

Alexandre Planas Saurí, the deaf martyr (2/2)

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

The Salesian

He was close to the sick, the children. The Oratory, which the Salesians had founded at the beginning of the house, ended with his departure back in 1903. But the parish of Sant Vicenç picked up the torch through a young man, Joan Juncadella, a born catechist, and *El Sordo*, his great assistant. As mentioned earlier, a very strong friendship and ongoing collaboration grew between them, which was only ended by the tragedy in 1936. Alexandre took care of the cleanliness and orderliness of the place, but he soon proved to be a real animator of the games and excursions that were organised. And if necessary, he did not hesitate to make available the money he saved.

And he had a Salesian heart. Deafness did not allow him to profess as a Salesian, which he certainly wanted. However, it appears that he took private vows, which he made with the permission of the then Provincial, Fr Philip Rinaldi, according to the testimony of one of the rectors of the house, Fr Crescenzi.

He demonstrated his identification with the Salesian cause in a thousand ways, but in a particularly significant way by taking personal care of the house for almost 30 years and defending it in the difficult situation in the summer and autumn of 1936.

"He seemed like the father to each of us. When, in 1935, three boys drowned in the river, the man's grief was as if he had lost three sons at once. We know that the Salesians did not consider him an employee, but one of the family, or a cooperator. Today perhaps we could say a consecrated layman in the style of the Volunteers with Don Bosco. A Salesian of

great spiritual stature."

Embracing the Cross, a true witness of faith and reconciliation

The Salesians returned to Sant Vicenç dels Horts in the autumn of 1931. The unrest that led to the fall of the Spanish monarchy affected the house in El Campello (Alicante) where the aspirantate was located at that time. The decision was therefore taken to move it to Sant Vicenç. The house, although relatively dilapidated, was ready. It was able to expand with the purchase of an adjacent tower. It was here that the life of the aspirants took place, whose testimony on *el Sordo* has made it possible to draw the portrait of the man, the artist, the believer and the Salesian to which we have referred.



Christ nailed to the cross, in the courtyard of the house, by Alexandre



The Deposition in the hands of Mary, in the courtyard of the house, by Alexandre



The Holy Sepulchre, in the courtyard of the house, by Alexandre

Now is not the time to refer to the critical situation of the years 1931-1936 in Spain. Despite all this, life in the Sant Vicenç aspirantate passed quite normally. The driving force of daily life was the vocational awareness of the young people, which always inspired them to look ahead in the hope of tying themselves to Don Bosco for good at a not too distant date.

Until the revolution came on 18 July 1936, on the same day Salesians and young people made their pilgrimage

excursion to Tibidabo. When they returned in the afternoon, things were changing. In just a few days, the parish house in the village was burnt down, the Salesian seminary was seized, a climate of religious intolerance had spread everywhere, the parish priest and his assistant were arrested and killed, the forces of law and order were unable or unwilling to cope with the riots. In Sant Vicenç, the "Antifascist Committee" took power, which was clearly anti-Christian.

Although at first the life of the teachers was respected because of the care for the children they housed, they nevertheless had to witness the destruction and burning of all religious objects, in particular the three monuments erected by *el Sordo*. "*How he suffered*" seeing himself having to collaborate in the destruction of what was an expression of his deep spirituality and witnessing the expulsion of the priests.

In those days, *el Sordo* became clearly aware of the new role that the revolution forced him to take on: without ceasing to be the community's main link with the outside world (he had always moved freely as an errand boy and in every kind of need), he had to guard the property as before and, above all, protect the seminarians. "In reality, he was the one who represented the Salesians and acted as our father. Within a few days, in fact, only the Brothers and an increasingly small group of aspirants remained.

The ultimate expulsion of both took place on 12 November. In Sant Vicenç, only Mr Alexandre remained. For his last days of life we know only three certain facts: two of the expelled Brothers returned to the village on the 16th to convince him to seek a safer place outside the village, which Alexandre refused. He could not leave the house he had guarded for so many years, nor could he maintain the Salesian spirit even in the midst of those difficult circumstances. One of them, Eliseo García, not wanting to leave him alone, stayed with him. Both were arrested on the night of the 18th. A few days later, seeing that Eliseo had not returned to Sarrià, another Salesian brother and a seminarian went to Sant Vicenç

to get news of them. *"Don't they know what happened?"* said a lady friend they knew who ran a bar. *"She told us in a few words about the disappearance of el Sordo and Eliseo."*

How did he spend this last week? Knowing el Sordo's life as we do, always faithful to his principles and his way of doing things, it is not difficult to imagine him: helping others, without hiding his faith and charity, in the knowledge that he was doing good, contemplating the mystery of Christ's passion and death, real and present in the lives of the persecuted, the disappeared and the murdered... Perhaps in the hope that he could be the guardian not only of the Salesians' property, but the guardian of so many of the people who suffered. As we have recalled, he did not want to strip himself of the crucifix even during the months of religious persecution that culminated in his martyrdom. With this faith, with this hope, with this immense love he would hear from the Lord of glory: *"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in small things; I will entrust much more to you. Enter into the joy of your Lord"* (Mt 25:21).

