

# Election of the first Rector Major

*During the eleventh General Chapter of the Salesian Congregation, the first Rector Major, Fr. Paolo Albera, was elected. Although he formally represents the second successor of Don Bosco, he was actually the first to be elected, as Don Rua had already been personally appointed by Don Bosco, through divine inspiration and at the request of Pope Pius IX (Don Rua's appointment was officially confirmed on November 27, 1884, and subsequently ratified by the Holy See on February 11, 1888). Let us now be guided by the narrative of Fr. Eugenio Ceria, who narrates the election of Don Bosco's first successor and the works of the General Chapter.*

It hardly seems possible to speak of ancient Salesians without starting from Don Bosco. This time it is to admire divine Providence, which led Don Bosco to meet the indispensable men along the arduous path in various roles and offices of his newly established Congregation. Men, I say, not made, but to be made. It was up to the founder to seek out young boys, to raise them, educate them, instruct them, inform them of his spirit, so that wherever he sent them, they would represent him worthily among the members and before outsiders. This is also the case with his second successor. The small and slender Paolino Albera, when he came to the Oratory from his native village, did not stand out among the crowd of companions for any of those characteristics that draw attention to a newcomer. Yet Don Bosco soon noticed in him the innocence of his character, intellectual ability veiled by natural shyness, and a childlike disposition, which gave him good reason to hope. He accompanied him up to the priesthood, sent him as Director to Sampierdarena, then Director to Marseille and Inspector for France, where they called him *petit Don Bosco*, until 1886 when the trust of his brothers

elected him General Catechist or Spiritual Director of the Society. But his progress did not stop there.

After Don Rua's death, according to the Rule, the governance of the Society passed into the hands of the General Prefect, Fr. Filippo Rinaldi, who therefore presided over the Superior Chapter and directed the preparations for the General Chapter to be held within the year 1910. The great meeting was set to open on August 15, preceded by a course of spiritual exercises, conducted by the Chapter members and preached by Fr. Albera.

An intimate diary of Fr. Albera, in English, allows us to know what his feelings were during the waiting period. Under April 21, we find: "I spoke at length with Fr. Rinaldi and with great pleasure. I wholeheartedly desire that he be elected to the position of Rector Major of our Congregation. I will pray to the Holy Spirit to obtain this grace." And under the 26th: "Rarely is there talk of Fr. Rua's successor. I hope that the Prefect is elected. He has the necessary virtues for the position. Every day I pray for this grace." Again, on May 11: "I accept to go to Milan for Fr. Rua's funeral. I am very happy to obey Fr. Rinaldi, in whom I recognise as my true Superior. I pray every day asking that a Rector Major be elected." Under June 6, he reveals the reason for his strong inclination towards Fr. Rinaldi, writing about him: "I have a high opinion of his virtue, his ability, and initiative." Shortly after going to Rome in his company, he wrote on the 8th in Florence: "I see that Fr. Rinaldi is well-received everywhere and regarded as Fr. Rua's successor. He leaves a good impression on those with whom he speaks."

If it had been permissible to campaign, he would have been a great elector. Numerous Salesians thought the same way, not to mention the Spaniards, among whom he had left a great legacy of affection. Inspectors and delegates, when they arrived from Spain for the General Chapter, did not make many mysteries even when speaking with him. However, he showed all the indifference of a deaf person who does not understand a word of what is said to him. In this, his attitude was such

that it impressed his cheerful interlocutors. There was a true sense of mystery.

On the evening of the Assumption, the opening meeting was held, in which Fr. Rinaldi "spoke very well," as noted by Fr. Albera in his diary. The election of the Rector Major took place in the session the following morning. From the beginning of the voting, the names of Fr. Albera and Fr. Rinaldi alternated at short intervals. The former appeared increasingly troubled and astonished. The latter, on the other hand, showed no sign of emotion. This was noted, not without a hint of curiosity. A great applause greeted the vote, which reached the absolute majority required by the Rule. Fr. Rinaldi, having completed the last act in his capacity as President of the Assembly with the proclamation of the elected, asked to read a memorandum. Upon receiving consent, he had a sealed envelope returned to him by Fr. Lemoyne, Secretary of the Superior Chapter, which had been given to him on February 27 and bore the inscription: "To be opened after the elections to take place upon the death of dear Fr. Rua." Having received it in his hands, he unsealed it and read: "Fr. Rua is seriously ill, and I feel it is my duty to put in writing what I keep in my heart for his successor. On November 22, 1877, the usual feast of St. Charles was celebrated in Borgo San Martino. At the table presided over by the Venerable John Bosco and Msgr. Ferrò, I too was seated next to Fr. Belmonte. At a certain point, the conversation turned upon Fr. Albera, with Don Bosco recounting the difficulties posed by the clergy of his country. It was then that Msgr. Ferrò wanted to know if Fr. Albera had overcome those difficulties: – Of course, replied Don Bosco. He is my second... – And running his hand over his forehead, he stopped the phrase. But I immediately calculated that he did not mean the second who entered nor the second-ranked, since he was not from the Superior Chapter, nor the second Director, and I concluded that he was the second successor. However, I kept these things in my heart, waiting for events. Turin, February 27, 1910." The electors then understood the reason for his demeanour and

felt their hearts expand. They had therefore elected the one preconised by Don Bosco thirty-three years earlier.

Fr. Bertello was immediately entrusted with formulating two telegrams to inform the Holy Father and Cardinal Rampolla, Protector of the Society. The message to the Pope was: "Fr. Paolo Albera, new Rector Major of the Salesian Society and General Chapter, who with the utmost concord of spirits today, the ninety-fifth anniversary of the birth of the Venerable Don Bosco, who elected him and celebrates him with the greatest joy, and thank Your Holiness for the precious advice and prayers and declare profound respect and unlimited obedience." His Holiness promptly replied by sending his Apostolic Blessing. The telegram alluded to a pontifical autograph of August 9. It read as follows: "To the beloved sons of the Salesian Congregation of the Venerable Don Bosco gathered for the election of the General Rector, in the certainty that all, setting aside any human affection, will cast their vote for that Brother, whom they judge in the Lord to be the most suitable to maintain the true spirit of the Rule, to encourage and guide all the Members of the religious Institute towards perfection, and to make the many works of charity and religion to which they have dedicated themselves prosper, we impart with paternal affection the Apostolic Blessing. From the Vatican, August 9, 1910. Pius PP. X."

The Cardinal Protector also addressed a "fatherly word of encouragement and blessing" to the Moderator and Electors of the Chapter on August 12, saying among other things: "Your beloved Don Bosco, with the most intense affection of a father, undoubtedly turns his gaze from Heaven towards you and fervently implores the Divine Paraclete to pour upon you the heavenly light, inspiring you with wise counsel. The holy Church awaits from your votes a worthy successor to Don Bosco and Fr. Rua, who knows how to wisely preserve their work, and indeed to increase it with new growth. And I too, with the most vivid interest, united with you in prayer, transmit warm wishes that, with divine favour,

your choice may be content in every respect and bring me the sweet consolation of seeing the Salesian Congregation ever more flourishing for the benefit of souls and in honour of the Catholic Apostolate. Therefore, let your hearts be far from human concerns and personal feelings in such a sacred and solemn act, so that, guided solely by right intentions and a burning desire for the glory of God and the greater good of the Institute, united in the name of the Lord in the most perfect concord and charity, you may choose as your leader the one who, by the sanctity of life, is an example to you, by the goodness of heart a loving father, by prudence and wisdom a sure guide, by zeal and firmness a vigilant guardian of discipline, religious observance, and the spirit of the Venerable Founder." His Eminence, receiving Fr. Albera not long after, gave him unmistakable signs of believing that the choice had been made in accordance with the wishes he had expressed.

The very early moments of the feelings of the elected one were expressed in the diary, in which under August 16 we read: "This is a day of great misfortune for me. I have been elected Rector Major of the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales. What a responsibility on my shoulders! Now more than ever I must cry out: *Deus, in adiutorium meum intende*. I have prayed a lot, especially in front of Don Bosco's tomb." In his wallet, a yellowed sheet was found, on which this programme was outlined and signed: "I will always have God in view, Jesus Christ as a model, the Helper in aid, myself in sacrifice."

At the same time, all the members of the Superior Chapter had expired, and it was necessary to hold the election, which took place in the third session. The General Prefect was elected first. The votes on the name of Fr. Rinaldi were overwhelmingly in favour. Of the 73 voters, 71 voted for him. Thus, there was only one vote missing, which went to Fr. Paolo Virion, the French Inspector. The other, most likely his, was for Fr. Pietro Ricaldone, Inspector in Spain, whom he greatly esteemed. He therefore resumed his

daily toil, which was to last another twelve years, until he himself became Rector Major.

