the healing serpent raised by Moses in the desert; a bridge of the soul to take flight in the light.

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

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

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

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

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

Practicing the virtue of hope grew parallel to the practice of the other Christian virtues, encouraging them: he



was a man rich in faith, hope, and charity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Carlo Riganti

President of the Carlo Crespi Association

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## **Patagonia: “The greatest enterprise of our Congregation”**

*Upon arriving in Patagonia, the Salesians—led by Don Bosco—aimed to establish an Apostolic Vicariate to secure pastoral autonomy and support from Propaganda Fide. Between 1880 and 1882, repeated appeals to Rome, Argentine President Roca, and the Archbishop of Buenos Aires were thwarted by political unrest and ecclesiastical scepticism. Missionaries such as Rizzo, Fagnano, Costamagna, and Beauvoir travelled along the Río Negro, the Colorado, and as far as Lake Nahuel-*

*Huapi, establishing missions among Indigenous communities and settlers. The turning point came on 16 November 1883: a decree established the Vicariate of Northern Patagonia, entrusted to Bishop Giovanni Cagliero, and the Southern Prefecture, led by Bishop Giuseppe Fagnano. From that moment, the Salesian mission took root "at the end of the world," laying the groundwork for its future flourishing.*

The Salesians had only just arrived in Patagonia when Don Bosco, on 22 March 1880, returned again to the various Roman Congregations and Pope Leo XIII himself with a request for the erection of a Vicariate or Prefecture of Patagonia with its headquarters in Carmen, which would embrace the colonies already established or that were being organised on the banks of the Río Negro, from 36° to 50° South latitude. Carmen could have become "the centre of the Salesian Missions among the Indians".

But the military unrest at the time of General Roca's election as President of the Republic (May-August 1880) and the death of the Salesian Provincial, Fr Francis Bodrato (August 1880), caused the plans to be put on hold. Don Bosco also insisted with the President in November, but to no avail. The Vicariate was neither wanted by the archbishop nor liked by the political authority.

A few months later, in January 1881, Don Bosco encouraged the newly appointed Provincial, Fr Giacomo Costamagna, to get busy with the Vicariate in Patagonia and assured the rector-parish priest Fr Fagnano that with regard to Patagonia – "the greatest undertaking of our Congregation" – a great responsibility would soon fall on him. But the impasse remained.

Meanwhile in Patagonia Fr Emilio Rizzo, who in 1880 had accompanied the Vicar General of Buenos Aires, Monsignor Espinosa, along the Río Negro to Roca (50 km), with other Salesians was preparing for further flying missions along the same river. Fr Fagnano was then able to accompany the army up to the Cordillera in 1881. Don Bosco trembled

impatiently and Fr Costamagna again in November 1881 advised him to negotiate directly with Rome.

As luck would have it, Monsignor Espinosa came to Italy at the end of 1881; Don Bosco took the opportunity to inform the Archbishop of Buenos Aires through him, who in April 1882 seemed favourable to the project of a Vicariate entrusted to the Salesians. More than anything, perhaps, because he did not have the clergy to serve there. But once again nothing came of it. In the summer of 1882 and then again in 1883 Fr Beauvoir accompanied the army as far as Lake Nahuel-Huapi in the Andes (880 km); other Salesians had made similar apostolic excursions in April along the Río Colorado, while Fr Beauvoir returned to Roca and in August Fr Milanesio went as far as Ñorquín in Neuquén (900 km).

Don Bosco was more and more convinced that without their own Vicariate Apostolic the Salesians would not have enjoyed the necessary freedom of action, given the very difficult relations he had had with his Archbishop in Turin and also taking into account that the First Vatican Council itself had not decided anything about the sometimes difficult relationships between Ordinaries and Superiors of Religious Congregations in mission territories. Furthermore, and this was no small thing, only a missionary Vicariate could have financial support from the Congregation of Propaganda Fide.

Therefore Don Bosco resumed his efforts, putting forward to the Holy See a proposal for the administrative subdivision of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego into three Vicariates or Prefectures: from Río Colorado to Río Chubut, from these to Río Santa Cruz, and from these to the islands of Tierra del Fuego, including Malvinas (Falklands).

Pope Leo XIII agreed a few months later and asked him for possible names for these. Don Bosco then suggested to Cardinal Simeoni the erection of a single Vicariate for northern Patagonia with its headquarters in Carmen, on which a Prefecture Apostolic for southern Patagonia would depend. For the latter he proposed Fr Fagnano; for the Vicariate Fr Cagliero or Fr Costamagna.

## **A dream come true**

On 16 November 1883 a decree from Propaganda Fide erected the Vicariate Apostolic of Northern and Central Patagonia, which included the south of the province of Buenos Aires, the national territories of La Pampa central, Río Negro, Neuquén and Chubut. Four days later he entrusted it to Fr Cagliero as Provicar Apostolic (and later Vicar Apostolic). On 2 December 1883, it was Fagnano's turn to be appointed Prefect Apostolic of Chilean Patagonia, the Chilean territory of Magallanes-Punta Arenas, the Argentine territory of Santa Cruz, the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands and the undefined islands stretching as far as the Strait of Magellan. Ecclesiastically, the Prefecture covered areas belonging to the Chilean diocese of San Carlos de Ancud.

The dream of the famous train journey from Cartagena in Colombia to Punta Arenas in Chile on 10 August 1883 was thus beginning to come true, all the more so since some Salesians from Montevideo in Uruguay had come to found the house of Niteroi in Brazil at the beginning of 1883. The long process of being able to run a mission in full canonical freedom had come to an end. In October 1884 Fr Cagliero would be appointed Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia, where he would enter on 8 July, seven months after his episcopal consecration at Valdocco on 7 December 1884.

## **The sequel**

Although in the midst of difficulties of all kinds that history recalls – including accusations and outright calumnies – the Salesian work from those timid beginnings rapidly unfolded in both Argentine and Chilean Patagonia. It took root mostly in very small centres of Indians and settlers, which today have become towns and cities. Bishop Fagnano settled in Punta Arenas (Chile) in 1887, from where he shortly afterwards started missions in the islands of Tierra del Fuego. Generous and capable missionaries spent their lives on both sides of the Strait of Magellan” or the salvation of the souls” and even bodies (as far as they were able) of the

inhabitants of those lands “down there, at the end of the world”. Many recognised this, among them a person who knows about it, because he himself came “almost from the end of the world”: Pope Francis.

*Historical photograph: The three Bororòs who accompanied the Salesian missionaries to Cuyabà (1904)*

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# The Evangelical Radicality of Blessed Stefano Sándor

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

## 1. Biographical Notes

Sándor Stefano was born in Szolnok, Hungary, on 26 October 1914, to Stefano and Maria Fekete, the first of three brothers. His father was an employee of the State Railways, while his mother was a housewife. Both instilled a deep religiosity in their children. Stefano studied in his

hometown, obtaining a diploma as a metallurgical technician. From a young age, he was respected by his peers; he was cheerful, serious, and kind. He helped his younger siblings study and pray, setting an example himself. He fervently received Confirmation, committing to imitate his patron saint and Saint Peter. He served daily Mass with the Franciscan Fathers, receiving the Eucharist.

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

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

When the State, under Mátyás Rákosi, confiscated ecclesiastical property in 1949 and began persecuting Catholic schools, which had to close their doors, Sándor tried to save what could be saved, at least some printing machines and some of the furnishings that had cost so many sacrifices. Suddenly, the religious found themselves with nothing; everything had become State property. Rákosi's Stalinism continued to rage; the religious were dispersed. Without a home, work, or community, many became clandestine. They adapted to do anything: street cleaners, farmers, laborers, porters, servants... Even Stefano had to "disappear," leaving his printing house, which had become famous. Instead of seeking refuge abroad, he remained in his homeland to save Hungarian youth. Caught in the act (he was trying to save some printing machines), he had to flee quickly and remain hidden for several months. Then, under another name, he managed to get hired in a detergent factory in the capital, but he continued his apostolate fearlessly and clandestinely, knowing it was strictly prohibited. In July 1952, he was captured at his workplace and was never seen again by his confreres. An official document certifies his trial and death sentence, carried out by hanging on June 8, 1953.

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

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

The brief notes on Sándor's biography have introduced us to the heart of his spiritual journey. Contemplating the features that the Salesian vocation has taken in him, marked by the action of the Spirit and now proposed by the Church, we discover some traits of that holiness: the deep sense of God and the full and serene availability to His will; the attraction to Don Bosco and the



cordial belonging to the Salesian community; the encouraging and animating presence among the youth; the family spirit; the spiritual and prayer life cultivated personally and shared with the community; the total dedication to the Salesian mission lived in service to apprentices and young workers, to the boys of the oratory, and to the animation of youth groups. It is an active presence in the educative and social world, all animated by the charity of Christ that drives him from within!

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

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

Even though more than sixty years have passed since his martyrdom and there has been a profound evolution in Consecrated Life, in the Salesian experience, in the vocation and formation of the Salesian Coadjutor, the Salesian path to holiness traced by Stefano Sándor is a sign and a message that

opens perspectives for today. This fulfills the affirmation of the Salesian Constitutions: "The confreres who have lived or live fully the evangelical project of the Constitutions are for us a stimulus and help in the journey of sanctification." His beatification concretely indicates that "high measure of ordinary Christian life" indicated by John Paul II in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*.

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

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

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

He had come to know Don Bosco through the Salesian Bulletin and the Salesian publications of Rákospalota. From this contact through the Salesian press, perhaps his passion for typography and books was born. In a letter to the Provincial of the Salesians of Hungary, Fr. János Antal, where he asks to be accepted among the sons of Don Bosco, he declared: "I feel the vocation to enter the Salesian

Congregation. There is a need for work everywhere; without work, one cannot reach eternal life. I like to work."

From the beginning, the strong and determined will to persevere in the received vocation emerges, as will indeed happen. When on May 28, 1936, he applied for admission to the Salesian novitiate, he declared that he "had known the Salesian Congregation and had been increasingly confirmed in his religious vocation, so much so that he trusted he could persevere under the banner of Don Bosco." In a few words, Sándor expresses a high-profile vocational awareness: experiential knowledge of the life and spirit of the Congregation; confirmation of a right and irreversible choice; assurance for the future of being faithful on the battlefield that awaits him.