El Sordo's gospel

Having reached this point, anyone, no matter how insensitive, can only be silent and try to collect, to the best of one's ability, the precious spiritual legacy Alexandre left to the Salesian Family, his adoptive family. Can we say something about "his gospel", that is, about the Good News that he made his own and continues to propose to us with his life and death?

Alexandre is like the *"man who had an impediment in his speech"* of Mk 7:32. His parents' plea to Jesus for healing would have been continuous. Like him, Jesus took him to a lonely place away from his people and said to him: *"Ephata!"* The miracle was not in the healing of the physical ear, but in the spiritual ear. It seems to me that the acceptance of his situation with a spirit of faith was one of the founding experiences of his believing life that led him to proclaim, like the deaf man in the Gospel, to the four winds:

"He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak" (Mk 7:37).

And from here in the life of *el Sordo* we can contemplate "the hidden treasure of the Kingdom" (Mt 13:44); *"the yeast that leavens the entire dough"* (Mt 13:33); Jesus himself *"who welcomes the sick"* and *"blesses the children"*; Jesus who prays to the Father for hours and hours and teaches us the Our Father (to give glory to the Father, to desire the Kingdom, to do his will, to trust in daily bread, to forgive, to free from evil. ...) (Mt 7:9-13); *"the householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old"* (Mt 13:52); *"the Good Samaritan who takes pity on the beaten man, approaches him, binds up his wounds and takes charge of his healing"* (Lk 10:33-35); *"the Good Shepherd, keeper of the sheepfold, who enters through the door, loves the sheep, even to the point of laying down his life for them"* (Jn 10:7-11)... In a word, a living icon of the Beatitudes, of all of them, in everyday life (Mt 5:3-12).

But, even more, we can approach Alexandre and contemplate with him the Mystery of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. A mystery that takes place in his life from birth to death. A mystery that strengthens him in his faith, nourishes his hope and fills him with love, with which to give glory to God, made all things to all people with the children and young people of the Salesian home, and with the villagers of Sant Vicenç, especially the poorest, including those who took his life: *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"* (Lk 23:34). Make me, Lord, a witness of faith and reconciliation. May they too, one day, hear from your lips: *"Today you will be with me in Paradise"* (Lk 23:43).

Blessed Alexandre Planas Saurí, layman, Salesian martyr, witness of faith and reconciliation, fruitful seed of the civilisation of Love for today's world, intercede for us.

Alexandre Planas Saurí, the deaf martyr (1/2)

Alexandre Planas Sauri, born in Mataró (Barcelona) on 31 December 1878, was a lay collaborator of the Salesians until his glorious death as a martyr in Garraf (Barcelona) on 19 November 1936. His beatification took place together with other Salesians and members of the Salesian Family on 11 March 2001, by Pope Saint John Paul II.

The list of Spanish martyrs beatified by Pope John Paul II on 11 March 2001 includes layman Alexandre PLANAS SAURÍ. His name is one of the Salesian martyrs of the Tarraconense Province, a subgroup of Barcelona. The testimonies about his life also describe him as “of the family” or “cooperator”, but everyone describes him as “a genuine Salesian”. The village of Sant Vicenç dels Horts, where he lived for 35 years, knew him by the nickname “El Sord’” “El Sord dels Frares” (The Deaf man of the friars). And this is the expression that appears on the beautiful plaque in the parish church, placed on at the back, on the exact spot where Alexandre stood when he went to pray.

His life was cut short on the night of 18 November 1936, along with a Salesian Brother, Eliseo García, who stayed with him so as not to leave him alone, as Alexandre did not want to leave the village and seek a safer place. Within hours both were arrested, condemned by the anarchist committee in the municipality, and taken to the banks of the Garraf, on the Mediterranean, where they were shot. Their bodies were not recovered. Alexandre was 58 years old.

This is a note that could have made it onto the events page of any newspaper and fallen into utter oblivion. But it did not. The Church proclaimed them both blessed. For

the Salesian Family they were and always will be “signs of faith and reconciliation”. Reference will be made in these pages to Mr Alexandre. Who was this man whom people nicknamed “*el Sord dels frares*”?

The circumstances of his life

Alexandre Planas Saurí was born in Mataró (province of Barcelona) in 1878, six years before the train that took Don Bosco to Barcelona (to visit and meet with the Salesians and the young people at the Sarrià house), stopped at the station in this city to pick up Doña Dorotea de Chopitea and those from Martí Codolar who wanted to accompany him on the last leg of the journey to Barcelona.