Having done this, the Chapter moved on to electing the remaining members, who were: Fr. Giulio Barberis, General Catechist; Fr. Giuseppe Bertello, Economer; Fr. Luigi Piscetta, Fr. Francesco Cerruti, Fr. Giuseppe Vespignani, Councillors. The latter, Inspector in Argentina, thanked the assembly for the act of trust, stating that he was obliged for particular reasons and also for health to decline the nomination, asking to proceed to another election. But the Superior did not believe he should accept the resignation so readily and asked him to suspend any decision until the next day. The next day, invited by the Rector Major to notify the resolution taken, he replied that, following the Superior's advice, he fully submitted to obedience with the intention of taking on the role.

The first act of the re-elected General Prefect was to officially inform the members of the election of the new Rector Major. In a short letter, briefly mentioning the various phases of his life, he appropriately recalled the so-called "Dream of the Wheel," in which Don Bosco saw Fr. Albera with a lantern in his hand illuminating and guiding others (BM VI, 910). He then concluded very appropriately: "My dear brothers, let the loving words of Don Bosco in the testamentary letter resonate once again in your ears: 'Your Rector is dead, but another will be elected for you, who will take care of you and your eternal salvation. Listen to him, love him, obey him, pray for him, as you have done for me.'"

To the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Fr. Albera deemed it appropriate to issue a communication without too much delay, especially since he was receiving a good number of letters from them. He therefore thanked them for their congratulations, but above all for their prayers. "I hope," he wrote, "that God will grant your wishes and that He will not allow my ineptitude to be detrimental to those works to which the Venerable Don Bosco and the unforgettable Fr. Rua dedicated their whole lives." He finally hoped that among the

two branches of Don Bosco's family there would always be a holy competition in preserving the spirit of charity and zeal left as a legacy by the founder.

Now let us take a brief look at the works of the General Chapter. It can be said that there was only one fundamental theme. The previous Chapter, having completed a rather summarised revision of the Regulations, had decided that, as they were, they would be practiced for six years *ad experimentum* and that Chapter XI would resume their examination, establishing the definitive text. There were six Regulations: for the Inspectors, for all Salesian houses, for the novitiate houses, for the parishes, for the festive oratories, and for the Pious Union of Cooperators. The same Chapter X, with a petition signed by 36 members, had requested that the administrative issue be addressed during the XI<sup>th</sup>, and especially on how to make the income sources granted by Providence to each Salesian house increasingly fruitful. To facilitate the arduous work, a Commission, so to speak, of technicians was appointed for each Regulation, with the task of conducting the relevant studies and presenting the conclusions to the Chapter itself.

The discussions, which began during the fifth session, went on for another 21. In order to close the matter, it would have been necessary to prolong the works much longer. Still, the General Chapter unanimously deferred the task of completing the review to the Superior Chapter, which promised to carry it out by appointing a special Commission. Nevertheless, in order to show that it was not disinterested and to assist the work, the General Chapter expressed the desire to create a Commission with the task of formulating the main criteria that should guide the new Commission of Regulations in its long and delicate task. So, this was done. Therefore, ten directive norms, elaborated by its delegates under the presidency of Fr. Ricaldone, were brought to the assembly's attention and approved. Their context was to maintain the spirit of Don Bosco intact, preserving those

articles that were recognised as his, and to eliminate anything that was purely exhortative from the Regulations.

I will remember nothing more than two episodes from the XI<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, which seem to have particular importance. The first refers to the Regulations of the festive oratories. The extra-chapter Commission had deemed it appropriate to simplify it, especially for the part concerning the various roles. Fr. Rinaldi felt that the concept of Don Bosco regarding the festive oratories was thus abolished, hence he rose up saying: "The Regulations printed in 1877 were truly compiled by Don Bosco, and Fr. Rua assured me of this four months before his death. I therefore wish that it be preserved intact, for if it is practiced, it will be seen that it is still good even today."

At this point an animated discussion arose, of which I will highlight the most notable points. The speaker declared that the Commission was completely unaware of this particularity, but he also noted that this Regulation had never been fully practiced in any festive oratory, not even in Turin. The Commission opined that the Regulations had been commissioned by Don Bosco based on the Regulations of the Lombard festive oratories. In any case, the intention was only to simplify it and to introduce what was practical as found in the best Salesian oratories. Yet Fr. Rinaldi did not calm down, and he insisted upon Fr. Rua's desire that these Regulations be respected, as a work of Don Bosco, even with the introduction of what was deemed useful for young adults.

Fr. Vespignani reinforced this thesis. Having come to the Oratory already a priest in 1876, he had received from Fr. Rua the task of transcribing the Regulations from Don Bosco's original writings, and he still retained the early drafts. Fr. Barberis also assured that he had seen the autograph. The opponents had objections regarding the roles, but Fr. Rinaldi did not disarm. On the contrary, he uttered these forceful words: "Nothing of Don Bosco's Regulations should be altered, otherwise they would lose their authority."



Fr. Vespignani confirmed his thoughts once again with examples from America and especially Uruguay, where, when at the time of Msgr. Lasagna there was an attempt to try differently, nothing was achieved. Finally, the controversy was closed by voting the following order of the day: "The XI General Chapter decides that the 'Regulations of the festive oratories' of Don Bosco, as printed in 1877, be preserved intact, making only in the appendix those additions deemed appropriate, especially for the sections of older youth." The sensitivity of the assembly in the face of an attempt at reform in matters sanctioned by Don Bosco is commendable.

The second episode belongs to the penultimate session for a matter not unrelated to the Regulations, as it might seem at first glance. Once again, it was proposed by Fr. Rinaldi, who became the interpreter of the desire of many, that the position of the Directors in the houses be defined after the decree on confessions. Until 1901, being ordinary confessors of the members and students meant that in directing, they acted habitually with a paternal spirit (this topic is extensively covered in Annals III,170-194). After that, however, it began to be observed that the paternal character desired by Don Bosco in his Directors and insinuated in the Regulations of the houses and elsewhere was being abandoned. The Directors indeed began to attend to material, disciplinary, and school affairs, thus becoming Rectors and no longer Directors. "We must return," said Fr. Rinaldi, "to the spirit and concept of Don Bosco, especially manifested to us in the 'Confidential Memories' (Annals III,49-53) and in the Regulations. The Director should always be a Salesian Director. Except for the ministry of confession, nothing has changed."

Fr. Bertello lamented that the Directors had believed that with confession they had to leave the spiritual care of the house as well, dedicating themselves to material offices. "Let us hope," he said, "that it was just a momentary thing. We must return to the ideal of Don Bosco, as described in the Regulations. Let those articles be read, meditated

upon, and practiced" (He cited them according to the edition of the time; in the present they would be 156, 157, 158, 159, 57, 160, 91, 195). Fr. Albera concluded by saying: "It is an essential issue for the life of our Society that the spirit of the Director be preserved according to the ideal of Don Bosco; otherwise, we change the way of educating and will no longer be Salesians. We must do everything to preserve the spirit of fatherhood, practicing the memories that Don Bosco left us: they will tell us how to do it. Especially in the reports, we will be able to know our subjects and direct them. As for the young, fatherhood does not mean caresses or unlimited concessions, but caring for them, allowing them the opportunity to come and see us. Let us not forget the importance of the evening talk. Let the sermons be done well and with heart. Let us show that we care about the salvation of souls and leave the unpleasant parts to others. Thus, the Director will retain the halo that Don Bosco wanted him surrounded with."

This time as well the Capitulars found a General Exhibition of the Salesian Professional and Agricultural Schools open in the Oratory, the third, which lasted from July 3 to October 16. Having already described the two previous ones, there was no need to stop and repeat more or less the same things (Annals III, 452-472). Naturally, the past experience served for a better organisation of the exhibition. The criterion already stated twice by the organiser Fr. Bertello prevailed, namely, according to an arrangement desired by Don Bosco, that every Exhibition of this kind is an event intended to be repeated periodically for the teaching and encouragement of the schools. The opening and closing were graced by the presence of city authorities and representatives of the Government. Visitors were never lacking, including high-ranking personalities and even true experts. On the last day, Professor Piero Gribaudi made the first presentation of about 300 former Turin students to the new Rector Major. Deputy Cornaggia, in his final speech, pronounced this judgment worthy of being remembered (Salesian Bulletin, Nov.

1910, p. 332): "Whoever has had the opportunity to delve into the study of the organisation of these schools and the concepts that inspire them cannot help but admire the wisdom of that Great One, who understood the workers' needs in the conditions of new times, anticipating philanthropists and legislators."