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

On September 8, 1940, he made his religious profession as a Salesian Coadjutor. On this day of grace, we report a letter written by Pista, as he was familiarly called, to his parents. "Dear parents, I have to report an important event for me that will leave indelible marks in my heart. On September 8, by the grace of good God and with the protection of the Holy Virgin, I committed myself with my profession to love and serve God. On the feast of the Virgin Mother, I made my wedding with Jesus and promised Him with the triple vow to be His, never to separate from Him, and to persevere in fidelity to Him until death. I therefore pray all of you not to forget me in your prayers and Communions, making vows that I may remain faithful to my promise made to God. You can

imagine that it was a joyful day for me, never before experienced in my life. I think I could not have given the Madonna a more pleasing birthday gift than the gift of myself. I imagine that our good Jesus looked at you with affectionate eyes, you having been the ones who gave me to God... Affectionate greetings to all. PISTA.”

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

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

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

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

He was not content with just one specific job but

made himself available for every need. He took on the role of sacristan of the small church of the Clarisseum and took care of the direction of the "Little Clergy." A testament to his capacity for endurance was also the spontaneous commitment to voluntary work in the flourishing oratory, regularly attended by the youth from the two suburbs of Újpest and Rákospalota. He enjoyed playing with the boys; in soccer matches, he refereed with great competence.

### **2.3. Religious Educator**

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

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

György Érseki had known the Salesians since 1945 and after World War II moved to Rákospalota, in the Clarisseum. His acquaintance with Stefano Sándor lasted until

1947. For this period, he not only offers us a glimpse of the multiple activities of the young Coadjutor, printer, catechist, and youth educator, but also a deep reading, from which emerges the spiritual richness and educational capacity of Stefano. "Stefano Sándor was a very gifted person by nature. As a pedagogue, I can affirm and confirm his observational skills and his multifaceted personality. He was a good educator and managed to handle the young people, one by one, in an optimal manner, choosing the appropriate tone with everyone. There is still a detail belonging to his personality: he considered every work a holy duty, dedicating, without effort and with great naturalness, all his energy to the realization of this sacred purpose. Thanks to an innate intuition, he was able to grasp the atmosphere and influence it positively. [...] He had a strong character as an educator; he took care of everyone individually. He was interested in our personal problems, always reacting in the most suitable way for us. In this way, he realized the three principles of Don Bosco: reason, religion, and loving-kindness... The Salesian Coadjutors did not wear the habit outside the liturgical context, but Stefano Sándor's appearance stood out from the crowd. Regarding his activity as an educator, he never resorted to physical punishment, which was prohibited according to the principles of Don Bosco, unlike other more impulsive Salesian teachers, who were unable to control themselves and sometimes slapped students. The apprentice students entrusted to him formed a small community within the school, despite being different from each other in terms of age and culture. They ate in the dining hall together with the other students, where the Bible was usually read during meals. Naturally, Stefano Sándor was also present. Thanks to his presence, the group of industrial apprentices was always the most disciplined... Stefano Sándor remained youthful, showing great understanding towards young people. By grasping their problems, he transmitted positive messages and was able to advise them both personally and religiously. His personality revealed great tenacity and resilience in work; even in the

most difficult situations, he remained faithful to his ideals and to himself.

The Salesian school of Rákospalota hosted a large community, requiring work with young people at multiple levels. In the school, alongside the printing house, there lived young Salesians in formation, who were in close contact with the Coadjutors. I remember the following names: József Krammer, Imre Strifler, Vilmos Klinger, and László Merész. These young men had different tasks from those of Stefano Sándor and also differed in character. However, thanks to their common life, they knew each other's problems, virtues, and flaws. Stefano Sándor always found the right measure in his relationship with these clerics. Stefano Sándor managed to find the fraternal tone to admonish them when they showed some shortcomings, without falling into paternalism. In fact, it was the young clerics who sought his opinion. In my view, he realized the ideals of Don Bosco. From the very first moment of our acquaintance, Stefano Sándor represented the spirit that characterized the members of the Salesian Society: a sense of duty, purity, religiosity, practicality, and fidelity to Christian principles."

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

his seriousness, which he manifested in church, in the printing house, and even on the playing field.”

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

What gave depth to all this – the dedication to the mission and the professional and educative capacity – and what immediately struck those who met him was the inner figure of Stefano Sándor, that of a disciple of the Lord, who lived at every moment his consecration, in constant union with God and in evangelical fraternity. From the testimonies in the process, a complete figure emerges, also for that Salesian balance whereby the different dimensions converge in a harmonious, unified, and serene personality, open to the mystery of God lived in the everyday.

One striking aspect of such radicality is the fact that from the very novitiate, all his companions, even those aspiring to the priesthood and much younger than him, esteemed him and saw him as a model to imitate. The exemplary nature of his consecrated life and the radicality with which he lived and testified to the evangelical counsels always distinguished him everywhere, so that on many occasions, even during his imprisonment, many thought he was a priest. Such testimony speaks volumes about the uniqueness with which Stefano Sándor always lived with clear identity his vocation as a Salesian Coadjutor, highlighting precisely the specificity of Salesian consecrated life as such. Among the novitiate companions, Gyula Zsédely speaks of Stefano Sándor: “We entered together the Salesian novitiate of Saint Stephen in Mezőnyárád. Our master was Béla Bali. Here I spent a year and a half with Stefano Sándor and was an eyewitness to his life, a model of a young religious. Although Stefano Sándor was at least nine or ten years older than me, he lived with his novitiate companions in an exemplary manner; he participated in the practices of piety with us. We did not feel the age difference at all; he stood by us with fraternal affection. He edified us not only through his good example but also by giving us



practical advice regarding the education of youth. It was already evident then how he was predestined for this vocation according to the educational principles of Don Bosco... His talent as an educator stood out even to us novices, especially during community activities. With his personal charm, he inspired us to such an extent that we took for granted that we could easily tackle even the most difficult tasks. The engine of his deep Salesian spirituality was prayer and the Eucharist, as well as devotion to Our Lady Help of Christians. During the novitiate, which lasted a year, we saw in him a good friend. He became our model also in obedience, as being the oldest, he was tested with small humiliations, but he endured them with composure and without showing signs of suffering or resentment. At that time, unfortunately, there was someone among our superiors who enjoyed humiliating the novices, but Stefano Sándor knew how to resist well. His greatness of spirit, rooted in prayer, was perceptible to all."

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

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

The evangelical radicality expressed itself in

various forms throughout the religious life of Stefano Sándor:

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

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

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

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

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

## **Conclusion**

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

moment of trial, to resist, first to situations of conflict and then to the supreme test of the gift of life.

I would like to highlight *the testimony of evangelical radicality* offered by this confrere. From the reconstruction of the biographical profile of Stefano Sándor emerges a real and profound journey of faith, begun from his childhood and youth, strengthened by his Salesian religious profession and consolidated in the exemplary life of a Salesian Coadjutor. A genuine consecrated vocation is particularly noticeable, animated according to the spirit of Don Bosco, by an intense and fervent zeal for the salvation of souls, especially young ones. Even the most difficult periods, such as military service and the experience of war, did not tarnish the upright moral and religious behavior of the young Coadjutor. It is on this basis that Stefano Sándor will suffer martyrdom without second thoughts or hesitations.

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

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

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# The safe tradition of Blessed Michael Rua (1/2)

*“Be good, trust in God and paradise will be yours” (Blessed Michael RUA)*

*Blessed Michael Rua* (1837-1910), Don Bosco's first successor, as studies, research and conferences held on the occasion of the centenary of his death have shown, goes beyond the traditional cliché of being a 'copy of Don Bosco', sometimes with less attractive traits or even in opposition to the founder, to release a more complete, harmonious and sympathetic figure.

Fr Rua is the consecration and exaltation of Salesian origins. It was testified during the process: 'Fr Rua is not to be placed in the ranks of Don Bosco's ordinary followers, even the most fervent, because he precedes them all as a perfect exemplar, and for this reason all those who want to know Don Bosco well must also study him, because the servant of God made a study on Don Bosco that no one else can make.' No one like him understood and interpreted the founder in his educational and ecclesial action and spirituality. Fr Rua's vocation and ideal were the life, intentions, works, virtues, holiness of the father and guide of his youthful, priestly and religious existence. Frn Rua always remains of vital relevance to the Salesian world.

When it came to finding the rector for the first house outside Turin, at Mirabello Monferrato in 1863, Don Bosco chose Fr Rua “admiring in him, in addition to his exemplary conduct, his indefatigable work, his great experience and spirit of sacrifice that one would say was unspeakable, as well as his good manners, so much so that he

was loved by all.” More directly Fr Cerruti, after affirming that he had found in the young rector the portrait and image of the Father (Don Bosco), testifies: “I always remember that tireless industriousness of his, that prudence so fine and delicate of government, that zeal for the good not only religious and moral, but intellectual and physical of the brothers and young people entrusted to him. These aspects summarise and embody the Salesian motto ‘work and temperance’. A true disciple of Don Bosco *verbo et opere*, in an admirable synthesis of prayer and work. A disciple who followed his master from his earliest childhood, doing everything by halves, assimilating in a vital form the spirit of his charismatic origins; a son who felt generated by a unique love, like so many of the first boys of the Valdocco Oratory, who decided to ‘stay with Don Bosco’” and among whom the first three successors of the father and teacher of the young excelled in a paradigmatic way: Fr Michael Rua, Fr Paul Albera, Fr Philip Rinaldi.

### **1. Some of the traits of Fr Rua’s virtuous life, an expression of continuity and fidelity**

It is a matter of the tradition of one who receives a gift and in turn passes it on, trying not to lose the dynamism and apostolic, spiritual and affective vitality that must permeate institutions and works. Don Bosco had already intuited this: “If God told me: Prepare yourself that you must die and choose a successor because I don’t want the Work you started to fail and ask for this successor as many graces, virtues, gifts and charisms as you think necessary, so that he can carry out his office well, which I will give him all, I assure you that I wouldn’t know what to ask the Lord for for this purpose, because I already see that Fr Rua already possesses everything.” This was the fruit of assiduous frequentation, of treasuring every piece of advice, of continuous study in observing and noting every act, every word, every ideal of Don Bosco.

## **Exemplary Conduct**

The testimony of Salesian Brother Giuseppe Balestra, Fr Rua's personal assistant, is significant. Balestra was very attentive to the aspects of daily life and in them he was able to grasp the traits of a holiness to the full that would also mark his religious journey. Even today in Don Bosco's rooms one can see the sofa that was Blessed Michael Rua's bed for 20 years. Having succeeded Don Bosco, and taken his place in this room, Fr Rua never wanted his own bed. In the evening, Brother Balestra spread two sheets on that sofa, which Fr Rua used to sleep on. In the morning, the sheets were folded and the sofa resumed its usual shape. "I have the conviction that the servant of God was a saint, because in the 11 years that I had the good fortune to live right next to him and to observe him continually, I have always and in all things found the greatest perfection; hence my conviction that he was most faithful in the fulfilment of all his duties and therefore in the most exact observance of all the Commandments of God, of the Church and the obligations of his own state."