Very little is known of his childhood and adolescence. He was baptised in the city’s most popular parish, St Joseph and St John. He was, without a doubt, a regular attender at Sunday celebrations, activities and parish celebrations. Judging by the trajectory of his later life, he was a young man who was able to develop a solid spiritual life.

Alexandre had a significant physical impairment: he was totally deaf and had an ungainly body (short in stature, and curvature of the spine). The circumstance that brought him to Sant Vicenç dels Horts, a town about 50 km from his home town, is unknown. The truth is that in 1900 he was among the Salesians in the small town of Sant Vicenç as an employee in the daily activities of the Salesian house: gardening, cleaning, farming, running errands... A clerver and hard working young man. And, above all, “good and very pious”.

The house in Sant Vicenç dels Horts was bought by Fr Philip Rinaldi, former Provincial of Spain, in 1895, to house the novitiate and the philosophy studies that were to be carried out later. It was the first Salesian formation centre in Spain. Alexandre arrived there in 1900 as an employee, immediately earning the respect of everyone. He felt very comfortable, fully integrated in the spirit and mission of the house.

At the end of the 1902-1903 school year, the house underwent a major change of direction. The Rector Major, Fr Michael Rua, had created the three provinces of Spain. Madrid and Seville Provinces decided to organise formation in their respective provinces. Barcelona also transferred the novitiate and philosophy to Girona. The house in Sant Vicenç dels Horts remained practically empty within a few months, inhabited only by Mr Alexandre.

From that year until 1931 (28 years!), he became the guardian of the house. Not only of the property, but above all of the Salesian traditions that had become strongly rooted in the population in just a few years. His was a benevolent presence and work, living like an anchorite but in no way foreign to the friends of the house who protected him, for the sick of the town he visited, life in his parish, the parishioners he edified with the example of his piety, and for the children at parish catechesis and the festive oratory he animated together with a young man from the town, Joan Juncadella, with whom he formed a strong friendship. Distant yet close at the same time, with no small influence on people. A singular character. The reference person for Salesian spirit in the village. *"El sord dels frares"*.

The man

Alexandre, a handicapped and deaf person who understood others thanks to his penetrating gaze, of the movement of their lips, always answered lucidly, even if he spoke softly. A man with a good and bright heart: *"A treasure in an ugly earthenware jar, but we, the children, were able to perceive his human dignity perfectly."*

He dressed as a poor person, always with his bag slung over his shoulder, sometimes accompanied by a dog. The Salesians let him stay at the house. He could live on what the garden produced and the help he received from a few people. His poverty was exemplary, more than evangelical. And if he had stoo much, he gave it to the poor. In the midst of this

kind of life, he carried out the task of caretaker of the house with absolute fidelity.

As well as the faithful and responsible man, was the good, humble, self-sacrificing man of an invincible, though firm, warmth. "He would not allow anyone to be spoken ill of." Then there was the gentleness of his heart. "The comforter of all families." A man of transparent heart, and upright intention. A man who made himself loved and respected. The people were with him.



The artist

Alexandre also had the soul of an artist, an artist and a mystic. Isolated from outside noise he lived absorbed in constant mystical contemplation. And he was able to capture the innermost feelings of his religious experience in material things, which almost always revolved around the passion of Jesus Christ.

In the courtyard at the house he created three clearly visible monuments: Christ nailed to the cross, being laid in Mary's hands and the holy sepulchre. Among the three, the cross presided over the courtyard. Passengers on the train that ran past the farm could see it perfectly. On the other hand, he set up a small workshop in one of the outbuildings of the house where he carried out the orders he received or small images with which he satisfied the tastes of popular piety and distributed them freely among his neighbours.

The believer

But what dominated his personality was his Christian faith. He professed it in the depths of his being and manifested it with total clarity, sometimes even ostentatiously, by professing it in public. "*A true saint*" a "*man of God*" people said. "*When we arrived at the chapel in the morning or in the afternoon we would always unfailingly*

find Alexandre praying, on his knees, doing his pious practices." "His piety was very deep." A man totally open to the voice of the Spirit, with the sensitivity that saints possess. The most admirable thing about this man was his thirst and hunger for God, "seeking ever more spirituality."