Fifty-five houses participated in the exhibition with a total of 203 schools. The examination of the exhibited works was entrusted to nine distinct juries, which included 50 of the most distinguished professors, artists, and industrialists from Turin. Since it was necessary that the Exhibition have an exclusively educational character, the works were judged according to this criterion, and the prizes were awarded. These were substantial, offered by the Pope (a gold medal), by the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce (five silver medals), by the Municipality of Turin (one gold medal and two silver medals), by the Agricultural Consortium of Turin (two silver medals), by "Pro Torino" (one *vermeil* medal, one silver, and two bronze), by the former students of the "Don Bosco" Circle (one gold medal), by the "Augusta" Company of Turin (500 Lire in typographic material to be divided into three prizes), and by the Salesian Superior Chapter (a golden laurel crown as the *grand prize*) (Those awarded are listed in the cited issue of the Salesian Bulletin).

It is worth reporting the last periods of the report that Fr. Bertello read before the winners were announced. He said: "About three months ago, at the inauguration of our small Exhibition, we lamented that due to the death of the Rev. Fr. Rua, we had lost he to whom we intended to pay tribute with our studies and our works on his priestly jubilee. Divine Providence has given us a new Superior and Father in the person of the Rev. Fr. Albera. Therefore, in closing the Exhibition, we place our intentions and hopes in his hands, confident that the artisan, who was first cared for by the Venerable Don Bosco and then the joy of Fr. Rua, will always have a fitting place in the affection and concerns of their Successor."

That was Fr. Bertello's last achievement. A little more than a month later, on November 20, an unexpected illness suddenly extinguished such an industrious existence. His robust intellect, solid culture, firmness of character, and goodness of spirit made him first a wise Director of the college, then a diligent Inspector, and finally for twelve years an expert General Director of the Salesian professional and agricultural schools. He owed everything, after God, to Don Bosco, who had raised him in the Oratory since he was little and had formed him in his image and likeness.

Fr. Albera did not delay in fulfilling the great duty of paying homage to the Vicar of Jesus Christ, to the One whom the Rule calls "the arbiter and supreme Superior" of the Society. Immediately on September 1, he left for Rome, where, upon arrival on the 2nd, he already found the audience ticket for the morning of the 3rd. It almost seemed that Pius X was eager to see him. From the Pope's lips, he gathered some kind expressions, which he kept in his heart. In response to the thanks for the autograph and the blessing, the Pope said he believed he acted this way to make known how much he appreciated the worldwide activity of the Salesians and added: "You were born recently, it is true, but you are spread all over the world and everywhere you work a lot." Being informed of the victories already obtained in the courts against the slanderers of Varazze (Annals III, 729-749), he warned: "Be vigilant, for your enemies are preparing other blows against you." Finally, when humbly asked for some practical guidelines for the governance of the Society, he replied: "Do not stray from the customs and traditions introduced by Don Bosco and Fr. Rua."

1910 had already come to an end, and Fr. Albera had not yet made a communication to the entire Society. New and incessant occupations, especially the many conferences with the 32 Inspectors, always prevented him from sitting down at the table. Only in the first half of January, as noted in the diary, did he write the first pages of a circular, which he intended to be somewhat lengthy. He sent it with the date

of the 25th. Apologising for the delay in making himself known, commemorating Fr. Rua and praising Fr. Rinaldi for his good interim governance of the Society, he elaborated on particular news about the General Chapter, his own election, the visit to the Pope, and the death of Fr. Bertello. In all, he had the air of a father who converses familiarly with his children. He also shared with them his worries about the events in Portugal. After the monarchy was overthrown in Lisbon in October 1910, the revolutionaries had fiercely targeted the religious, attacking them with wild fury. The Salesians did not have any victims to mourn, however, the brothers at Pinheiro near Lisbon had a bad day. A gang of thugs invaded and looted that house, not only mocking the priests and clerics but also sacrilegiously profaning the chapel and even more sacrilegiously scattering and trampling the consecrated hosts. Almost all the Salesians had to leave Portugal, seeking refuge in Spain or Italy. The revolutionaries occupied their schools and laboratories, from which the students were expelled. The persecution also extended to the colonies, so that it was necessary to abandon Macao and Mozambique, where much good was being done (Annals III, 606 and 622-4). But even then, Fr. Albera could write: "Those who have scattered us recognise that they have deprived their country of the only professional schools it possessed."

He, who in the early days of the Society had often heard Don Bosco predict the multiplication of his children in every even remote nation, and then saw those predictions marvellously fulfilled, certainly felt the weight of the immense legacy received and believed that for some time it was not appropriate to embark on new works, but it was necessary to focus on consolidating the existing ones. He therefore deemed it necessary to instil the same thing in all the Salesians. To achieve this, it was not enough for the Superiors alone. He strongly recommended common cooperation. Since in those years modernism was also posing threats to religious families, he warned the Salesians, urging them to flee every novelty that Don Bosco and Fr. Rua could not have

approved.

Together with the circular, he also sent each house a copy of the circulars of Fr. Rua, who from his deathbed had entrusted him to collect in a volume. The typographic work had already been completed about two months earlier. In fact, the publication included a letter from Fr. Albera dated December 8, 1910.

For the upcoming anniversary of Don Bosco's death, he therefore sent the houses a double gift, the circular and the book. He held this second one in special regard because he knew he was offering a great treasure of asceticism and Salesian pedagogy in it. He had proposed to follow the traces of Fr. Rua, especially aiming to imitate his charity and zeal in procuring the spiritual good of all the Salesians.

*Annals of the Salesian Society, Vol. IV (1910-1921), pp. 1-13*

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## Vera Grita, pilgrim of hope

Vera Grita, daughter of Amleto and Maria Anna Zacco della Pirrera, was born in Rome on January 28, 1923, and was the second of four sisters. She lived and studied in Savona, where she obtained her teaching qualification. At the age of 21, during a sudden air raid on the city (1944), she was overwhelmed and trampled by the fleeing crowd, suffering serious consequences for her body, which remained marked by suffering forever. She went unnoticed in her short earthly life, teaching in the schools of the Ligurian hinterland (Rialto, Erli, Alpicella, Deserto di Varazze), where she earned the esteem and affection of all for her kind and gentle character.

In Savona, at the Salesian parish of Mary Help of Christians, she participated in Mass and was a regular at the

Sacrament of Penance. From 1963, her confessor was the Salesian Don Giovanni Bocchi. A Salesian Collaborator since 1967, she realized her calling in the total gift of herself to the Lord, who extraordinarily gave Himself to her, in the depths of her heart, with the "Voice," with the "Word," to communicate to her the Work of the Living Tabernacles. She submitted all her writings to her spiritual director, the Salesian Don Gabriello Zucconi, and kept the secret of that calling in the silence of her heart, guided by the divine Master and the Virgin Mary, who accompanied her along the path of hidden life, of self-denial, and of annihilation of self.

Under the impulse of divine grace and welcoming the mediation of spiritual guides, Vera Grita responded to God's gift by witnessing in her life, marked by the struggle of illness, the encounter with the Risen One and dedicating herself with heroic generosity to the teaching and education of her students, meeting the needs of her family and witnessing a life of evangelical poverty. Centred upon and steadfast in the God who loves and sustains, with great inner firmness, she was made capable of enduring the trials and sufferings of life. Based on such inner solidity, she bore witness to a Christian existence made of patience and constancy in good.

She died on December 22, 1969, at the age of 46, in a small room of the hospital in Pietra Ligure, where she had spent the last six months of her life in a crescendo of accepted suffering lived in union with Jesus Crucified. "The soul of Vera," wrote Don Borra, Salesian, her first biographer, "with the messages and letters, enters the ranks of those charismatic souls called to enrich the Church with flames of love for God and for Jesus Eucharistic for the expansion of the Kingdom."

### **A life devoid of human hope**

Humanly, Vera's life has been marked since childhood by the loss of a horizon of hope. The loss of her family's economic independence, then the separation from her

parents to go to Modica in Sicily to stay with her aunts, and especially the death of her father in 1943, put Vera in front of the consequences of particularly painful human events.

After July 4, 1944, the day of the bombing of Savona that would mark Vera's entire life, her health conditions would also be compromised forever. Therefore, the Servant of God found herself a young girl without any prospects for the future and had to repeatedly revise her plans and give up many desires: from university studies to teaching and, above all, to having her own family with the young man she was seeing.

Despite the sudden end of all her human expectations between the ages of 20 and 21, hope was very present in Vera: both as a human virtue that believes in a possible change and commits to realising it (despite being very ill, she prepared for and won the competition to teach), and especially as a theological virtue – anchored in faith – that infused her with energy and became a tool of consolation for others.