### **1.2. Tireless work, tireless industriousness and extraordinary activity**

It seems incredible that a man with such a frail body, with health that was anything but florid, could have been able to undertake such an intense and untiring activity, so vast, taking an interest in the most diverse sectors of the Salesian apostolate, promoting and implementing initiatives that if they appeared extraordinary and daring at the time, are also a very valid indication and spur today. This untiring industriousness, a typical trait of Salesian spirituality, was recognised in Fr Rua by Don Bosco from his youth, as Fr Lemoyne attested: "It is true, in the oratory one works a lot, but it is not work that is the cause of death. There is only one here in the Oratory who should, without God's help, die of fatigue, and that is Fr Rua, who always continues to work harder than the others."

This dedication to work was an expression of the spirit and practice of poverty that singularly distinguished Fr Rua's life and actions: "He loved poverty immensely, which was a most welcome companion to him from childhood and he possessed the spirit of it perfectly... He practised it with joy." The practice of poverty, expressed in many forms, emphasised the value of the example of life and of taking divine Providence into account. He admonished: "Persuade yourselves that to a much higher end my exhortations tend, it is a matter of ensuring that the true spirit of poverty, to which we are obliged by vow, reigns among us. If economy is not taken care of, and too much is given to our bodies in treatment, in clothing, in travel, in comfort, how can we have fervour in the practices of piety? How can we be disposed to those sacrifices that are inherent to Salesian life? It would be impossible to make any real progress in perfection, impossible to be true sons of Don Bosco."

### **1.3. Great experience and prudence of governance**

Prudence defines better than any other quality the virtuous profile of Blessed Michael Rua: from his earliest childhood he set out to follow St John Bosco, hastening under his guidance to embrace the religious state; he formed himself through assiduous meditation and diligent examination of conscience; he eschewed idleness, worked tirelessly for good and led an irreproachable life. And as an adolescent he remained so as a priest, educator, vicar superior and successor of Don Bosco.

In the sphere of a Congregation dedicated to the education of the young he introduced into the formation process the practice of practical training, a period of three years during which the young Salesians "were sent to the houses to carry out different tasks, but mostly as assistants or teachers, for the main purpose that they might live together with the young, study their mentality, grow with them, and this under the guidance and supervision of the catechist and Rector." He also offered precise indications and

clear directives in the most varied fields of the Salesian mission, with a spirit of evangelical vigilance.

This exercise of prudence was characterised by a docility to the Spirit and a marked capacity for discernment regarding the persons called to hold positions of responsibility, especially in the field of formation and governance of the houses and provinces, regarding the works and the different situations; as when, for example, he chose Fr Paul Albera as Visitor of the houses in America or Fr Philip Rinaldi as Prefect General. "He inculcated in all the confreres, especially the rectors and provincials, the exact observance of the Rules, the exemplary fulfilment of practices of piety and always the exercise of charity; and he himself preceded them all by example, saying: 'A means of gaining the confidence of those under us is to never neglect one's duties.'"

The practice of prudence, especially in the exercise of government, produced as its fruit the filial confidence the confreres had in him, considering him as an expert counsellor and spiritual director, not only for matters of the soul, but also for material things: "The prudence of the servant of God shone in an extraordinary way in jealously preserving the confidential secret which he buried in his soul. He observed with the greatest caution the secrecy of personal correspondence: this was a general confession, and therefore the confreres approached him with great confidence because he answered everyone in the most delicate way."

#### **1.4. "Priest of the Pope".**

This expression of Pope John XXIII in front of Don Bosco's casket in 1959, expresses very well how Fr Rua, following Don Bosco in his daily journey, saw and found in the pope the light and the guide for his action. "Providence reserved even harder and I would say heroic trials of this fidelity and docility for Fr Rua than for Don Bosco. During his time as Rector Major, various decrees came from the Holy See that seemed to break traditions considered important and



characteristic of our spirit in the Congregation. Fr Rua, while deeply feeling the blow of the sudden measures and being afflicted by them, immediately made himself a champion of obedience to the Holy See's dispositions, inviting the Salesians, as true sons of the Church and of Don Bosco, to accept them serenely and with confidence."

This is one of the maturing elements of the Salesian charism in obedience to the Church and in fidelity to the founder. Certainly, it was a very demanding ordeal, but one that forged both the holiness of Fr Rua and the *sentire cum ecclesia* and that fidelity to the Pope of the entire Congregation and Salesian Family which were characteristic and indispensable features in Don Bosco. Obedience made of faith, of love, translated into humble but cordial service, in a spirit of filial docility and fidelity to the teachings and directives of the Holy Father.

It is interesting to note how even in the process of beatification Fr Rua went halfway with Don Bosco, but not according to a repetitive stereotype, but with originality, highlighting precisely those aspects that in Don Bosco's process had aroused the most controversial *animadversiones*: "Some surprise and perplexity may arise from the most obvious conclusion reached by comparing the two *Positiones*, that is the fact that the same virtues most frequently invoked to delineate Fr Rua's holiness are those constantly set out to challenge Don Bosco's holiness. It is true in fact that it is precisely prudence, temperance and poverty that are in the forefront of the *animadversiones* collected in the Founder's *Positio*."

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# The new rooms of the Salesian General Postulation

*On 4 June 2024, the new rooms of the Salesian General Postulation located at the Zeffirino Namuncurà community in Via della Bufalotta in Rome were opened and blessed by the then Rector Major, Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime. In the plan to restructure the headquarters, the Rector Major with his Council decided to locate the rooms relating to the Salesian General Postulation in this new Salesian presence in Rome.*

From Don Bosco to the present day we recognise a tradition of holiness that deserves attention, because it is the embodiment of the charism that originated with him and that has been expressed in a plurality of states of life and forms. We are talking about men and women, young people and adults, consecrated and lay people, bishops and missionaries who in different historical, cultural and social contexts in time and space have made the Salesian charism shine with special light, representing a heritage that plays an effective role in the life and community of believers and for people of good will. The Postulation accompanies **64 Causes of Beatification and Canonisation concerning 179 Saints, Blesseds, Venerables, Servants of God**. It is worth noting that about half of the Salesian Family groups (15 out of 32) have at least one Cause of Beatification and Canonisation underway.

The **plans for the work** were drawn up and supervised by architect Toti Cameroni. Having identified the space for the location of the Postulation rooms, which originally comprised a long and wide corridor and a large hall, it then went on to the study of their distribution based on the requirements. The final solution was thus designed and realised:

**The library** with full-height bookcases divided into 40×40 cm

squares that completely cover the walls. The purpose is to collect and store the various publications on saintly figures, in the knowledge that the lives and writings of the saints have, since ancient times, constituted frequent reading among the faithful, arousing conversion and a desire for a better life: they reflect the splendour of Christ's goodness, truth and charity. In addition, this space is also well suited for personal research, hosting groups and meetings.

From here we move on to **the reception** area, which is intended to be a space for spirituality and meditation, as in the visits to the monasteries of Mount Athos, where the guest was first introduced to the chapel of the relics of the saints: that is where the heart of the monastery was located and from there came the incitement to holiness for the monks. In this space there is a series of small **showcases** illuminating reliquaries or valuables related to Salesian holiness. The right-hand wall is lined with wooden **panelling** with replaceable panels depicting some of the Salesian Family's saints, blessed, venerable and servants of God.

A door leads into the largest room of the postulation: **the archives**. A 640 linear metre compactor allows for the archiving of a large number of documents relating to the various processes of Beatification and Canonisation. A long chest of drawers is located under the windows: there are liturgical images and vestments.

A small corridor from the reception area, where canvases and paintings can be admired on the walls, leads first into **two brightly lit offices** with furnishings and then into the **relics case**. Also in this space, furniture fills the walls, cabinets and drawers accommodate the relics and liturgical vestments.

**A storage room and a small room used as a rest area** complete the postulation rooms.

The opening and blessing of these rooms reminds us that we are custodians of a precious heritage that deserves to

be known and valued. In addition to the liturgical-celebratory aspect, the spiritual, pastoral, ecclesial, educational, cultural, historical, social, missionary... potential of the Causes must be fully valorised. Holiness recognised, or in the process of being recognised, on the one hand is already a realisation of evangelical radicalism and fidelity to Don Bosco's apostolic project, to be looked to as a spiritual and pastoral resource; on the other hand it is a provocation to live one's vocation faithfully in order to be available to bear witness to love to the extreme. Our Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God are the authentic incarnation of the Salesian charism and the Constitutions or Regulations of our Institutes and Groups in the most diverse times and situations, overcoming that worldliness and spiritual superficiality which undermine our credibility and fruitfulness at the root.

Experience confirms more and more that the promotion and care of the Causes of Beatification and Canonisation of our Family, the celebration together of events related to holiness, are dynamics of grace that give rise to gospel joy and a sense of charismatic belonging, renewing intentions and commitments of fidelity to the call received and generating apostolic and vocational fruitfulness. The saints are true mystics of the primacy of God in the generous gift of self, prophets of evangelical fraternity, servants of their brothers and sisters with creativity.