Alexandre's faith was first of all open to the mystery of God, before whose greatness he would fall on his knees in profound adoration: *"Bowed down by his body, his eyes lowered, full of interior life... placed at one side of the church, his head bowed, kneeling, absorbed in the mystery of God, fully immersed in meditation on holy pleasure, he would give vent to his affections and emotions..."*

"He would spend hours before the tabernacle, kneeling, with his body bent almost horizontally to the ground, after communion." From contemplation of God and his saving greatness, Alexandre drew a great trust in Divine Providence, but also a radical aversion to blasphemy against the glory of God and his holy name. He could not tolerate blasphemy. *"If he sensed a blasphemy he would either become tense as he looked intensely at the person who had uttered it, or he would whisper with compassion, so that the person could hear: 'Our Lady weeps, Our Lord weeps.'"*

His faith was expressed in the traditional devotions of the Eucharist, as we have seen, and the rosary. But where his religious impulse found the channel best suited to his needs was undoubtedly in meditation on the passion of Christ. *"I remember the impression we had of this deaf man on hearing him speak of the Passion of Christ."*

He bore the mystery of the cross in his flesh and in his soul. In its honour he had erected the monuments of the cross, the deposition and the burial of Christ. All accounts also mention the iron crucifix he wore hanging from his chest, and whose chain was embedded in his skin. And he always slept with a large crucifix beside him. He did not want to take off the crucifix even during the months of religious persecution that culminated in his martyrdom. "Am I doing anything wrong?" he would say. "And if they kill me, so much the better, then I

already have heaven open.”

Every day he would make the Stations of the Cross: “When he went up to the study room, Mr Planas would enter the chapel, and when we came down after an hour, he was finishing the Stations of the Cross, which he did totally bent over, until his head touched the ground.”

Founded on this experience of the cross to which was added his profound devotion to the Sacred Heart, the Deaf man’s spirituality was projected towards asceticism and solidarity. He lived as a penitent, in evangelical poverty and a spirit of mortification. He slept on planks without a mattress or pillow, having beside him a skull that reminded him of death and “some instruments of penance”. He did not learn this from the Salesians. He had learnt it previously and explained it by recalling the spirituality of Jesuit St Alphonse Rodríguez, whose manual he used to read in the novitiate house and which he sometimes meditated on during those years.

But his love for the cross also drove him to solidarity. His austerity was impressive. He dressed like the poor and ate frugally. He gave all he could give: not money, because he had none, but always his fraternal help: *“When there was something to be done for someone, he would leave everything and go where it was needed.”* Those who benefited most were the children in catechesis and the sick. *“He never missed the bedside of a seriously ill person: he would watch over him while the family rested. And if there was no one in the family who could prepare the deceased, he was ready for this service. Favoured were the poor, whom, if he could, he helped with the alms he collected or with the fruit of his labour.”*

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don Joan Lluís Playà, sdb

Servants of God John Świerc and eight Companions Martyrs. Pastors who gave their lives

Extremist ideologies, that is, ideas raised to the rank of absolute truths, always bring suffering and death when they seek to impose themselves at any cost on those who do not accept them. Sometimes it is enough to belong to a nation or social group to suffer the consequences. This is the case of the Polish Salesian martyrs presented in this article.

Nine Polish Salesian priests also belong to the number of victims of Nazism, Servants of God Fr Jan Świerc and his 8 Companions: Fr Ignacy Antonowicz, Fr Karol Golda, Fr Włodzimierz Szembek, Fr Franciszek Harazim, Fr Ludwik Mroczek, Fr Ignacy Dobiasz, Fr Kazimierz Wojciechowski and Fr Franciszek Miśka, who were killed *in odium fidei* in the Nazi death camps in 1941–1942. As priests, all the Servants of God were engaged in Poland in various pastoral and governmental activities and in teaching. They were completely uninvolved in the political tensions that agitated Poland during the wartime occupation. Nevertheless, they were arrested and martyred *in odium fidei* for the very fact of being Catholic priests.

The strength and serene perseverance preserved by the Servants of God in carrying out their priestly ministry even during their imprisonment represented a real act of defiance for the Nazis: although exhausted by humiliation and torture, in defiance of any prohibition, the Servants of God were guardians to the end of the souls entrusted to them and showed themselves ready, despite human weakness, to accept death with God and for God.

The concentration camp at Auschwitz, known to all as the death

camp, and the camp at Dachau for Fr Miśka, thus became places of priestly commitment for these Salesian priests: Fr Jan Świerc and 8 companions responded to the denial of human dignity and life, by offering the power of grace and the hope of eternity through the sacraments. They welcomed many fellow prisoners, sustained them through the Eucharist and confession and prepared them for a peaceful death. This service was not infrequently rendered in hiding, taking advantage of the darkness of the night and under the constant and pressing threat of severe punishment or more often death.

The Servants of God, as true disciples of Jesus, never uttered words of scorn or hatred towards their persecutors. Arrested, beaten, humiliated in their human and priestly dignity, they offered their suffering to God and remained faithful to the end, certain that whoever places everything before the divine will is not disappointed. Their inner serenity and their demeanour, which they showed even at the hour of death, were so extraordinary that they left their torturers astonished, and in some cases outraged.