Almost all the witnesses who knew her noted this apparent contradiction between compromised health conditions and the ability to never complain, instead attesting to joy, hope, and courage even in humanly desperate circumstances. Vera became a “bringer of joy.”

**A niece says:** «She was always sick and suffering, but I never saw her discouraged or angry about her condition; she always had a light of hope sustained by great faith. [...] My aunt was often hospitalised, suffering and delicate, but always serene and full of hope for the great Love she had for Jesus».

**Vera's sister Liliana also** drew encouragement, serenity, and hope from their afternoon phone calls, even though the Servant of God was then burdened by numerous health problems and professional constraints: «She instilled in me, she says – trust and hope, making me reflect that God is always close to us and leads us. Her words brought me back into the arms of the Lord, and I found peace».



**Agnese Zannino Tibirosa**, whose testimony is particularly valuable as she spent time with Vera at the “Santa Corona” hospital in her last year of life, attests: «Despite the severe suffering that illness caused her, I never heard her complain about her state. She brought relief and hope to all those she approached, and when she spoke of her future, she did so with enthusiasm and courage».

Until the end, Vera Grita maintained this: even in the last part of her earthly journey, she kept a gaze toward the future, hoping that with treatment, the tuberculoma could be reabsorbed, hoping to be able to take the chair at the Piani di Invrea for the 1969-1970 school year, as well as to dedicate herself, once out of the hospital, to her spiritual mission.

### **Educated in hope by her confessor and in her spiritual journey**

In this sense, the hope attested by Vera is rooted in God and in that sapiential reading of events that her spiritual father Don Gabriello Zucconi and, before him, her confessor Don Giovanni Bocchi taught her. Don Bocchi’s ministry – a man of joy and hope – had a positive influence on Vera, whom he welcomed in her condition as a sick person and taught to value the sufferings – not sought – with which she was burdened. Don Bocchi was the first master of hope. It has been said of him: «With always cordial and hope-filled words, he opened hearts to magnanimity, forgiveness, and transparency in interpersonal relationships; he lived the beatitudes with naturalness and daily fidelity». «Hoping and having the certainty that as it happened to Christ, it will also happen to us: the glorious Resurrection», Don Bocchi carried out through his ministry an announcement of Christian hope, founded on the omnipotence of God and the Resurrection of Christ. Later, from Africa, where he had gone as a missionary, he would say: «I was there because I wanted to bring and give them Jesus Who is Alive and present in the Most Holy Eucharist with all the gifts of His Heart: Peace, Mercy, Joy, Love, Light, Union, Hope, Truth, Eternal Life».

Vera became a provider of hope and joy even in environments marked by physical and moral suffering, by cognitive limitations (as among her small hearing-impaired students) or suboptimal family and social conditions (as in the «heated climate» of Erli).

**Her friend Maria Mattalia** recalls: «I still see Vera's sweet smile, sometimes tired from so much struggle and suffering; remembering her willpower, I try to follow her example of kindness, great faith, hope, and love [...]».

**Antonietta Fazio** – a former janitor at the Casanova school – testified about her: «She was very well-liked by her students, whom she loved so much, especially those with intellectual difficulties [...]. Very religious, she transmitted faith and hope to everyone, even though she herself was suffering very much physically but not morally».

In those contexts, Vera worked to revive the reasons for hope. For example, in the hospital (where the food is not very satisfying), she deprived herself of a special bunch of grapes to leave part of it on the bedside table of all the patients in the ward. She also always took care of her appearance so as to present herself well, orderly, with composure and refinement, thus also contributing to countering the environment of suffering in a clinic, and sometimes the loss of hope in many patients who risk “letting themselves go.”

Through the **Messages of the Work of the Living Tabernacles**, the Lord educated her to a posture of waiting, patience, and trust in Him. Indeed, there are countless exhortations about *waiting for the Bridegroom or the Bridegroom who awaits His bride*:

“Hope in your Jesus always, always.

May He come into our souls, may He come into our homes; may He come with us to share joys and sorrows, labours and hopes.

Let my Love do, and increase your faith, your hope.

Follow me in the dark, in the shadows because you know the «way».

Hope in Me, hope in Jesus!

After the journey of hope and waiting, there will be victory.

To call you to the things of Heaven”.

### **Provider of hope in dying and interceding**

Even in illness and death, Vera Grita witnessed Christian hope.

She knew that when her mission was completed, her life on earth would also end. «This is your task, and when it is finished, you will say goodbye to the earth for Heaven»: therefore, she did not feel as an “owner” of time rather she sought obedience to God’s will.

In the last months, despite being in an increasingly serious condition and being exposed to a worsening clinical situation, the Servant of God attested serenity, peace, and an inner perception of a “fulfilment” of her life.

In the last days, although she was naturally attached to life, Don Giuseppe Formento described her as «already at peace with the Lord». In this spirit, she was able to receive Communion until a few days before her death and received the Anointing of the Sick on December 18.

When her sister Pina visited her shortly before her death – Vera had been in a coma for about three days – contrary to her usual reserve, she told her that she had seen many things during those days, beautiful things that unfortunately she did not have time to recount. She had learned of the prayers of Padre Pio and the Good Pope for her, and she added – referring to Eternal Life – «You all will come to paradise with me, be sure of it».

**Liliana Grita** also testified that, in the last period, Vera «knew more about Heaven than about earth». From her life, the following assessment was drawn: «She, suffering

so much, consoled others, infusing them with hope and she did not hesitate to help them».

Finally, many graces attributed to Vera's interceding mediation concern Christian hope. Vera – even during the Covid-19 Pandemic – helped many to rediscover the reasons for hope and was for them a safeguard, a sister in spirit, a help in the priesthood. She helped a priest who, following a stroke, had forgotten the prayers, unable to articulate them due to his extreme pain and disorientation. She ensured that many returned to pray, asking for the healing of a young father struck by haemorrhage.

**Sister Maria Ilaria Bossi**, Mistress of Novices of the Benedictines of the Most Holy Sacrament of Ghiffa, also notes how Vera – a sister in spirit – is a soul that directs to Heaven and accompanies toward Heaven: «I consider her as a sister on the journey to heaven... Many [...] who recognise themselves in her, and refer to her, in the evangelical journey, in the race toward heaven».

In summary, it is understood how the entire story of Vera Grita has been supported not by human hope, by merely looking to “tomorrow”, hoping it would be better than the present, but by a true theological Hope: «She was serene because faith and hope always sustained her. Christ was at the centre of her life; from Him, she drew strength. [...] She was a serene person because she had in her heart the theological Hope, not the superficial hope [...], but that which derives only from God, which is a gift and prepares us for the encounter with Him».

In a prayer to Mary of the Work of the Living Tabernacles, one can read: «Lift us [Mary] from the earth so that from here we may live and be for Heaven, for the Kingdom of your Son».

It is also nice to remember that **Don Gabriello** also had to accomplish a pilgrimage in hope through many trials and difficulties, as he writes in a letter to Vera dated March 4, 1968, from Florence: «However, we must always

hope. The presence of difficulties does not take away the fact that in the end, what is right, good, and beautiful will all triumph. Peace, order, and joy will return. The man, Son of God, will regain all the glory he had from the beginning. Man will be saved in Jesus and will find in God every good. Then all the beautiful things promised by Jesus come to mind, and the soul in Him finds its peace. Come on: now it is as if we are in combat. The day of victory will come. It is certainty in God».

In the Church of *Santa Corona* in Pietra Ligure, Vera Grita participated in Mass and went to pray during her long periods of hospitalisation. Her testimony of faith in the living presence of Jesus Eucharistic and the Virgin Mary in her short earthly life is a sign of hope and comfort for those in this place of care who will ask for her help and intercession before the Lord to be lifted and freed from suffering.

Vera Grita's journey through daily laborious work also offers a new secular perspective on holiness, becoming an example of conversion, acceptance, and sanctification for the 'poor,' the 'fragile,' the 'sick' who can recognise themselves in her and find hope.

Saint Paul writes, «that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us». With «impatience», we await to contemplate the face of God because «in hope we have been saved» (*Rom* 8:18, 24). Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to hope against all hope, «*Spes contra spem*». Because, as Charles Péguy wrote, Hope is a «irreducible» child. Compared to Faith, which «is a faithful bride», and Charity, which «is a Mother», Hope seems, at first glance, to be worth nothing. And instead, it is exactly the opposite: it will be Hope, writes Péguy, «that came into the world on Christmas Day» and that «bringing the others, will traverse the worlds».

«Write, Vera of Jesus, I will give you light. The flowering tree in spring has borne its fruits. Many trees will have to bloom again in the appropriate season so that the

fruits may be abundant... I ask you to accept with faith every trial, every pain for Me. You will see the fruits, the first fruits of the new flowering». (Santa Corona – October 26, 1969 – Feast of Christ the King – Penultimate message).