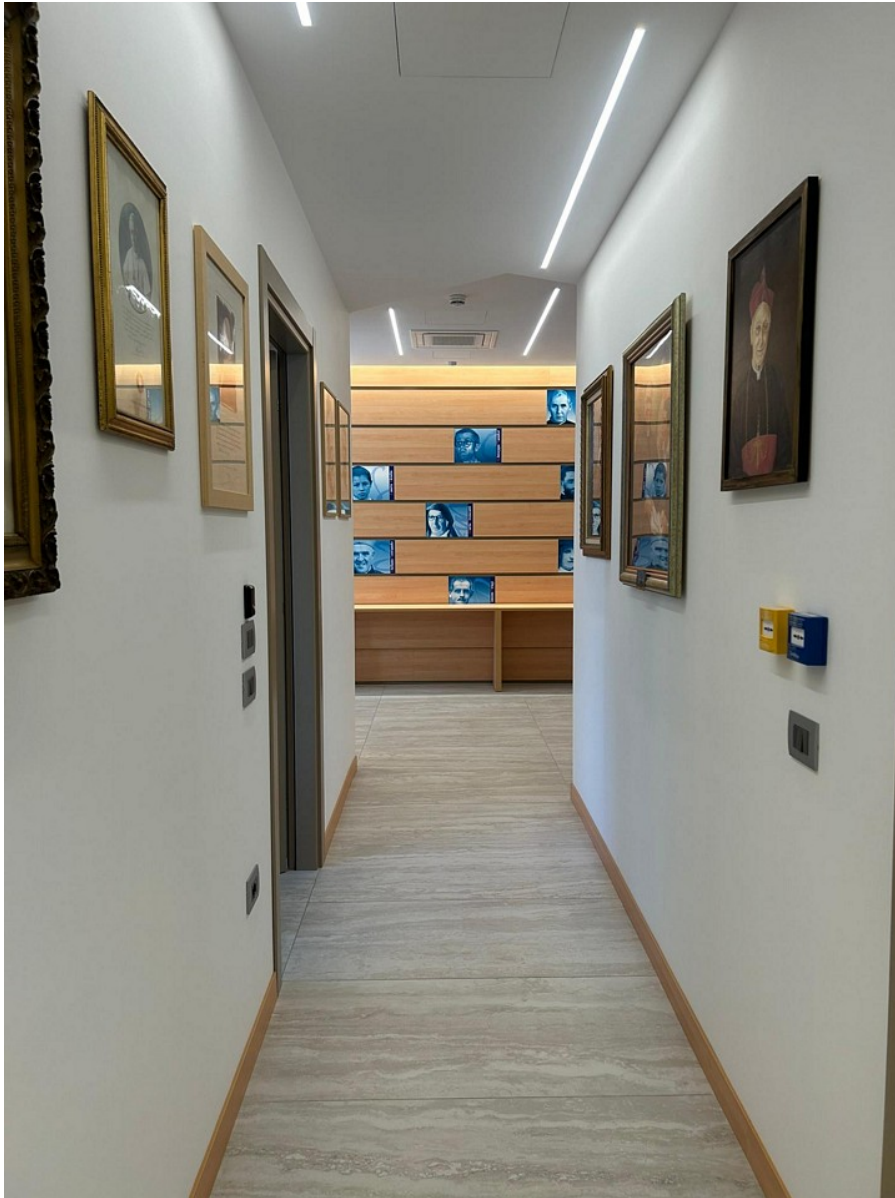
In order to promote the Causes of Beatification and Canonisation of the Salesian Family and to get to know at first hand the heritage of holiness that flourished from Don Bosco, the Postulation is available to **welcome people and groups who wish to get to know and visit these environments**, also offering the possibility of mini-retirements with itineraries on specific themes and the presentation of documents, relics, significant objects. **For information write to [postulatore@sdb.org](mailto:postulatore@sdb.org).**

# Photo gallery – The new rooms of the Salesian General Postulation

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# 2023

Santidad en la Familia Salesiana

Sanctity in the Salesian Family

Santità nella Famiglia Salesiana

La Sainteté dans la Famille Salesienne

Santidade na Família Salesiana

Santi  
Saints  
Santos  
Święci



Beati Blessed  
Bienheureux  
Beatos  
Bem-aventurados  
Błogosławieni



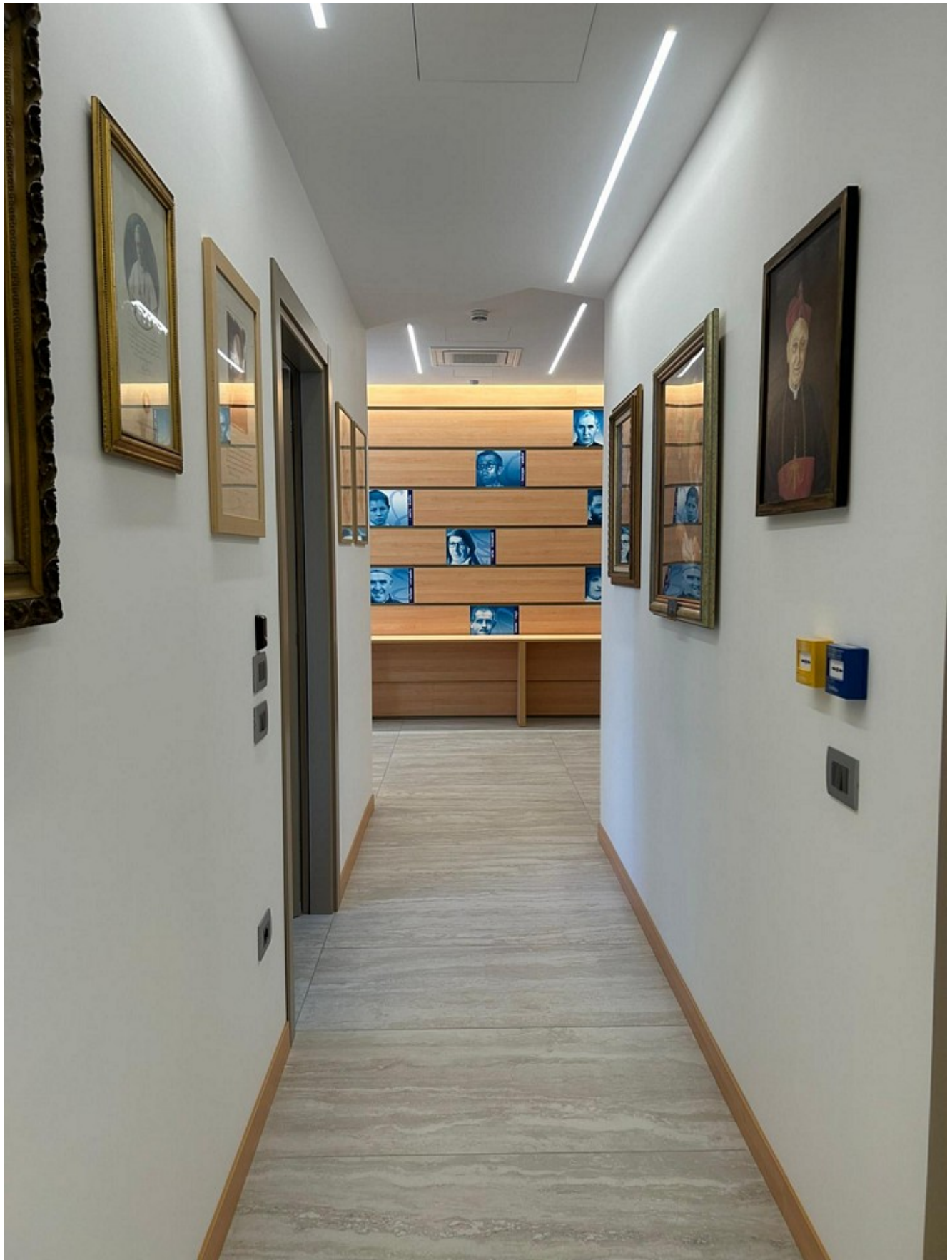
Venerabili  
Venerables  
Vénérables  
Veneráveis  
Czcigodni



Servi di Dio  
Servants of God  
Serveurs de Dieu  
Servos de Dios  
Słudzy Bzzy



































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# The turning point in the life of St Francis de Sales (1/2)

After ten years of study in Paris and three years at the University of Padua, Francis de Sales returned to Savoy shortly before the beginning of spring 1592. He confided to his cousin Louis that he was “more and more determined to embrace the ecclesiastical state, despite the resistance of his parents”. Nevertheless, he agreed to go to Chambéry to enrol in the bar of the Senate of Savoy.

In truth, the entire direction of his life was at stake. On the one hand, in fact, there was his father's authority commanding him, as Francis was the eldest son, to consider a career in the world; on the other, there were his inclinations and the growing awareness that he had to follow a particular vocation “to be of the Church”. If it is true that “fathers do everything for the good of their children”, it is equally true that the views of one and the other do not always coincide. His father, Monsieur de Boisy, dreamed of a magnificent career for Francis: senator of the Duchy and (why not?) president of the sovereign Senate of Savoy. Francis de Sales would one day write that fathers “are never satisfied and never know how to stop talking to their children about the means that can make them greater”

Now, for him obedience was a fundamental imperative and what he would later tell Philothea was a rule of life that he certainly followed from childhood: “You must humbly obey your ecclesiastical superiors, such as the pope and the bishop, the parish priest and their representatives; you must then obey your political superiors, that is, your prince and the magistrates he instituted in your country; you

must finally obey the superiors of your house, that is, your father, your mother." The problem arose from the impossibility of reconciling the different obediences. Between his father's will and his own (which he increasingly perceived to be God's) the opposition became inevitable. Let us follow the stages of the vocational maturation of a "sweet rebel"

### **Retrospective look**

To understand the drama experienced by Francis it is necessary to revisit the past, because this drama marked his entire youth and was resolved in 1593. From the age of about ten, Francis cultivated his own life project within himself. More than a few events he experienced or provoked bear witness to this. At the age of eleven, before leaving for Paris, he had asked his father for permission to receive the tonsure. This ceremony, during which the bishop placed the candidate on the first step of an ecclesiastical career, actually took place on 20 September 1578 Clermont-en-Genevois. His father, who at first opposed it, eventually gave in because he considered it to be nothing more than a childish whim. During the preliminary examination, amazed at the accuracy of the answers and the candidate's modesty, the bishop allegedly told him "My boy, cheer up, you will be a good servant of God". At the moment of sacrificing his blond hair, Francis confessed that he felt a certain regret. However, the commitment he made would always remain fixed in his memory. Indeed, he confided one day to Mother Angélique Arnauld: "From twelve years on, I have been so determined to be of the Church that I would not have changed my intention, not even for a kingdom."

When his father, who was not unsympathetic, decided to send him to Paris to complete his studies there, he must have felt contradictory feelings in his soul, described in the *Treatise on the Love of God*: "A father sending his son either to court or to his studies," he wrote, "does not deny tears to his departure, testifying, that though according to his superior part, for the child's advancement in virtue, he

wills his departure, yet according to his inferior part he has a repugnance to the separation." Let us also recall the choice of the Jesuit college in Paris, preferred to the one at Navarre, Francis' behaviour while growing up, the influence of Father Possevino's spiritual direction in Padua and all the other factors that could have played in favour of the consolidation of his ecclesiastical vocation.

But before him stood a rocky obstacle: his father's will, to which he owed not only humble submission according to the custom of the time, but also something more and better, because "the love and respect that a son bears his father make him decide not only to live according to his commands, but also according to the desires and preferences he expresses". In Paris, towards the end of his stay, he was deeply impressed by the decision of the Duke of Joyeuse, an old favourite of Henry III, who had become a Capuchin following the death of his wife. According to his friend Jean Pasquelet, "If he had not been afraid of upsetting the soul of Monsieur de Boisny, his father, being his eldest son, he would have become a Capuchin without fail."