Here are their biographical profiles.

Fr Ignacy Antonowicz

Ignacy Antonowicz was born in 1890 in Więśławice, Włocławek County, north-central Poland. In 1901 he entered the Salesian Secondary School in Oświęcim, where he remained until 1905. Between 1905 and 1906 he completed his novitiate in Daszawa. He made his perpetual profession in August 1909 in Italy, in Lanzo Torinese. He was ordained a priest on 22 April 1916 in Rome. Fr Ignacy taught dogmatics at the Theological Studentate in Foglizzo (Turin) between 1916 and 1917. In 1919, during the Russo-Polish War, he was a military chaplain in the Polish army. Between 1919 and 1920 he was in Krakow as a professor in the Theological Studentate. On 1 July 1934 he was appointed councillor of the Polish Province of St Hyacinth in Krakow

until the end of 1936. In 1936 he took up the post as Rector of the Salesian Immaculate Conception Theological Studentate in Krakow, which he held until his arrest on 23 May 1941. He was detained for a month in the Montelupich prison in Cracow, then taken to the concentration camp at Oświęcim. He was killed on 21 July 1941. He was 51 years old, with 34 years of religious profession and 25 years of priesthood.



Fr Karol Golda

Karol Golda was born on 23 December 1914 in Tychy, Upper Silesia. After finishing fourth grade, he moved to the Boleslaw Chrobry Secondary School in Pszczyna. He attended sixth grade at the Salesian school in Oświęcim. In June 1931 he went to the House in Czerwińsk to begin his novitiate. On 15 January 1937 he made his perpetual religious profession in Rome. On 18 December 1938 he was ordained a priest in Rome, where he stayed for a further six months to obtain a Licentiate in Theology. In July 1939 he returned to Poland. The Second World War broke out and Fr Karol went to Silesia in October 1939 and then to Oświęcim where he stayed, as the occupying authorities did not allow him to travel to Italy. Fr Karol Golda was entrusted with teaching theology at the Salesian Institute in Oświęcim and was appointed Prefect of Studies there. He was arrested by Gestapo officials on 31 December 1941 and killed on 14 May 1942, after only three and a half years of priesthood.



Fr Włodzimierz Szembek

The Servant of God Fr Włodzimierz Szembek, son of Count

Zygmunt and Klementyna of the Dzieduszycki family, was born on 22 April 1883 in Poręba Żegoty, near Cracow. In 1907, he graduated from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow with a degree in agricultural engineering. For about twenty years he was involved in the administration of his mother's estates and in the lay apostolate. When he turned 40, the Servant of God's religious vocation came to maturity. On 4 February 1928 he entered the aspirantate in Oświęcim. At the end of 1928 he began his novitiate in Czerwińsk. He made his religious profession on 10 August 1929. On 3 June 1934 he received priestly ordination in Cracow. On 9 July 1942 he was arrested by the Gestapo and taken to Nowy Targ. The following 19 August he was taken to Auschwitz concentration camp, where he died on 7 September 1942, exhausted by suffering and as a result of the mistreatment he had endured. He was 59 years of age, 13 of profession and 9 of priesthood.



Fr Franciszek Harazim

Franciszek Ludwik Harazim was born on 22 August 1885 in Osiny, Rybnik district in Silesia. He attended primary school first in Baranowicze, then in Osiny. In 1901, he entered the Salesian Institute in Oświęcim to attend secondary school there. He completed his novitiate in Daszawa in 1905/1906. On 24 March 1910 he made his perpetual vows. He was ordained a priest in Ivrea on 29 May 1915. Between 1915 and 1916 he taught at the Oświęcim High School, of which he was appointed headmaster between 1916 and 1918. In the years 1918-1920 he taught philosophy in the Salesian major seminary in Cracow (Łosiówka). From 1922-1927 the Servant of God held the post of headmaster at the Salesian High School in Aleksandrów Kujawski. In 1927 he returned again to the major seminary in Krakow as a councillor, teacher and educator of clerics. In July 1938 Fr Franciszek was appointed professor at the Krakow-

Łosiówka house. He was arrested by the Gestapo in Krakow on 23 May 1941. He was first taken to Konfederacka Street and then, together with the other confreres, to Montelupich Prison. A month later, on 26 June 1941, he was taken to Auschwitz concentration camp. He was killed on 27 June 1941 on the famous Ghiaione. He had not yet turned 56 years of age: of these 34 were of religious profession and 26 of priesthood.