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## Salesian Holiness 2024

*Every year, the postulator for the causes of saints of the Salesian Congregation, Don Pierluigi Cameroni, publishes the "General Postulation Dossier of Don Bosco Salesians – 2024," which presents the updated list of saints and blessed related to the past year. In this edition, in addition to the updated list, we also find the new [poster](#) dedicated to these witnesses of Salesian faith. We offer you an overview of the names included in the dossier and the main activities of the Postulation planned for 2024, to continue spreading the spirit of Don Bosco and devotion to his saints and blessed.*

*"Let us not forget that it is precisely the saints who drive the Church forward and make it grow"*  
(Pope Francis).

*"From now on, let it be our motto: let the holiness of children be proof of the holiness of the father."*  
(Don Rua)

It is necessary to express deep gratitude and praise to God for the holiness already recognized in the Salesian Family of Don Bosco and for the one in the process of recognition. The outcome of a Cause of Beatification and Canonization is an event of extraordinary importance and ecclesial value. In fact, it is a matter of discerning the reputation of holiness of a baptized person, who lived the Gospel beatitudes to a heroic degree or who gave his life for Christ.

From Don Bosco to our own day there is attested a tradition of holiness to which attention deserves attention, because it is the incarnation of the charism that originated from him and that was expressed in a plurality of states of life and forms. These are men and women, young people and adults, consecrated and lay people, bishops and missionaries who in historical, cultural and social contexts different in time and space have made the Salesian charism shine with a singular light, representing a heritage that plays an effective role in the life and community of believers and for people of good will.

### **1. List as at 31 December 2024**

Our Postulation involves 179 Saints, Blesseds, Venerables, Servants of God.

The Causes followed directly by the Postulation are 61 (+ 5 extra).

#### ***SAINTS (10)***

Saint John Bosco, priest (date of Canonization: April 1, 1934) – (Italy)

Saint Joseph Cafasso, priest (22 June 1947) – (Italy)

Saint Maria D. Mazzarello, virgin (24 June 1951) – (Italy)

Saint Dominic Savio, adolescent (12 June 1954) – (Italy)

Saint Leonard Murialdo, priest (3 May 1970) – (Italy)

Saint Luigi Versiglia, bishop, martyr (October 1, 2000) – (Italy – China)

Saint Callistus Caravario, priest, martyr (October 1, 2000) – (Italy – China)

Saint Luigi Orione, priest (May 16, 2004) – (Italy)

Saint Luigi Guanella, priest (23 October 2011) – (Italy)

Saint Artemide Zatti, religious (9 October 2022) – (Italy – Argentina)

#### ***BLESSED (117)***

Blessed Michael Rua, priest (date of beatification: October 29, 1972) – (Italy)

Blessed Laura Vicuña, adolescent (September 3, 1988) – (Chile – Argentina)

Blessed Filippo Rinaldi, priest (April 29, 1990) – (Italy)

Blessed Magdalene Morano, virgin (5 November 1994) – (Italy)

Blessed Joseph Kowalski, priest, martyr (June 13, 1999) – (Poland)

Blessed Francis Kęsy, layman, and 4 companion martyrs (June 13, 1999) – (Poland)

Czesław Józwiak, layman

Edward Kaz mierski, layman

Edward Clinic, Laico

Jarogniew Wojciechowski, layman

Blessed Pius IX, Pope (September 3, 2000) – (Italy)

Blessed Joseph Calasanaz, priest, and 31 companion martyrs (March 11, 2001) – (Spain)

Antonio Maria Martin Hernandez, priest

Recaredo de los Ríos Fabregat, priest

Giuliano Rodríguez Sánchez, priest

Giuseppe Giménez López, priest

Augustine García Calvo, layman

Giovanni Martorell Soria, priest

Giacomo Buch Canal, layman

Pietro Mesonero Rodríguez, chierico

Giuseppe Otín Aquilué, priest

Alvaro Sanjuán Canet, priest

Francesco Bandrés Sánchez, priest

Sergio Cid Pazo, priest

Giuseppe Batalla Parramó, priest

Giuseppe Rabasa Bentanachs, layman

Gil Rodicio Rodicio, layman

Angelo Ramos Velázquez, layman

Filippo Hernández Martínez, cleric

Zaccaria Abadía Buesa, cleric

Giacomo Ortiz Alzueta, layman

Saverio Bordas Piferrer, cleric

Felice Vivet Trabal, cleric

Michael Domingo Cendra, cleric

Giuseppe Caselles Moncho, priest

Joseph Castell Camps, priest



Giuseppe Bonet Nadal, priest  
Giacomo Bonet Nadal, priest  
Alessandro Planas Saurí, lay collaborator  
Eliseo García García, layman  
Giulio Junyer Padern, priest  
María Carmen Moreno Benítez, vergin  
María Amparo Carbonell Muñoz, vergin

Blessed Luigi Variara, priest (April 14, 2002) – (Italy – Colombia)

Blessed Maria Romero Meneses, virgin (April 14, 2002) – (Nicaragua – Costa Rica)

Blessed Augustus Czartoryski, priest (April 25, 2004) – (France – Poland)

Blessed Eusebia Palomino, virgin (April 25, 2004) – (Spain)

Blessed Alexandrina M. Da Costa, laywoman (April 25, 2004) – (Portugal)

Blessed Alberto Marvelli, layman (5 September 2004) – (Italy)

Blessed Bronislaus Markiewicz, priest (June 19, 2005) – (Poland)

Blessed Henry Saiz Aparicio, priest, and 62 companion martyrs (October 28, 2007) – (Spain)

Felice González Tejedor, priest  
Giovanni Codera Marqués, coadjutor  
Virgilio Edreira Mosquera, cleric  
Paolo Gracia Sánchez, layman  
Carmelo Giovanni Pérez Rodríguez, subdeacon  
Teodulo González Fernández, cleric  
Tommaso Gil de la Cal, aspirant  
Federico Cobo Sanz, aspirant  
Igino de Mata Díez, aspirant  
Giusto Juanes Santos, cleric  
Vittoriano Fernández Reinoso, cleric  
Emilio Arce Díez, layman  
Raimondo Eirín Mayo, layman  
Matteo Garolera Masferrer, layman  
Anastasio Garzón González, layman

Francesco Giuseppe Martín López de Arroyave,

## layman

Giovanni de Mata Díez, lay collaborator  
Pio Conde Conde, priest  
Sabino Hernández Laso, priest  
Salvatore Fernández Pérez, priest  
Nicola de la Torre Merino, layman  
Germano Martín Martín, priest  
Giuseppe Villanova Tormo, priest  
Stefano Cobo Sanz, cleric  
Francesco Edreira Mosquera, cleric  
Emanuele Martín Pérez, cleric  
Valentino Gil Arribas, layman  
Pietro Artolozaga Mellique, cleric  
Emanuele Borrajo Míguez, cleric  
Dionisio Ullívarri Barajuán, layman  
Michele Lasaga Carazo, priest  
Luigi Martínez Alvarelllos, cleric  
John Larragueta Garay, cleric  
Fiorenzo Rodríguez Güemes, cleric  
Pasquale de Castro Herrera, cleric  
Stefano Vázquez Alonso, layman  
Eliodoro Ramos García, layman  
Giuseppe Maria Celaya Badiola, layman  
Andrea Jiménez Galera, priest  
Andrea Gómez Sáez, priest  
Antonio Cid Rodríguez, layman  
Antonio Torrero Luque, priest  
Antonio Enrico Canut Isús, priest  
Michele Molina de la Torre, priest  
Paolo Caballero López, priest  
Onorio Hernández Martín, cleric  
John Louis Hernández Medina, cleric  
Antonio Mohedano Larriva, priest  
Antonio Fernández Camacho, priest  
Giuseppe Limón Limón, priest  
Giuseppe Blanco Salgado, layman  
Francesco Míguez Fernández, priest

Emanuele Fernández Ferro, priest  
Felice Paco Escartín, priest  
Tommaso Alonso Sanjuán, layman  
Emanuele Gómez Contioso, priest  
Antonio Pancorbo López, priest  
Stefano García García, layman  
Raffaele Rodríguez Mesa, layman  
Antonio Rodríguez Blanco, diocesan priest  
Bartolomeo Blanco Márquez, layman  
Teresa Cejudo Redondo, lay

Blessed Zeffirino Namuncurá, layman (11 novembre 2007) – (Argentina – Italia)

Blessed Maria Troncatti, virgin (November 24, 2012) – (Italy – Ecuador)

*Decree on the miracle: November 25, 2024*

*Canonization September 7, 2025?*

Blessed Stephen Sándor, religious, martyr (19 October 2013) – (Hungary)

Blessed Titus Zeman, priest, martyr (30 September 2017) – (Slovakia).