He studied out of obedience, but also to make himself useful to his neighbour. "And it is still true, Father de Quoex testified, "what he told me while he was in Paris and Padua, that he was interested not so much in what he was studying, but rather in thinking whether one day he would be able to serve God worthily and help his neighbour through the studies he was doing." In 1620 he confided to François de Ronis: "While I was in Padua, I studied law to please my father, and to please myself I studied theology." Similarly, François Bochut declared that "when he was sent to Padua to study law to please his parents, his inclination led him to embrace the ecclesiastical state", and that there he "completed most of his theological studies, devoting most of his time to them". This last statement seems clearly exaggerated: Francis de Sales certainly had to devote the greater part of his time and energy to the juridical studies that were part of his "duty of state". As for his father,



Jean-Pierre Camus relates this significant confidence: "I had the best father in the world" he told me; "but he was a good man who had spent most of his years at court and at war, so he knew those principles better than those of theology."

It was probably Father Possevino who became his best support in guiding his life. According to his nephew Charles-Auguste, Possevino told him: "Continue to think about divine things and to study theology", adding gently: "Believe me, your spirit is not suited to the labours of the forum and your eyes are not made to endure its dust; the road of the century is too slippery, there is a danger of getting lost. Is there not more glory in proclaiming the word of our good Lord to thousands of human beings, from the cathedrals of the churches, than in warming one's hands by beating one's fists on the benches of the prosecutors to settle disputes?" It was undoubtedly his attraction to this ideal that enabled him to resist certain manoeuvres and distasteful farces by some comrades who were certainly not models of virtue.

### **A very difficult discernment and choice**

On his return journey from Padua, Francis de Sales carried with him a letter from his old professor Panciroli addressed to his father, advising him to send his son to the Senate. Monsieur de Boisy wanted nothing more, and to this end had prepared a rich library of law for Francis, provided him with land and a title, and destined him to be the Lord of Villaroget. Finally, he asked him to meet Françoise Suchet, a fourteen-year-old girl, "an only child and very beautiful", Charles-Auguste pointed out, to make "preliminary marriage arrangements". Francis was twenty-five, an age of majority in the mentality of the time and suitable for marriage. His choice had been made a long time ago, but he did not want to create any ruptures, preferring to prepare his father for the favourable moment.

He met the young lady several times, making it clear, however, that he had other intentions. "To please his father", François Favre declared at the beatification process,

“he visited the young lady, whose virtues he admired”, but “he could not be convinced to accept such a marriage, despite all his father’s efforts in this regard.” Francis also revealed to Amé Bouvard, his confidant: “In obedience to my father, I saw the young lady to whom he wholeheartedly intended me, I admired her virtue””, adding, bluntly and with conviction: “Believe me, I tell you the truth: my only wish has always been to embrace the ecclesiastical life.” Claude de Blonay claimed to have heard from Francis’ own lips “that he had refused such a beautiful covenant, not out of contempt for marriage, of which he had great respect as a sacrament, but rather out of a certain ardour, intimate and spiritual, that inclined him to place himself totally at the service of the Church and to be all of God, with an undivided heart.”

Meanwhile, on 24 November 1592, during a session in which he gave praiseworthy proof of his abilities, he had been accepted as a lawyer at the Bar in Chambéry. On his return from Chambéry, he saw a celestial sign in an incident reported by Michel Favre: “The horse collapsed under him and the sword from its scabbard came to rest on the ground with the point pointing at him, [so] from this he drew further convincing proof that God wanted him in his service, together with the hope that He would provide him with the means.” According to Charles-Auguste, the sword “out of its sheath had traced a kind of cross”. What seems certain is that the prospect of a profession as a lawyer should not have excited him, if one lends credence to what he would later write:

*[According to some,] when the chameleon swells, it changes colour; this happens out of fear and apprehension, say others. Democritus states that the tongue torn out while they were alive made those who had it in their mouths win trials; this applies well to the tongues of lawyers, who are true chameleons.*

A few weeks later, he was given a senator’s licence from Turin. It was an extraordinary honour for his

age, because if "lawyers argue in the bar with many words about the facts and rights of the parties", "the Parliament or Senate resolves all difficulties with a decree from above." Francis did not want to accept such a high office, which could upset all the facts of the matter again. Despite the scandalised astonishment of his father and pressure from his best friends, he strictly maintained his refusal. And even when it was shown to him that the accumulation of civil and ecclesiastical offices was permissible, he replied that "one should not mix sacred and profane things".

The day finally came when, by a happy combination of circumstances, he was able to unravel a complicated situation that could have degenerated into a painful break with his family. A few months later, and precisely after the death of the provost of the cathedral in October 1592, some confidants had unbeknownst to him submitted an application to Rome for him to take this position, which made him the first person in the diocese after the bishop. On 7 May 1593, the Roman appointment arrived. Two days later, the meeting that was to mark the turning point of his life took place. With the support of his mother, Francis made a request to his old father that he had never dared to make: "Have the courtesy, my father, [...] to allow me to be of the Church."

It was a terrible blow for Monsieur de Boisy, who suddenly saw his plans crumble. He was "shocked" because he had not expected such a request. Charles-Auguste adds that "his lady was no less so", having been present at the scene. For the father, his son's desire to be a priest was a "mood" that someone had put in his head or "advised" him.

*"I hoped" he told him, "that you would be the rod of my old age, and instead you turn away from me before your time. Be careful what you do. Perhaps you still need to mature in your decision. Your head is made for a more majestic beret. You have devoted so many years to the study of the law: jurisprudence will do you no good under a priest's cassock. You have brothers whom you must be a father to when they are*



*missing."*

For Francis it was an inner need, a "vocation" that engaged his whole person and his whole life. His father had respect for the priesthood, but he still considered it a simple function, a profession. Now the Catholic reform aimed to give the priesthood a renewed, higher and more demanding configuration, that is, to consider it a call from God sanctioned by the Church. The duty to respond to this divine call perhaps also corresponded to a new right of the human person, which Francis defended in the face of his father's "unilateral" decision. The latter, after setting out all his good reasons against such a project, knowing that his son would occupy a very honourable position, ended up giving in: "For God's sake, do what you believe."

In a work that appeared in 1669, Nicolas de Hauteville commented on this episode, comparing Monsieur de Boisy's drama to that of Abraham, whom God had commanded to sacrifice his son. But with this difference, that it was Francis who had imposed the sacrifice on his father. In fact, wrote the ancient chronicler, "the whole of [Francis'] adolescence and youth was a time of joy, hope and consolation that was very gratifying for his good father, but in the end it must be confessed that this [new] Isaac was for him a boy cause of worries, bitterness and pain." And he added that "the struggle that was unleashed within him made him seriously ill, finding it hard to allow this beloved son to marry a breviary instead of a handsome and wealthy young lady heiress of a very noble and ancient house of Savoy."

[\(continued\)](#)

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# Don Bosco's educational journey (1/2)

## Following the paths of the heart

Don Bosco wept at the sight of the boys who ended up in prison. Yesterday, as is the case today too, evil's timetable is relentless: fortunately, so is the schedule for good. And even more so. I feel that yesterday's roots are the same as today's. Like yesterday, others today find a home on the streets and in prisons. I believe that the memory of the priest for so many boys without a parish is the irreplaceable thermometer for measuring the temperature of our educational intervention.

Don Bosco lived at a time of striking social poverty. We were at the beginning of the process of large groups of youths coming together in the great industrial metropolises. The police authorities themselves denounced this danger: there were so many "young children brought up without principles of Religion, Honour and Humanity, who were ending up rotting totally in hatred", we read in the chronicles of the time. It was the growing poverty that drove a great multitude of adults and young people to live by expediency, and in particular by theft and from alms-giving.

The urban decay caused social tensions to explode, which went hand in hand with political tensions; disorderly boys and misguided youth, towards the middle of the 19th century, drew public attention, shaking governmental sensibilities.

Added to the social phenomenon was a clear lack of education. The breakdown of the family caused concern above all in the Church; the prevalence of the repressive system was at the root of growing youthful unease and it affected the relationship between parents and children, educators and those being educated. Don Bosco had to confront a system made up of "bad traits", proposing loving kindness instead.

The life of so many parents lived on the borders of illegality, the need to procure the necessities for survival, would lead a multitude of youngsters to be uprooted from their families, and to leave the place they lived in. The city became more and more crowded with boys and young adults on the hunt for a job; for many who come from afar there was also a lack of a corner to sleep in.

It as not uncommon to meet a lady, such as Maria G., begging, using children artfully placed at strategic points in the city or in front of church doors; often, parents themselves entrusted their children to beggars, who used them to arouse the pity of others and receive more money. It sounds like a photocopy of a tried and tested system in a large southern city: the renting out of other people's children, so the passer-by would take pity and begging become more profitable.

However, theft was the real source of income: it was a phenomenon that grew and became unstoppable in 19th century Turin. On 2 February 1845, nine young urchins aged between eleven and fourteen appeared before the police commissioner of the Vicariate, accused of having robbed a bookseller's shop of numerous volumes ... and various stationery items, using a picklock. The new breed of *borsajuoli* attracted constant complaints from the people. They were almost always abandoned children, without parents, relatives or means of subsistence, very poor, chased away and abandoned by everyone, who ended up stealing.

The picture of juvenile deviance was impressive: delinquency and the state of abandonment of so many boys was spreading like wildfire. The growing number of "rascals", "reckless purse-snatchers" in the streets and squares was however only one aspect of a widespread situation. The fragility of the family, strong economic malaise, the constant and strong immigration from the countryside to the city, fuelled a precarious situation which the political forces felt powerless to tackle. The malaise grew as crime organised itself and penetrated public structures. The first

manifestations of violence by organised gangs began, acting with sudden and repeated acts of intimidation designed to create a climate of social, political and religious tension.

This was expressed by the gangs known as the *cocche*, which spread in various numbers, taking different names from the neighbourhoods where they were based. Their sole purpose was “to disturb passers-by, mistreat them if they complained, commit obscene acts on women, and attack some isolated soldier or provost.” In reality, it was not a question of criminal associations, but more of gangs formed not only by people born in Turin, but also by immigrants: young people aged between sixteen and thirty who used to gather in spontaneous meetings, especially in the evening hours, giving vent to their tensions and frustrations of the day. It was in this situation in the mid 19th century that Don Bosco’s activities were inserted. It was not the poor boys, friends and childhood companions of his place at the Becchi in Castelnuevo, not the valiant young men of Chieri, but “the wolves, the squabblers, the unruly types” of his dreams.

It is in this world of political conflict, in this vineyard, where the sowing of darnel is abundant, among this market of young arms hired out for depravity, among these youngsters without love and malnourished in body and soul, that Don Bosco was called to work. The young priest listened, went out into the streets: he saw, was moved, but, as practical as he was, he rolled up his sleeves; those boys needed a school, education, catechism, training for work. There was no time to waste. They were young: they needed to give meaning to their lives, they had a right to have time and means to study, to learn a trade, but also time and space to be happy, to play.