Fr Ludwik Mroczek

Ludwik Mroczek was born in Kęty (Kraków) on 11 August 1905. In 1917, after attending school in Kęty, he was admitted to the Salesian institute in Oświęcim where he completed his secondary school studies. He did his novitiate in Klecza Dolna completing this on 7 August 1922. He made his perpetual vows on 14 July 1928 in Oświęcim. In Przemyśl he received priestly ordination on 25 June 1933. Ordained a priest, he worked in Oświęcim (in 1933), in Lvov (in 1934), in Przemyśl (in 1934 and 1938/39), in Skawa (in 1936/37), in Częstochowa (in 1939). On 22 May 1941, as soon as he had finished celebrating Mass, he was arrested and transferred with other confreres to the concentration camp at Oświęcim. Here he died on 5 January 1942: he was 36 years old, 18 years of religious profession and 8 years of priesthood.



Fr Jan Świerc

Jan Świerc was born in Królewska Huta (today Chorzów, in Upper Silesia) on 29th April 1877. He completed his secondary school studies at Valsalice, Turin. Between 1897 and 1898 he did his novitiate in Ivrea. Here he took his perpetual vows on 3

October 1899. On 6 June 1903 he was ordained a priest in Turin. In 1911 he was appointed Rector of the Krakow House by the then Rector Major Fr Paul Albera. From September 1911 to April 1918, he was Rector of the Lubomirski Institute in Krakow. In 1924, for a period of seven months, he was engaged as a missionary in the Americas. From November 1925 to October 1934, he was Rector and Parish Priest in Przemyśl. On 15 August 1934 he was appointed Rector of the Lviv House. In July 1938 he took up the post as Rector and Parish Priest of the house at 6 Konfederacka Street in Krakow from 1938-1941. On 23 May 1941 he was arrested by the Gestapo together with other confreres and taken to prison in Montelupich. On 26 June 1941 he was transferred to the Auschwitz concentration camp and, after just one day, he was killed: he was 64 years old, 42 years of religious profession and 38 years of priesthood.



Fr Ignacy Dobiasz

Ignacy Dobiasz was born in Ciechowice (Upper Silesia) on 14th January 1880. Having completed primary school, in May 1894 he went to Italy, to Turin Valsalice, to do his secondary school studies there. On 16 August 1898 he entered the Salesian novitiate in Ivrea. He made his perpetual vows at San Benigno Canavese on 21 September 1903. He completed his philosophical and theological studies at San Benigno Canavese and at Foglizzo between 1904 and 1908. On 28 June 1908 he was ordained a priest in Foglizzo. He then returned to Poland: he carried out his pedagogical and pastoral activities in Oświęcim (in 1908, 1910, 1921 and 1923), in Daszawa (in 1909), in Przemyśl (1912-1914) and in Krakow (between 1916 and 1920 and in 1922). In 1931 he was in Warsaw as Vice-Rector. In November 1934 he went to Krakow where he remained as confessor and assistant parish priest. Here he was arrested together with other Salesian confreres on 23 May 1941. After a short

detention in the prison in Montelupich, he was deported to the concentration camp in Auschwitz. On 27 June 1941, he died of ill-treatment and inhuman labour. He was 61 years of age, 40 years of profession and 32 years of priesthood.



Fr Kazimierz Wojciechowski

Kazimierz Wojciechowski was born in Jasło (Galicia) on 16 August 1904. Orphaned by his father when he was only five years old, he was taken into the institute of Prince Lubomirski in Cracow. He began secondary school in 1916 at the Salesian Institute in Oświęcim. In 1920 he began his novitiate in Klecza Dolna. He made his perpetual vows on 2nd May 1928 in Oświęcim. Between 1924 and 1925 he taught music and mathematics in Łąd. On 19th May 1935 he was ordained a priest in Cracow. In 1935-1936 he was in Daszawa and in Cracow, where he taught religion and was appointed director of the oratory and of the Catholic Youth Association. The Servant of God was arrested in Krakow on 23 May 1941 with other Salesian confreres. On 26 June 1941 he was deported to Auschwitz concentration camp where, after just one day, he was killed. He was 37 years of age, 19 of profession and 6 of priesthood.



Fr Franciszek Miśka

Franciszek Miśka was born in Swierczyniec (Upper Silesia) on 5 December 1898. He completed his secondary schooling at the Salesian Institute in Oświęcim. He entered the novitiate in Pleszów in 1916. He made his perpetual profession in Oświęcim on 25 July 1923. He completed his theological studies in Turin-Crocetta. He was ordained a priest on 10 July 1927 in

Turin. He then returned to Poland. In 1929 he was appointed counsellor and catechist at the orphanage in Przemyśl. In 1931 and for the next five years he was in Jaciążek as the Rector. In 1936 he was appointed parish priest of the parish of Łąd. In 1941 he became Rector of the house of the Sons of Mary and parish priest of Łąd. On 6 January 1941, the Salesian institute in Łąd was transformed by the Gestapo into a prison for priests of the diocese of Włocławek and Gniezno-Poznań. Fr Franciszek was entrusted by the German authorities with the task of maintaining order and providing for the prisoners. For unspecified reasons he was transferred several times to Inowrocław and brutally tortured there. On 30 October 1941, the Servant of God was transported to Dachau concentration camp (Germany). Here, subjected to forced labour and inhuman living conditions, he died on 30 May 1942, the day of the Most Holy Trinity, in the camp's barracks hospital. He was 43 years old, almost 25 years of religious profession and almost 15 years of priesthood.