### **VENERABLE (20)**

Ven. Andrea Beltrami, priest, (date of the Decree super virtutibus: December 15, 1966) – (Italy)

Ven. Teresa Valsè Pantellini, virgin (July 12, 1982) – (Italy)

Ven. Dorotea Chopitea, laywoman (June 9, 1983) – (Spain)

Ven. Vincenzo Cimatti, priest (December 21, 1991) – (Italy – Japan)

Ven. Simone Srugi, religious (April 2, 1993) – (Palestine)

Ven. Rodolfo Komorek, priest (6 aprile 1995) – (Polonia – Brasile)

Ven. Luigi Olivares, bishop (December 20, 2004) – (Italy)

Ven. Margherita Occhiena, laywoman (23 October 2006) – (Italy)

Ven. Giuseppe Quadrio, priest (December 19, 2009) – (Italy)

Ven. Laura Meozzi, virgin (June 27, 2011) – (Italy – Poland)

Ven. Attilio Giordani, layman (9 October 2013) – (Italy – Brazil)

Ven. Joseph Augustus Arribat, priest (8 July 2014) – (France)  
Ven. Stefano Ferrando, bishop (3 March 2016) – (Italy – India)  
Ven. Francesco Convertini, priest (20 January 2017) – (Italy – India)  
Ven. Joseph Vandor, priest (20 January – 2017) – (Hungary – Cuba)  
Ven. Octavius Ortiz Arrieta Coya, bishop (27 February 2017) – (Peru)  
Ven. Augusto Hlond, cardinal (19 May 2018) – (Poland)  
Ven. Ignazio Stuchly, priest (21 December 2020) – (Czech Republic)  
Ven. Carlo Crespi Croci, priest (23 March 2023) – (Italy – Ecuador)  
Ven. Antonio De Almeida Lustosa, bishop (22 June 2023) – (Brazil)

### ***SERVANTS OF GOD (27)***

The Causes are listed according to the progress

#### **Positio examined by cardinals and bishops**

Elia Comini, priest (Italy) martyr

Peculiar Congress of Theologians: May 5, 2022

Peculiar Congress of Theologians: April 11, 2024

Ordinary session of Cardinals and Bishops: 10 December 2024

Decree on martyrdom: 18 December 2024

#### **Positio examined by theologians**

John Świerc, priest and 8 companion martyrs (Poland)

Ignacio Dobiasz, priest

Francis Harazim, priest

Casimiro Wojciechowski, priest

Ignazio Antonowicz, priest

Lodovico Mroczek, priest

Carlo Golda, priest

Vladimiro Eyes, priest

Francesco Miśka, priest

*Positio* delivered: 21 July 2022

Peculiar historical congress. March 28, 2023

## *Ordinary session of the Cardinal and Bishops: June 2025*

### **Positio delivered**

*Costantino Vendrame, priest (Italy – India)*

Decree of validity of the Diocesan Inquiry: 1 February 2013

*Positio* delivered: 19 September 2023

*Peculiar Congress of Theologians: January 23, 2025*

*Oreste Marengo, bishop (Italy – India)*

Decree of validity of the Diocesan Inquiry: 6 December 2013

Position delivered: 28 May 2024

*Peculiar Theologians Congress: September-October 2025*

*Rodolfo Lunkenbein, priest (Germany – Brazil) and Simão Bororo, layman (Brazil), martyrs*

Decree of validity of the Diocesan Inquiry: 16 December 2020

*Positio* delivered: 28 November 2024

*Peculiar Theologians Congress: September-October 2025*

### **The drafting of the Positio is underway**

*Andrea Majcen, priest (Slovenia – Cina – Vietnam)*

Decree of validity of the Diocesan Inquiry: 23 October 2020

*Vera Grita, laywoman (Italy)*

Decree of validity of the Diocesan Inquiry: 14 December 2022

*Cognata Giuseppe, bishop (Italy)*

Decree of validity of the Diocesan Inquiry: 11 January 2023

*Carlo Della Torre, priest (Italy – Thailand)*

Decree of validity of the Diocesan Inquiry: 1 April 2016

*Silvio Galli, priest (Italy)*

Decree of validity of the Diocesan Inquiry: 19 October 2022

*Akash Bashir, layman, martyr (Pakistan)*

Decree of validity of the Diocesan Inquiry: 24 October 2024

### **Waiting for validity of the Diocesan Inquiry**

*Antonietta Böhm*, virgin (Germany – Mexico)  
Opening of the Diocesan Inquiry: 7 May 2017  
Diocesan Inquiry Closed: 28 April 2024  
*Validity of the Diocesan Inquiry*

*Antonino Baglieri*, layman (Italy)  
Opening of the Diocesan Inquiry: 2 March 2014  
Closure of the diocesan inquiry. May 5, 2024  
*Validity of the Diocesan Inquiry*

### **Cause temporarily stopped**

*Anna Maria Lozano*, virgin (Colombia)  
Closure of the Diocesan Inquiry: 19 June 2014

### **The diocesan inquiry is underway**

*Luigi Bolla*, priest (Italy – Ecuador – Peru)  
Opening of the Diocesan Inquiry: 27 September 2021  
*Closure of the Diocesan Inquiry*

*Rosetta Marchese*, virgin (Italy)  
Opening of the Diocesan Inquiry: 30 April 2021  
*Closure of the Diocesan Inquiry*

*Matilda Salem*, laywoman (Syria)  
Opening of the Diocesan Inquiry: 20 October 1995

*Carlo Braga*, priest (Italy – China – Philippines)  
Opening of the Diocesan Inquiry: 30 January 2014

### **EXTRA CAUSES FOLLOWED BY POSTULATION (5)**

*Venerabile COSTA DE BEAUREGARD CAMILLO*, PRIEST (France)  
    The Decree *super virtutibus*: January 22, 1991  
    Medical consultation *super miro*: March 30, 2023  
    Peculiar Congress of Theologians: October 19, 2023  
    Ordinary Session of Cardinals and Bishops: 20  
February 2024  
    *Beatification*: 17 May 2025  
*Venerable BARELLO MORELLO CASIMIRO*, Franciscan tertiary (Italy)

– Spain)

The Decree *super virtutibus*: 1 July 2000

Venerable TYRANOWSKI GIOVANNI, layman (Poland)

The Decree *super virtutibus*: 20 January 2017

Venerable BERTAZZONI AUGUSTO, bishop (Italy)

The Decree *super virtutibus*: October 2, 2019

Venerable CANELLI FELICE, priest (Italy)

The Decree *super virtutibus*: May 22, 2021

Also to be remembered are the Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God who at different times and in different ways have met with the Salesian charism such as: the Blessed, Edvige Carboni, the Servant of God Cardinal Giuseppe Guarino, founder of the Apostles of the Holy Family, the Servant of God Salvo d'Acquisto, past pupil and numerous others.

## 2. EVENTS OF 2024

On Tuesday, January 16, 2024, the opening session for the **canonical recognition and conservation treatment of the mortal remains of the Venerable Camille Costa de Beauregard** (1841-1910), diocesan priest, took place at the chapel of the Bocage Foundation in Chambéry.

On February 27, 2024, in the **Ordinary Session of the Cardinals and Bishops** of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, a positive vote was given (7 out of 7) to the alleged miracle attributed to the intercession of the **Venerable Camille Costa de Beauregard**, diocesan priest (1841-1910), which occurred to the child René Jacquemond, for healing from “intense keratoconjunctivitis with grinding of the cornea, strong perikeratic injection, redness and injection of the conjunctiva, photophobia and tearing of the right eye due to violent trauma from the plant-burdock agent” (1910).

On 7 March 2024, the **Medical Advisory Board of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints** gave a positive opinion, with all affirmative votes, to the **alleged miracle attributed to the**

**intercession of Blessed Maria Troncatti**, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians (1883-1969), from “open brain trauma with comminuted fracture of the skull, exposure of brain tissue in the right fronto-parieto-temporal area and state of coma (G6)” (2015).

On 14 March 2024, the Supreme Pontiff authorized the same Dicastery to **promulgate the Decree concerning the miracle** attributed to the intercession of the **Venerable Servant of God Camillo Costa de Beauregard**, diocesan priest; born in Chambéry (France) on 17 February 1841 and died there on 25 March 1910. The miracle, which took place in 1910, concerns the child René Jacquemond, cured of “intense keratoconjunctivitis with grinding of the cornea, strong perikeratic injection, redness and injection of the conjunctiva, photophobia and tearing of the right eye due to violent trauma from the plant-burdock agent” (1910).