### **Go, look around!**

Sedentary by profession or by choice, computerised in thought and action, we risk losing the originality of “being”, of sharing, of growing “together”.

Don Bosco did not live in the era of test-tube preparations:

he left humanity the pedagogy of 'companionship', the spiritual and physical pleasure of living next to a youngster, small among the small, poor among the poor, fragile among the fragile.

A priest friend and spiritual guide of his, Fr Cafasso, knew Don Bosco, knew his zeal for souls, sensed his passion for this multitude of boys; he urged him to go out into the streets. "Go, look around." From the first Sundays, the priest from the countryside, the priest who had not known his father, went out to see the misery of the town's suburbs. He was shocked. *"He met a large number of young people of all ages,"* testified his successor, Fr Rua, *"who were wandering around the streets and squares, especially in the outskirts of the town, playing, brawling, swearing and even doing worse."*

He entered building sites, talked to workers, contacted employers; he felt emotions that would mark him for the rest of his life when he met these boys. And sometimes he found these poor "bricklayers" lying on the floor in a corner of a church, tired, asleep, unable to tune into meaningless sermons about their vagabond lives. Perhaps that was the only place where they could find some warmth, after a day of toil, before venturing off in search of somewhere to spend the night. He went into the shops, wandered around the markets, visited the street corners where there were many boys begging. Everywhere, badly dressed and undernourished boys; he witnessed scenes of malpractice and transgressions: all carried out by boys.

After a few years, he moved from the streets to the prisons. "For a full twenty years I assiduously visited Turin's city prisons. I continued my visits later, though not as regularly. ...". (BM XV, 600)

How many misunderstandings at the beginning! How many insults! A "cassock" was out of tune in that place, frowned upon. He approached those abid and distrustful "wolves"; he listened to their stories, but above all he made their suffering his own.

He understood the drama of those boys: clever

exploiters had pushed them into those cells. And he became their friend. His simple and humane manner restored dignity and respect to each of them.

Something had to be done and soon; a different system had to be invented, to stand by those who had gone astray. *"Whenever he had the time, he would spend entire days in the prisons and several times he conducted spiritual retreats there. He regularly visited the inmates on Saturdays, his pockets bulging with tobacco or bread. He was especially interested in the juveniles whom misfortune had brought there. ... By helping and befriending them, he sought to draw them to the festive oratory after their release from prison."* (MB II, 136-137)

In the "Generalà", a House of Correction opened in Turin on 12 April 1845, as stated in the regulations of the Penal House, "young people condemned to a correctional sentence for having acted without discernment in committing the crime and young people supported in prison by paternal love" were "gathered and governed by the method of working together, in silence and segregated by night in special cells." This was the context for the extraordinary excursion to Stupinigi organised by Don Bosco alone, with the consent of the Minister of the Interior, Urban Rattazzi, without guards, based only on mutual trust, a commitment of conscience and the fascination of the educator. He wanted to know the "reason why the State does not have the influence" of the priest over these young people. "The force we have is a moral force: unlike the State, which knows only how to command and punish, we speak primarily to the heart of the youth, and our word is the word of God."

Knowing the system of life adopted inside the Generalà, the challenge thrown down by the young Piedmontese priest took on incredible value: to ask for a "Free Release" day for all those young inmates. It was madness yet such was Don Bosco's request. He obtained permission in the spring of 1855. The whole thing was organised by Don Bosco alone, with the help of the boys themselves. The consent he received from

Minister Rattazzi was certainly a sign of esteem for and trust in the young priest. The experience of leading boys out of that House of Correction in complete freedom and managing to bring them all back to prison, despite what ordinarily took place inside the prison structure, was extraordinary. It was the triumph of an appeal to trust and conscience, the testing of an idea, an experience, that would guide him throughout his life to rely on the resources hidden in the hearts of so many young people doomed to irreversible marginalisation.

### **Onward, and in shirt sleeves**

Even today, in a different cultural and social context, Don Bosco's grasp of things is not all all outdated, but still works. Especially surprising, in the dynamics of rehabilitating children and young people who have entered the penal circuit, is the inventive spirit in creating concrete job opportunities for them.

Today we encounter problems offering employment opportunities for our minors at risk. Those who work in the social sector know how hard it is to overcome bureaucratic mechanisms and gears in order to realise, for example, simple work grants for minors. Don Bosco used agile approaches and structures, having boys "fostered" by employers, under the educational tutelage of a guarantor.

The first years of Don Bosco's priestly and apostolic life were marked by a continuous search for the right way to take boys and young men away from the dangers of the street. The plans were clear in his mind, as ingrained in his mind and soul was his educational method. "Not with blows but by gentleness". He was also convinced that it was no easy feat to turn wolves into lambs. But he had Divine Providence on his side.

And when faced with immediate problems, he never backed down. He was not the type to enter into discussion about the sociological condition of minors, nor was he the priest for political or formal compromises; he was saintly stubborn in his good intentions, but was strongly tenacious

and concrete in realising them. He had great zeal for the salvation of youth and there were no obstacles that could restrain this holy passion, which marked every step and punctuated every hour of his day.

*"In the prisons he saw a great number of boys, ranging between twelve and eighteen years of age, [basically] healthy, sturdy and intelligent. He was horrified to see them inactive, bitten by insects, hungry for both spiritual and material food while they served time, expiating through detention, and even more through remorse, their precocious depravity. They were a blot on their country, the dishonor of their families, an infamy to themselves. They were above all, souls that, redeemed by the blood of Christ, were now reduced to slaves of vice, and in the greatest danger of eternal perdition. Who knows, if these boys had had a friend who had taken loving care of them by helping them and by giving them religious instruction on holy days, perhaps they would have avoided coming and returning to these prisons. Certainly, the number of these young prisoners would be diminished."* (MB II, 49-50)

He rolled up his sleeves and gave himself body and soul to the prevention of these evils; he gave all his contribution, his experience, but above all his insights in launching his own initiatives or those of other associations. It was the release from prison that worried both the government and private "societies". It was precisely in 1846 that an associative structure authorised by the government was set up, which resembled, at least in its intentions and in some ways, what is happening today in the Italian juvenile penal system. It was called the "Royal Society for the Patronage of Young People Released from the House of Correctional Education". Its purpose was to support young people released from the Generala.

A careful reading of the Statutes brings us back to some of the penal measures that are nowadays provided for as alternative measures to prison.

The Members of the Society were divided into



“operatives”, who took on the office of guardians, “paying members”, and “paying operatives”. Don Bosco was an “operative member”. Don Bosco accepted several, but with discouraging results. Perhaps it was these failures that made him decide to ask the authorities to send the boys to him before they ended up like that.

It is not important here to deal with the relationship between Don Bosco, the houses of correction and collateral services, but rather to recall the attention the Saint paid to this group of minors. Don Bosco knew the hearts of the young men of the Generala, but above all he had more in mind than remaining indifferent to the moral and human degradation of those poor and unfortunate inmates. He continued his mission: he did not abandon them: “Ever since the Government opened that Penitentiary, and entrusted its direction to the Society of St Peter in Chains, Don Bosco was able to go from time to time among those poor youngsters [...]. With the permission of the Director of the prisons he instructed them in catechism, preached to them, heard their confessions, and many times entertained them amicably in recreation, as he did with his boys at the Oratory” (BS 1882, n. 11 p. 180).

Don Bosco's interest in young people in difficulty was focused over time in the Oratory, a true expression of a preventive and recuperative pedagogy, being an open and multifunctional social service. Don Bosco had direct contact with quarrelsome, violent youth bordering on delinquency around 1846-50. These are the encounters with the *cocche*, gangs or neighbourhood groups in ongoing conflict. The story is told of a fourteen-year-old boy, son of a drunkard and anticlerical father who, having happened to be in the Oratory in 1846, threw himself headlong into the various recreational activities, but refused to attend religious services, because according to his father's teachings, he did not want to become a “mouldy old cretin”. Don Bosco attracted him with his tolerance and patience, which made him change his behaviour in a short time.

Don Bosco was also interested in taking on the management of re-educational and correctional institutions. Proposals in this sense had come from various quarters. There were attempts and contacts, but drafts and proposals for agreements came to nothing. All this is sufficient to show how much Don Bosco had the problem discarded children at heart. And if there was resistance, it always came from the difficulty of using the preventive system. Wherever he found a "mixture" of the repressive and preventive system, he was categorical in his refusal, as he was also clear in his rejection of any group or structure that brought back to the idea of the "reformatory". A careful reading of these attempts reveals the fact that Don Bosco never refused to help the boy in difficulty, but he was against the management of institutes, houses of correction or directing works with an obvious educational compromise.

The conversation that took place between Don Bosco and Crispi in Rome in February 1878 is very interesting. Crispi asked Don Bosco for news about the progress of his work and in particular spoke about the educational systems. He lamented the unrest that was taking place in the correctional prisons. It was a conversation in which the Minister was fascinated by Don Bosco's analysis; he asked him not only for advice but also for a programme for these houses of correction (MB XIII, 483).

Don Bosco's replies and proposals found sympathy, but not willingness: the rift between the religious and political worlds was strong. Don Bosco expressed his opinion, indicating various categories of boys: the unruly, dissipated and good. For the saintly educator there was hope of success for all, even for the unruly, as he then used to refer to what we nowadays call at-risk boys.

*"Let them not become worse." "...In time let the good principles acquired produce their effect later ... many will come to their senses."* This is an explicit answer and perhaps the most interesting.

After mentioning the distinction between the two

educational systems, he determined which children must be considered to be in danger: those who go to other cities or towns in search of work, those whose parents cannot or do not want to take care of them, vagabonds who fall into the hands of the public security'. He points out the necessary and possible measures: *"Weekend recreations areas, care of those placed at work hospices and preservation houses with arts and crafts and with agricultural colonies."*

It proposes not direct government management of educational institutions, but adequate support in buildings, equipment and financial grants, and presents a version of the Preventive System that retains the essential elements, without the explicit religious reference. Besides a pedagogy of the heart could not have ignored the social, psychological and religious problems.

Don Bosco ascribes their misguidance to the absence of God, to the uncertainty of moral principles, to the corruption of the heart, to the clouding of the mind, to the incapacity and carelessness of adults, especially parents, to the corrosive influence of society and to the intentional negative action of "bad companions" or the lack of responsibility of educators.

Don Bosco played a lot on the positive: the will to live, the fondness for work, the rediscovery of joy, social solidarity, family spirit, healthy fun.