The reputation for holiness and martyrdom of the Servants of God Fr Jan Świerc and 8 Companions, although hindered during the communist period, spread as soon as they died and is still alive today. They were considered to be exemplary priests, dedicated to pastoral work and works of charity, warm and friendly, always available, interested in giving glory only to God, for whose sake they were faithful even to the shedding of their blood.

On 28 March 2023, the Historical Consultors of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints cast affirmative votes on the *Positio super martyrio* of the Servants of God John Świerc and VIII Companions, Professed Priests of the Society of St Francis de Sales, who were killed in *odium fidei* in the Nazi death camps in the years 1941-1942. We pray that they will be raised to

the honours of the altars as soon as possible.

Mariafrancesca Oggianu

Member of the General Postulation

The invisible other Don Boscós

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

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

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

The other Don Boscós

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

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

Bishops, priests, nuns, lay Salesians, members of the Salesian Family: all figures, men and women, who without being saints – in our research we excluded saints and those already on their way to the altars – have fully realised Don Bosco’s educational mission in different spheres and roles: as educators and priests, as professors and teachers, animators of oratories and youth centres, founders and directors of educational works, formators of vocations and new religious institutes, as writers and musicians, architects and builders of churches and colleges, artists of wood and painting, missionaries *ad gentes*, witnesses of the faith in prison, simple Salesians and simple Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Among them, not a few have often lived a life of hard sacrifices, overcoming obstacles of all kinds, learning very difficult languages, often risking death for lack of acceptable sanitary conditions, impossible climatic conditions, hostile and persecutory political regimes, even actual attacks. The latest of these happened just as I was leaving for Nairobi: Spanish Salesian, [Fr Cesare Fernández](#),

murdered in cold blood on 15 February 2018 at the border between Togo and Burkina Faso. One of the most recent Salesians 'martyrs', we could call him, knowing the individual as I did.

A story to learn about



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

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

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

Are these presented to us as "next door saints"? Some certainly, even considering their personal limitations, their characters, their whims, and, why not, their sins (which only God knows). All, however, were endowed with immense faith,

great hope, strong charity and generosity, much love for Don Bosco and souls. Some of them – think of the pioneer missionaries in Patagonia – one might be tempted to call real “madmen”, madmen for God and for souls of course.

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

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

Let us briefly introduce these new faces of Don Bosco.

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|---|-----------------------------|-----------|---|------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Antonio COJAZZI, Fr. | 1880-1953 | brilliant educator | Educators in the field | EU |
| 2 | Domenico MORETTI, Fr. | 1900-1989 | experience in Salesian oratories with the poorest young people | Educators in the field | EU |
| 3 | Samuele VOSTI, Fr. | 1874-1939 | creator and promoter of a renewed festive oratory in Valdocco | Educators in the field | EU |
| 4 | Karl ZIEGLER, Fr. | 1914-1990 | nature lover and scout | Educators in the field | EU |

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| 5 | Alfonsina FINCO, Sr. | 1869-1934 | dedication to abandoned children | Educators in the field | EU |
| 6 | Margherita MARIANI, Sr. | 1858-1939 | Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Rome | Educators in the field | EU |
| 7 | Sisto COLOMBO, Fr. | 1878-1938 | man of culture and mystical soul | Educators in the field | EU |
| 8 | Franc WALLAND, Fr. | 1887-1975 | theologian and provincial | Educators in the field | EU |
| 9 | Maria ZUCCHI, Sr. | 1875-1949 | made Salesian mark on the Don Bosco Institute in Messina | Educators in the field | EU |
| 10 | Clotilde MORANO, Sr. | 1885-1963 | the teaching of women's physical education | Educators in the field | EU |
| 11 | Annetta URI, Sr. | 1903-1989 | from the desk to building sites: the courage to build the future of the school | Educators in the field | EU |
| 12 | Frances PEDRICK, Sr. | 1887-1981 | the first Daughter of Mary Help of Christians to graduate from Oxford University | Educators in the field | EU |
| 13 | Giuseppe CACCIA, Bro. | 1881-1963 | a life dedicated to Salesian publishing | Educators in the field | EU |