On 15 March 2024 in Lahore (Pakistan) the **Diocesan Inquiry** into the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of **Akash Bashir (1994-2015)**, a layman, a former pupil of Don Bosco, killed in hatred of the faith, was closed. It is the first Cause of Beatification in Pakistan.

On 11 April 2024, during the **special Congress of Theological Consultors at the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints**, a positive opinion was expressed on the Positio super martyrio of Servant of God Elia Comini, Professed Priest of the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco (1910-1944), killed in hatred of the faith in the Nazi massacre of Monte Sole on 1 October 1944.

On April 28, 2024, in Cuautitlán (Mexico) **closing of the Diocesan Inquiry** of the Cause of the Servant of God **Antonietta Böhm (1907-2008)**, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians.

On May 5, 2024, in Modica (Ragusa) **closing of the Diocesan Inquiry of the Servant of God Antonino Baglieri (1951-2007)**,



Layman, Volunteer with Don Bosco.

On May 28, 2024, the **peculiar Congress of Theologians of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints** gave a positive vote to the **alleged miracle attributed to the intercession of Blessed Maria Troncatti**, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians (1883-1969), from “open brain trauma with comminuted fracture of the skull, exposure of brain tissue in the right fronto-parieto-temporal area and state of coma (G6)” (2015).

On May 31, 2024, the volume of the *Positio super Vita, Virtutibus et Fama Sanctitatis* by the **Servant of God Oreste Marengo (1906-1998)**, **Salesian missionary bishop in Northeast India**, was delivered to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints in the Vatican.

On Tuesday, June 4, 2024, at the “Zeffirino Namuncurà” community in Rome, the **new premises of the Salesian General Postulation were inaugurated and blessed by the Rector Major, Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime**.

On 24 November 2024, the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints in the Ordinary Congress gave **legal validity to the Diocesan Inquiry for the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God Akash Bashir** (Risalpur 22 June 1994 – Lahore 15 March 2015) Layman, Past Pupil of Don Bosco.

On 19 November 2024, in the **Ordinary Session of the Cardinals and Bishops** of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, a **positive vote was given to the alleged miracle** attributed to the intercession of **Blessed Maria Troncatti**, Professed Religious of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1883-1969), which occurred miraculously healed of a Lord from “Open cranio-encephalic trauma with comminuted fracture of the skull, loss of brain substance and exposure of brain tissue in the right front-parieto-temporal area, diffuse axonal damage (DAI), severe coma evolved in a type 2 vegetative state”, which occurred in 2015 in Ecuador.

On 25 November 2024, the Holy Father authorized the same Dicastery to promulgate the Decree concerning  
– **the miracle attributed to the intercession of Blessed Maria Troncatti**, a professed nun of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, born in Córteno Golgi, Italy, on 16 February 1883 and died in Sucúa, Ecuador, on 25 August 1969.

On November 28, 2024, the volume of the *Positio super martyrio* of the Servants of God Rodolfo Lunkenbein, **Professed Priest of the Society of St. Francis de Sales** and Simão Bororo, **Layman, killed in hatred of the faith on July 15, 1976**, was delivered to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints in the Vatican.

On Tuesday, December 3, 2024, **the Theological Consultors** of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, during the Peculiar Congress, **responded affirmatively regarding the *Positio super martyrio* of the Servants of God John Świerc and VIII Companions**, Professed Priests of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, killed in odium fidei in the Nazi extermination camps in the years 1941-1942.

On Tuesday, December 10, 2024, during the **Ordinary Session of Cardinals and Bishops** at the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, a positive opinion was expressed regarding the *Positio super martyrio* of **Servant Elia Comini**, Professed Priest of the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco (1910-1944), killed in hatred of the faith in the Nazi massacre of Monte Sole on October 1, 1944.

On Wednesday, December 18, 2024, the **Holy Father Francis authorized** the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints to promulgate **the Decree concerning: the martyrdom of the Servant of God Elia Comini**, professed priest of the Society of St. Francis de Sales; born on May 7, 1910 in Calvenzano di Vergato (Italy, Bologna) and killed, in hatred of the Faith, in Pioppe di Salvaro (Italy, Bologna) on 1 October 1944.

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# Marian Devotion from Don Bosco's Perspective

*Saint John Bosco had a deep devotion to Mary Help of Christians, a devotion that had its roots in the numerous experiences of her maternal intervention in his life, beginning with the Dream of Nine. This true devotion could not remain merely personal. Don Bosco felt the need to share it with others. In 1869, he founded the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA), which continues to be a vibrant spiritual reality today. Every 5-6 years, the association organizes international congresses in honor of Mary Help of Christians. The latest, the IX Congress, was held in Fatima, Portugal, from August 29 to September 1 2024. We present the concluding address of the Vicar of the Rector Major, Don Stefano Martoglio.*

I gladly take the floor at this Marian Congress, after what we have heard and experienced, in order to reaffirm a personal and institutional act of entrustment, according to the heart of Don Bosco and the faith of the Church. We conclude these days with one of the characteristic dimensions of Don Bosco's life and mission, namely, Marian devotion. We entrust ourselves to the maternal hands of Mary. Here and now, in this place made holy by the apparition of Mary, we ask her to make what we have heard, experienced, and prayed over in this Congress ever fruitful.

I hope that my words, after all that we have heard and experienced, may stay imprinted in your memories. This memory is important. It means that we acknowledge that it is not ours; rather it is a legacy entrusted to us and we should pass it on to succeeding generations.

With great simplicity, I share with myself and each of one of you some central aspects of the presence of Mary in Don Bosco's life and mission, and thus in our devotion.

### **1. Mary in the Writings of Don Bosco, from the very beginning.**

The woman "of majestic appearance, dressed in a mantle that shone from all sides," was described in the Dream of Nine. We have meditated on her in this Bicentennial of the Dream. She is the Madonna dear to the popular tradition of the masses. Don Bosco emphasized her maternal kindness. This image of Mary was most in tune with his soul and it will accompany him until his last breath.

Many popular devotions were recounted in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. Among these were the family rosary, the Angelus, novenas and tridua, short invocations, consecrations, visits to altars and shrines, Marian feasts (Divine Motherhood, the Name of Mary, the Madonna of the Rosary, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of Consolation, Mary Immaculate, and the Madonna of Grace). By popular devotion, we do not refer to easy and spontaneous practices. Popular religiosity is the quintessence of centuries of experience that is given to us as a gift. We must own it.

During his studies in Chieri, more elements appeared that connected Marian devotion to the spiritual choices of the young Bosco. This was linked especially to his vocational growth and to the maturing of the virtues that would form a good seminarian. The Madonna of the seminary was the Mary Immaculate. In all the Piedmontese seminaries, and in those influenced by the Lazarist tradition, the seminary chapel was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception since the 1600's.

This characterized the Marian piety of the young Bosco, formed in the school of St. Alphonsus. *True devotion must be expressed in virtuous living; it guaranteed the most powerful patronage one can have in life and in death.*

Don Bosco would also write in *The Companion of Youth* in 1847:

"If you are her devotees, in addition to filling you with blessings in this world, you will have paradise in the next life."

But it was especially in the booklet *The Month of May Dedicated to Mary Most Holy Immaculate for the Use of the People* (1858) that the saint explicitly and insistently discussed popular and youthful Marian devotion within the context of serious, fervent, and loving Christian commitment.

*"Three things are to be practiced the whole month: 1. Do what you can to commit no sin during this month: let it be entirely dedicated to Mary. 2. Take great care in fulfilling the spiritual and temporal duties of your state of life. 3. Invite your relatives and friends and all those who depend on you to participate in the pious practices that are done in honor of Mary during the month."*

The other theme discussed by Don Bosco was inherited from a whole devout tradition. It is the link between Marian devotion and eternal salvation: "Since the most beautiful ornament of Christianity is the Mother of the Savior, Most Holy Mary, so to you I turn, O most clement Virgin Mary, I am sure of obtaining the grace of God, the right to Paradise, to regain my lost dignity, if you pray for me: *Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis.*" Don Bosco was convinced that Mary intervenes as a most effective advocate and a powerful mediatrix before God.

Ten years later (1868), for the inauguration of the church of Mary Help of Christians, the saint wrote and distributed a pamphlet entitled *Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the Title of Mary Help of Christians*. In this work, Don Bosco emphasized the ecclesial dimension of Marian devotion. Don Bosco meant to expand his missionary outlook and his educational concerns.

The titles of *Immaculate Conception* and of *Help of Christians* in the ecclesial context of the time evoked struggles and

produced triumphs. It was the “great clash” between the Church and liberal society. A religious reading of political and social events was made, along the lines of the Catholic reaction to atheism, liberalism, and de-Christianization.