[\(continued\)](#)

*don Alfonso Alfano, sdb*

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# Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians (5/13)

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

**Chapter 7. Mary favours those who work for the faith; while God punishes those who outrage the Blessed Virgin.**

There was a time when the emperors of Constantinople carried out a violent persecution against Catholics for venerating sacred images. Among them was Leo Isauricus. In order to abolish the cult , he killed and imprisoned anyone who was denounced as having given veneration to images or relics of saints and especially of the Blessed Virgin. In order to deceive the simple people, he summoned some bishops and abbots and by dint of money and promises induced them to establish that the images of the crucified Jesus, neither of the Virgin nor of the Saints should be venerated.

But the learned and famous St John Damascene lived in those times. To fight the heretics and also to provide an antidote for Catholics, John wrote three books in which he defended the cult of holy images. The Iconoclasts (as those heretics were called because they despised holy images) were greatly offended by these writings, so they accused him of treason to the prince. They said that he had sent letters signed in his own hand to break the alliance he had with foreign princes, and that he disturbed public peace with his writings. The credulous emperor began to suspect the saint, and although he was innocent, he condemned him to have his right hand cut off.

But this treachery had a much happier outcome than

he had expected, for Our Blessed Lady wanted to reward her servant for his zeal for her.

As evening came, St John prostrated himself before the image of the Mother of God, and prayed most of the night , saying: O Blessed Virgin, because of my zeal for you and the holy images, my right hand was cut off, come therefore to my aid and let me continue to write your praises and those of your son Jesus. So saying, he fell asleep.

In a dream he saw the image of the mother of God looking at him happily and saying: Behold, your hand is healed. Therefore arise and write down my glories. When he woke up, he actually found his healed hand attached to his arm.

When the news of such a great miracle had spread, everyone praised and glorified the Blessed Virgin, who rewards so greatly. Virgin who so richly rewards her devotees who suffer for the faith. But some of Christ's enemies wanted to claim that the hand had not been cut off from him, but from one of his servants, and they said, "Don't you see that John is in his house singing and carousing as if he were celebrating a wedding feast?" So John was arrested again and taken to the prince. But here a new miracle. Showing his right hand, a shining line could be seen in it, which proved the amputation to be true.

Amazed at this miracle, the prince asked him which doctor had restored him to health, and what medicine he had used. He then loudly narrated the miracle. "It is my God" he said, "the almighty physician who restored my health. The prince then showed repentance for the evil he had done, and wanted to raise him to great dignities. But Damascene, averse to human greatness, loved private life better, and as long as he lived, he employed his genius in writing and publishing about the power of the august Mother of the Saviour (see John Patriarch of Jer. Baronius in the year 727).

If God often grants extraordinary graces to those who promote the glories of his august Mother, he not infrequently punishes terribly even in the present life those

who despise her or her images.

Constantine Copronymus, son of Leo Isauricus ascended his father's throne at the time of the supreme pontiff St Zacharias (741-75). Following the impieties of his father, he forbade the invocation of saints, the honouring of relics, and the imploring of their intercession. He desecrated churches, destroyed monasteries, persecuted and imprisoned monks, and invoked with nocturnal sacrifices the help of the demons themselves. But his hatred was especially directed against the Holy Virgin. To confirm what he said, he used to take in his hand a bag full of gold coins, and showed it to those around him, saying: How much is this bag worth? Very much, they said. Throwing out the gold, he again asked what the purse was worth. When they answered that it was not worth anything, so quickly she took back the impious one, so it is of the Mother of God; for that time, that she had Christ in her, she was greatly to be honoured, but from the point that she gave him up nothing differs from other women.

These enormous blasphemies certainly deserved an exemplary punishment that God did not delay in sending to the impious blasphemer.

Constantine Copronymus was punished with shameful infirmities, with ulcers that turned into burning pustules, which made him send up high cries, while a burning fever devoured him. Thus panting and screaming as if he were burning alive, he sent out his last breath.

The son followed his father's footsteps. He took great delight in gems and diamonds, and seeing the many beautiful crowns that the Emperor Maurice had dedicated to the Mother of God to adorn the church of St Sophia in Constantinople, he had them taken and placed on his head and carried it to his own palace. But on the instant his forehead was covered with pestiferous carbuncles, which on that very day drew to death the one who dared to thrust his sacrilegious hand against the ornament of Mary's virginal head (see Theophanes and Nicephorus contemporaries. Baronius an. 767).

## **Chapter 8. Mary protector of the armies fighting for the faith.**

Let us now briefly mention some facts concerning the special protection that the holy Virgin has constantly given to armies fighting for the faith.

Emperor Justinian recovered Italy, which had been oppressed by the Goths for sixty years. Narses, his General, was warned by Mary when he was to take the field and never took up arms without her consent. (Procopius, Evagrius, Nicephorus, and Paul the Deacon. Baronius to the year 553).

Emperor Heraclius won a glorious victory against the Persians and seized their rich spoils, reporting the prosperous outcome of his arms to the Mother of God to whom he had commended himself. (Greek Inst. art. 626).

The same Emperor triumphed again over the Persians the following year. A frightful hail in the enemies' camp routed them and put them to flight. (Greek Ist.).

The city of Constantinople was once again liberated from the Persians in a most prodigious manner. While the siege lasted, the Barbarians saw a noble matron escorted by a retinue of Eunuchs coming out of the city gate at dawn. Believing her to be the emperor's wife on her way to her husband to plead for peace, they let her pass. When they saw her going to the emperor, they followed her as far as a place called the Old Stone, where she disappeared from their sight. Then a tumult arose among them, they fought each other, and so terrible was the slaughter that their general was forced to raise the siege. It is believed that that matron was the Blessed Virgin. (Baronius).

The image of Mary carried in procession around the walls of Constantinople freed this city from the Moors who had held it besieged for three years. Already the enemy leader, despairing of victory, begged to be allowed to enter and see the city, promising not to dare any violence. While his soldiers entered without difficulty, when his horse arrived at the gate known as the Bosphorus, there was no way to make it

go forward. Then the barbarian looked up and saw on the gate the image of the Virgin that he had blasphemed just before. He then turned back and took the path towards the Aegean Sea where he was shipwrecked. (Baronius year 718).

In the same year, the Saracens took up arms against Pelagius, Prince of the Asturians. This pious general resorted to Mary and the darts and thunderbolts thrown at him backfired on the enemies of the faith. Twenty thousand Saracens were wiped out, and sixty thousand perished submerged in the waters. Pelagius together with his few had taken refuge in a cave. Grateful to Mary for the victory he had won, he built a temple to the Blessed Virgin in the cave. (Baronius).

Andrew, General of the Emperor Basil of Constantinople, defeated the Saracens in the year 867. The enemy had insulted Mary in this conflict by writing to Andrew: I will now see if the son of Mary and his mother can save you from my arms. The pious General took the insolent writing, hung it on the image of Mary saying: See, O Mother of God: see, O Jesus, what insolence this arrogant barbarian says against your people. Having done this, he rises up on his bow and commences a bloody massacre of all his enemies. (Curopalate ann. 867).

In the year 1185, the Supreme Pontiff Urban II put the Crusaders' arms under the auspices of Mary, and Goffredo Buglione at the head of the Catholic army freed the holy places from the dominion of the infidels.

Alfonso VIII, King of Castile, achieved a glorious victory over the Moors by carrying the image of Mary on his banners onto the battlefield. Two hundred thousand Moors remained on the field. To perpetuate the memory of this event, Spain celebrated the feast of the Holy Cross every year on 16 July. The banner on which was impressed the image of Mary, who had triumphed over the enemies, is still preserved in the church of Toledo. (Ant. de Balimghera).

Alfonso IX, King of Spain, also defeated two hundred thousand Saracens with Mary's help. (Idem die XXI junii).



James I King of Aragon wrested three very noble kingdoms from the Moors and defeated ten thousand of theirs. In gratitude for this victory, he erected several churches to Mary. (Idem die XXI julii).

The Carnotesi besieged in their city by a band of corsairs displayed a part of Mary's robe that Charles Calvo had brought from Constantinople on a pole as a banner. The barbarians, having thrown their spears at this relic, were suddenly blinded, and could no longer escape. The devout Carnotese took up arms and slaughtered them.

Charles VII, King of France, who was cornered by the English, had recourse to Mary, and not only was he able to defeat them in several battles, but he also freed a city from siege and brought many others under his rule. (The same on 22nd July).

Philip the Fair, King of France surprised by his enemies and abandoned by his own resorted to Mary and found himself surrounded by a prodigious host of warriors ready to fight in his defence. In a short time thirty-six thousand enemies are defeated, the others surrender as prisoners or flee. Grateful for such a triumph to Mary, he built a church to her and there hung all the weapons he had used in the conflict. (Idem XVII aug.).

Philip Valesius, King of France, defeated twenty thousand enemies with a handful of men. Returning triumphant that same day to Paris, he went straight to the cathedral dedicated to the Virgin Mary. There he offered his horse and his royal arms to his generous Helper. (Idem XXIII aug.).

John Zemisca, Emperor of the Greeks, defeated the Bulgarians, Russians, Scythians and other barbarians, who together numbered three hundred and thirty thousand and threatened the empire of Constantinople. The Blessed Virgin sent the martyr St Theodore, who appeared on a white horse and broke the enemy ranks; whereupon Zemisca built a church in honour of St Theodore and had the image of Mary carried in triumph. (Curopalate).

John Comnenus, aided by the protection of Mary,

defeated a horde of Scythians and in memory of the event ordered a public feast at which the image of the Mother of God was carried triumphantly on a chariot quilted with silver and precious gems. Four very white horses led by the Emperor's princes and relatives pulled the chariot; the Emperor walked on foot carrying the cross. (Niceta in his *Annals*).

The citizens of Ipri, besieged by the English and reduced to extremes, resorted with tears to the help of the Mother of God, and Mary appeared visibly to console them and put the enemies to flight. The event took place in 1383 and the people of Cyprus celebrate the memory of their liberation every year with a religious festival on the first Sunday in August. (Maffeo lib. 18, *Cronaca Univers.*).

Simon Count of Monforte with eight hundred horsemen and one thousand pawns defeated one hundred thousand Albigensians near Toulouse. (Bzovio Annals year 1213).

Vladislaus, King of Poland, placed his arms under the protection of the Virgin Mary, defeated fifty thousand Teutons and took their remains as a trophy to the tomb of the martyr St. Stanislaus. Martin Cromerus in his history of Poland says that this holy martyr was seen, as long as the battle lasted, dressed in pontifical robes in the act of encouraging the Poles and threatening his enemies. It is believed that this holy bishop was sent by the Virgin to help the Poles, who had recommended themselves to Mary before the battle.