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| 14 | Rufillo UGUCCIONI, Fr. | 1891-1966 | writer for children, evangeliser and disseminator of Salesian values | Educators in the field | EU |
| 15 | Flora FORNARA, Sr. | 1902-1971 | a life for educational theatre | Educators in the field | EU |
| 16 | Gaspar MESTRE, Bro. | 1888-1962 | the Salesian school of carving, sculpture and decoration in Sarriá (Barcelona) | Educators in the field | EU |
| 17 | Wictor GRABELSKI, Fr. | 1857-1902 | a forerunner of Salesian work in Poland | Educators in the field | EU |
| 18 | Antoni HLOND, Fr. | 1884-1963 | musician, composer, founder of a school for organists | Initiators | EU |
| 19 | Carlo TORELLLO, Fr. | 1886-1967 | popular devotion and civic memory in Latina | Initiators | EU |
| 20 | Jan KAJZER Bro. | 1892-1976 | engineer co-author of the Polish “art deco” style and moderniser of the Salesian vocational school in Oświęcim | Initiators | EU |
| 21 | Antonio CAVOLI, Fr. | 1888-1972 | founder of religious congregation in Japan inspired by the Salesian charism | Initiators | EU |

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| 22 | Iside MALGRATI, Sr. | 1904-1992 | innovative Salesian in printing, school and vocational training | Initiators | EU |
| 23 | Anna JUZEK, Sr. | 1879-1957 | contribution to the establishment of the works of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Poland | Initiators | EU |
| 24 | Mária ČERNÁ, Sr. | 1928-2011 | basis for the rebirth of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Slovakia | Initiators | EU |
| 25 | Antonio SALA, Fr. | 1836-1895 | economer at Valdocco and earliest Economer General | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | EU |
| 26 | Francesco SCALONI, Fr. | 1861-1926 | an extraordinary figure of a Salesian superior | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | EU |

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| 27 | Luigi TERRONE, Fr. | 1875-1968 | novice master and rector | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | EU |
| 28 | Marcelino OLAECHEA, Bishop | 1889-1972 | promoter of housing for workers | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | EU |
| 29 | Stefano TROCHTA, Cardinal | 1905-1974 | martyr under Nazis and Communists | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | EU |

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| 30 | Alba DEAMBROSIS, Sr. | 1887-1964 | builder of female Salesian work in the German-speaking area | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | EU |
| 31 | Virginia FERRARO ORTÍ, Sr. | 1894-1963 | from trade unionist to Salesian superior | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | EU |
| 32 | Raffaele PIPERNI, Fr. | 1842-1930 | parish priest, 'mediator' in the integration of Italian immigrants into the San Francisco mainstream | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |
| 33 | Remigio RIZZARDI, Fr. | 1863-1912 | the father of beekeeping in Colombia | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |
| 34 | Carlos PANE, Fr. | 1856-1923 | pioneer of the Salesian presence in Spain and Peru | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |

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| 35 | Florencio José MARTÍNEZ EMBODAS, Fr. | 1894-1971 | a Salesian way of building | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |
| 36 | Martina PETRINI PRADO, Sr. | 1874-1965 | Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; origins in fast- developing Uruguay | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |
| 37 | Anna María COPPA, Sr. | 1891-1973 | foundress and face of the first Catholic school in Ecuador | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |
| 38 | Rose MOORE, Sr. | 1911-1996 | pioneer in the rehabilitation of blind Thai youth | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |
| 39 | Mirta MONDIN, Sr. | 1922-1977 | the origins of the first Catholic girls' school in Gwangju (Korea) | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |
| 40 | Terezija MEDVEŠEK, Sr. | 1906-2001 | valiant missionary in North-East India | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |
| 41 | Nancy PEREIRA, Sr. | 1923-2010 | tireless dedication to the poor | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |
| 42 | Jeanne VINCENT, Sr. | 1915-1997 | one of the first missionaries in Port-Gentil, Gabon | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |
| 43 | Maria Gertrudes DA ROCHA, Sr. | 1933-2017 | missionary and economist in Mozambique | Pioneers in mission | AM, AS, AF |

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| 44 | Pietro GIACOMINI, Bishop | 1904-1982 | obedience blossoms | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | AM, AS, AF |
| 45 | José Luis CARREÑO ECHANDIA, Fr. | 1905-1986 | a multifaceted missionary with a preferential option for the poor | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | AM, AS, AF |
| 46 | Catherine MANIA, Sr. | 1903-1983 | first provincial in North-East India | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | AM, AS, AF |

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| 47 | William Richard AINSWORTH, Fr. | 1908-2005 | an essay on modern Salesian leadership | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | AM, AS, AF |
| 48 | Blandine ROCHE, Sr. | 1906-1999 | the Salesian presence in the difficult years of post-independence Tunisia | Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles | AM, AS, AF |