In the year 1546, the Portuguese besieged by Mamudio, King of the Indies, invoked Mary's help. The enemy counted over sixty thousand men perished in the war. The siege had been going on for seven months and was already on the verge of surrender, when a sudden consternation invaded the enemies. A noble matron, surrounded by celestial splendour, appeared above a small church in the city and shone such a light on the Indians that they could no longer distinguish one from the other and fled in haste. (Maffeo lib. 3 Hist. of the Indies).

In the year 1480, while the Turks were fighting

against the city of Rhodes, they had already succeeded in planting their banners on the walls, when the blessed Virgin appeared armed with a shield and lance, with St John the Baptist and a host of armed heavenly warriors out front. Then the enemies broke free and slaughtered each other. (James Bosso *St. of the Knights of Rhodes*).

Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, reduced a horde of heretical Austrian and Bohemian rebels to duty. On the banner of his army, he had the effigy of the Virgin Mary inscribed with the words: *Da mihi virtutem contro hostes tuos*. Give me strength against your enemies. (Jeremias Danelius. *Trimegisti cristiani* lib. 2 cap. 4, § 4).

Arthur, King of England, by wearing the image of Mary on his shield made himself invulnerable in battle; and Prince Eugene with our Duke Victor Amadeus, who wore it on their shield and chest, with a handful of valiant men defeated the 80,000-strong French army under Turin. The majestic Basilica of Superga was erected by the aforementioned Duke, then King Victor Amadeus as a sign of gratitude for this victory.

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## **Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians (4/13)**

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

**Chapter V. Devotion of the early Christians to the Blessed**

## **Virgin Mary.**

The faithful of the early Church themselves made constant recourse to Mary as a powerful helper for Christians. This is particularly demonstrated by the general commotion caused by the news of her imminent departure from the world.

Not only those in Jerusalem but the faithful still in the vicinity of the city crowded around Mary's poor house, yearning to contemplate once more that blessed face. Moved by seeing herself surrounded by so many children who showed her with tears the love they bore her and the sorrow they felt at having to be separated from her, she made them the warmest of promises: that she would assist them from heaven, that in heaven at the right hand of her divine Son she would have greater power and authority and would do all things for the good of mankind. Here is how St John Damascene relates this wonderful event:

At the time of the glorious Dormition of the Blessed Virgin, all the holy Apostles, who travelled the earth for the salvation of the nations, were in a moment transported to Jerusalem. There a vision of angels appeared to them and a sweet harmony of heavenly powers was heard, and thus Mary surrounded with divine glory rendered her holy soul into the hands of God. Then her body transported with the song of the Angels and Apostles, was placed in a coffin and carried to Gethsemane, in which place the Angels' song was heard for three continuous days. After three days the angelic singing ceased. St Thomas, who had not been with the other Apostles at the death of Mary, arrived on the third day, and having manifested a most fervent desire to venerate the body which had been the dwelling place of a God, the Apostles who were still there opened the tomb, but in no part could they find her sacred body. But having found the cloths in which she had been wrapped, which exhaled a most sweet odour, they closed the tomb. They were greatly astonished by this miracle and could only conclude that He who had chosen to take flesh from the Virgin Mary, become man and be born, even though He was God, the Word and the Lord of glory, and who after the birth

preserved her virginity intact, also wanted her immaculate body after death, keeping it incorrupt, to be honoured by being transported to heaven before the common and universal resurrection (St John Damascene).

An experience of eighteen centuries shows us in a most luminous way that Mary continued from heaven and with the greatest success the mission as mother of the Church and helper of Christians that she had begun on earth. The innumerable graces obtained after her death made her cult spread with the utmost rapidity, so that even in those early days of persecution, wherever the sign of the Catholic religion appeared, there the image of Mary could also be seen. Indeed, from the days when Mary still lived, many devotees of her were already to be found, who gathered on Mount Carmel and there, living together in community, devoted themselves wholly to Mary.

It does not displease the devout reader that we relate this fact as it is narrated in the Office of the Holy Church under the Feast of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel, 16 July.

On the sacred day of Pentecost, the Apostles having been filled with the Holy Spirit, many fervent believers (*viri plurimi*) had given themselves to follow the example of the holy prophets Elijah and Elisha, and at the preaching of John the Baptist had prepared themselves for the coming of the Messiah. Having seen the predictions they had heard from the great Forerunner verified, they immediately embraced the Gospel faith. Then, while the Blessed Virgin was still living, they took special affection for her and honoured her so much that on Mount Carmel, where Elijah had seen that little cloud, which was a distinguished figure of Mary, ascend, they built a small shrine to the same Virgin. There they gathered every day with pious rites, prayers and praises and venerated her as the singular protector of the Order. Here and there they began to call themselves the brothers of the blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel. In the course of time, the supreme pontiffs not only confirmed this title, but also

granted special indulgences. Mary then gave the name herself, granted her assistance to this institute, established for them a sacred scapular, which she gave to the blessed Simon Stock so that by this heavenly habit that sacred order would be distinguished and those who wore it would be protected from all evil.

As soon as the Apostles came to our lands to bring the light of the Gospel, it was not long before devotion to Mary sprang up in the West. Those who visit the catacombs of Rome, and we are eyewitnesses to this, still find in those dungeons ancient images representing either the marriage of Mary with St Joseph, or the assumption of Mary into heaven, and others depicting the Mother of God with the child in her arms.

A renowned writer says that "in the early days of the Church, the Christians produced a type of the Virgin in the most satisfactory manner that the condition of art at that time could have required. The feeling of modesty that shone, according to St Ambrose, in these images of the Virgin, proves that in the absence of a real effigy of the Mother of God, Christian art was able to reproduce in it the likeness of her soul, that physical beauty symbol of moral perfection that one could not but attribute to the divine Virgin. This character can also be found in certain paintings in the catacombs, in which the Virgin is painted seated with the Child Jesus on her knees, now standing and now half-length, always in a manner that seems to conform to a priestly type."

"In the catacombs of St Agnes", writes Ventura, "outside Porta Pia, where one can see not only tombs, but oratories still of second-century Christians filled with immense riches of Christian archaeology and precious memories of early Christianity, one finds in great abundance images of Mary with the divine Infant in her arms that attest to the faith of the ancient Church about the necessity of Mary's mediation to obtain graces from Jesus Christ, and about the cult of sacred images that heresy has attempted to destroy, branding them as superstitious novelties."

## **Chapter VI. The B. Virgin explains to St. Gregory [Thaumaturgus] the mysteries of the faith. – Chastisement of Nestorius.**

Although the holy Virgin Mary has at all times shown herself to be the help of Christians in all the necessities of life, yet she seems to have wished in a particular way to make her power manifest when the Church was attacked in the truths of the faith either by heresy or by enemy weapons. We gather here some of the most glorious events that all concur to confirm what is written in the Bible. Thou art like the tower of David, whose building is encircled with ramparts; a thousand shields are hanging round about, and every kind of armour of the most valiant (Cant. IV, 4). Let us now see these words verified in the facts of ecclesiastical history.

Around the middle of the third century St Gregory lived, known as a thaumaturge because of the multitude of miracles he performed. Since the bishop of Neocesarea, his homeland, had died, St. Phaedimus, Archbishop of Amasea, on whom that was dependent, thought of elevating St. Gregory to that bishopric. But, considering himself unworthy of that sublime dignity, he hid himself in the desert; indeed, in order not to be found, he went from one solitude to another; but St. Phaedimus, enlightened by the Lord, elected him bishop of Neocesarea in spite of himself, even though he was absent.

That diocese still worshipped false deities, and when s. Gregory had only 17 Christians in all. Gregory was greatly dismayed when he was forced to accept such a high and dangerous dignity, especially since there were those in that city who made a monstrous mixture of the mysteries of faith with the ridiculous fables of the Gentiles. Gregory therefore begged Phaedimus to give him some time to better instruct himself in the sacred mysteries, and he spent entire nights in study and meditation, commending himself to the Blessed Virgin who is the mother of wisdom, and to whom he was very devoted. Now it happened one night that after long meditation on the sacred mysteries, a venerable old man of heavenly beauty and

majesty appeared to him. Amazed at this sight, he asked him who he was and what he wanted. The old man kindly reassured him and told him that he had been sent by God to explain to him the mysteries he was meditating on. When he heard this, with great joy he began to look at him, and with his hand he pointed out to him another apparition in the form of a woman who shone like lightning, and in beauty surpassed every human creature. Frightened, he prostrated himself on the ground in an act of veneration. In the meantime he heard the woman, who was the Blessed Virgin, calling that old man by the name of John the Evangelist, and inviting him to explain to him the mysteries of true religion. St John replied that he was very ready to do so, since it pleased the Mother of the Lord. And in fact he set about explaining to him many points of Catholic doctrine, then not yet elucidated by the Church and therefore very obscure.

She explained to him that there was only one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that all three are perfect, invisible, incorruptible, immortal, and eternal; that to the Father is attributed especially the power and creation of all things; that to the Son is ascribed especially wisdom, and that he became truly man, and is equal to the Father though begotten of him; that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and is the source of all holiness; perfect Trinity without division or inequality, which has always been and will always be immutable and invariable.

Having explained these and other most lofty doctrines, the vision vanished, and Gregory immediately wrote down the things he had learned and taught them constantly in his Church, nor did he ever cease to thank the Blessed Virgin who had instructed him in such a portentous manner.

If Mary proved to be a prodigious help to Christians in favour of the Catholic faith, God shows how terrible are the punishments inflicted on those who blaspheme against the faith. We see this verified in the fatal end that befell Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople. He denied that the Virgin Mary was properly the mother of God.



The grave scandals caused by his preaching moved the Supreme Pontiff, who was called Celestine I, to examine the doctrine of the heresiarch, which he found erroneous and full of impiety. The patient pontiff, however, first admonished him, then threatened to separate him from the Church if he did not recant his errors.

Nestorius' obstinacy forced the pope to convene a council of over 200 bishops in the city of Ephesus, presided over by St Cyril as papal legate. This council, which was the third Ecumenical Council, met in the year of Christ 431.

Nestorius' errors were proclaimed anathema, but the author did not convert, rather he became more obstinate. He was therefore deposed from his seat, exiled to Egypt, where after many tribulations he fell into the hands of a band of robbers. Because of his exile, poverty, abandonment, a fall from a horse, and his advanced age, he suffered excruciating pain. Finally his living body rotted, and his tongue, the organ of so many blasphemies, rotted and was pink with worms.

Thus died the one who dared to utter so many blasphemies against the august Mother of the Saviour.

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