However, Don Bosco continued to emphasize among his boys and his Salesians the predominantly ascetic-spiritual and apostolic dimensions of Marian piety. In fact, the practice of the month of Mary and the various devotions aimed at instilling in young people the aspiration to greater commitment to duty, to the practice of virtue, to asceticism with mortifications offered in honor of Mary, to an operative charity, to a generous apostolate among one’s companions.

Don Bosco tended to assign to the Immaculate Conception and to the Help of Christians a decisive role in the educational and formative work and in the enhancement of virtue and devotion, within a climate of Marian fervor, in order to lead a life free from sin and its enticements and to grow in total self-giving to God.

Therefore, Don Bosco urged young people to struggle against sin and to direct one’s life to God, to the sanctification of oneself and of others, to the service of charity, to the patient carrying of the cross, and to missionary commitment. These are the salient traits of a Marian devotion that was devoid of sentimentalism. despite the climate of the times.

What a journey it was for Don Bosco – the man of faith that he was! He said: “Among the preoccupations of your hearts, I would like to emphasize that we cannot stagnate in our devotion. We must always move on! One who does not move forward, always moves backward, and there is no room for such a one in the Oratory!”

## **2. Mary in the Life of Don Bosco; the Daily Expressions of Don Bosco’s Devotion and of Our Devotion**

### **2.1. The Sense of a Presence**

Mary was, in the life of Don Bosco, a perceived, loved, active, and stimulating presence, aimed at salvation and holiness. He felt her closeness and entrusted himself to her, allowing himself to be guided and led by her in the pursuit of his vocation. Don Bosco dreamed of her. It seemed he was seeing her.

At Nizza Monferrato in June 1885, Don Bosco was conversing in the parlor with the chapter members of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. He felt very tired and his voice was faint. He was asked to leave them a final remembrance. "Oh then, you want me to say something. If I could speak, how many things I would like to tell you! But I am old, old and frail, as you see; I can hardly speak. I want to tell you only that the Madonna loves you very, very much. And, you know, she is here among you." Then Don Bonetti, seeing him moved, interrupted him and began to say, solely to distract him:

– "Yes, that's right! Don Bosco means that the Madonna is your Mother and that she watches over you and protects you."

– "No, no," the Saint replied, "I mean that the Madonna is really here, in this house, and that she is happy with you, and that if you continue to live with the present spirit, which is what the Madonna desires ...". The good Father became even more emotional, and Don Bonetti took the floor again:

– "Yes, that's right! Don Bosco means to tell you that if you are always good, the Madonna will be happy with you."

– "But no, but no," Don Bosco struggled to explain, trying to control his emotion. "I mean that the Madonna is truly here, here among you! The Madonna walks in this house and covers it with her mantle." – In saying this, he stretched out his arms, raised his tearful eyes upwards, and seemed to want to persuade the sisters that he saw the Madonna walking here and there as in her own home.

*It is an operative presence: Mary accompanies, supports, guides, and encourages. She was given to him as Teacher: "I will give you the Teacher under whose discipline you can*

*become wise, and without whom all wisdom becomes foolishness."* Mary's presence stimulates living consciously in the presence of God: "At the thought of God present / let the lips, the heart, the mind / follow the way of virtue / O great Virgin Mary. / Sac. Gio Bosco" (prayer written by the saint at the foot of one of his photographs).

Splendid and essential: what is not a living presence in one's life means total absence! The sense of Presence is one of God's Providence and of Mary's action. This is a continuous journey for each one of us and for all of us together in the Salesian Family.

## **2.2. The Energy of the Mission**

Don Bosco closely linked Mary with his vocation and his ministry. Here it is good to revisit the presentation that Don Bosco made of the Dream of Nine: "Taking me kindly by the hand, 'Look,' he said to me, here is your field, here is where you must work. Make yourself humble, strong, and robust; and what you see happening with these animals at this moment, you must do for my children." It is the mission of salvation, of transformation, and of formation of young people, through prevention, education, instruction, evangelization, and a solid set of virtues in the educator.

Mary's Son taught Don Bosco the method and the objective for the realization of the dream: "Not with blows, but with meekness and charity you must win over these friends of yours. Therefore, immediately instruct them on the ugliness of sin and the beauty of virtue."

The narration made in 1873-74 of the Dream of Nine brings together all the many other accounts of Marian interventions and inspirations, where the Blessed Mother took on the role of animation, guidance, and support for his mission of saving young people.

It is in this context that Don Bosco recognized as miraculous Mary's interventions: the "graces" granted to people, both spiritual and physical, her powerful protection for the



Oratory and the nascent Salesian Family, and her intervention for its prodigious growth for the good of souls.

Personal graces and the awareness of the particular presence of God, through the intercession of Mary, were evident in the personal life of Don Bosco and in the life of the Salesian Family. If one does not perceive the presence of Mary, one is at the mercy of chance.

### **2.3. Stimulus to Holiness**

Don Bosco lived his Marian devotion as a stimulus and support for the movement towards Christian perfection. In this same perspective, he wisely instilled in the young the promotion of Christian life and the desire for holiness.

Don Bosco knew well the sensitivity of his boys and their popular taste of piety. Thus, he was able to transform a devotional tendency, touched with romantic sentiment, into a powerful tool for spiritual formation, for encouraging, correcting, and directing the young.

Mary never leaves us where she finds us. As at the beginning of the Book of Signs in the Gospel of John, she knows that we must be guided, and accompanied for a precise goal. Don Bosco says: "Do what Jesus tells you and you will arrive at where he is waiting for you," which is to see the Invisible.

### **3. Salesian Identity and Marian devotion**

In conclusion, I wish to share with you, simply, what we as brothers and sisters live at the very center of our Salesian vocation. I love to conclude with what is the very backbone of my life and of yours as well. If it does so much good to me, it will also do a lot of good to you and to everyone.

**First of all**, the *Constitutions* outline the characteristic traits of our Marian devotion. Article 8, found in the first chapter on the elements that comprise the identity of the Salesian Congregation, summarizes the meaning of Mary's presence in our Society. She showed Don Bosco his field of work. She constantly guided and supported him. She continued among us her mission as Mother and Helper: we "entrust

ourselves to her, humble servant in whom the Lord has done great things, to become among the young witnesses of the inexhaustible love of her Son.”

Article 92 presents the role of Mary in the life and piety of the Salesian. She is a model of prayer and of pastoral charity, a teacher of wisdom, and a guide of our family, an example of faith, of solicitude for the needy, of fidelity in the hour of the cross, and of spiritual joy. She is our educator to the fullness of self-donation to the Lord and to the courageous service of our brothers and sisters. It follows, therefore, that a filial and strong devotion, is expressed in prayer, like the daily rosary and the celebration of her feasts, and in convinced personal imitation of her.

**The best summary, however, is found, in my opinion, in the Prayer of entrustment to Mary Help of Christians**, which is recited daily in each of our communities after meditation. It was composed by Don Rua in 1894 as an expression of daily consecration in the commitment to fidelity and generosity. Today it has been revised, but it retains the same structure as the old one and the same contents. Here is the original text:

*“Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Helper, we consecrate ourselves entirely to you and promise to always act for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.*

We ask you to turn your merciful gaze upon the Church, its august Head, the priests and missionaries, upon the Salesian Family, our relatives and benefactors, and the youth entrusted to our care, upon poor sinners, the dying, and the souls in purgatory.

Teach us, O most tender Mother, to replicate in ourselves the virtues of our Founder, especially angelic modesty, profound humility, and ardent charity.

Grant, O Mary Help of Christians, that your powerful

intercession may make us victorious against the enemies of our soul in life and in death, so that we may come to crown you with Don Bosco in Paradise. Amen.”

As can be seen, the current version merely takes up, with some developments, the text of Don Rua. I believe it is good, every now and then, to revisit it and meditate on it. It is structured in four parts: promise; intercession; docility, entrustment.

In the first part (*Most Holy*), the ultimate purpose of our consecration is recalled by promising to orient every action solely to the service of God and the salvation of others, in fidelity to the essence of the Salesian vocation.

In the second part (*We ask you*), the ecclesial, Salesian, and missionary sense of our consecration is condensed, entrusting to Mary’s intercession the Church, the Congregation, and the Salesian Family, the youth, especially the poorest, all men redeemed by Christ. Here, the passion that must nourish and characterize Salesian prayer is well outlined: universality, ecclesiality, youthful missionary spirit.

In the third part (*Teach us*), the virtues that characterize the typical physiognomy of the Salesian disciple of Don Bosco are concentrated: we place ourselves in the school of Mary to grow in union with God, in chastity, in humility, and in poverty, in love for work and temperance, in ardent loving charity (goodness and unlimited self-donation to our brothers and sisters), in fidelity to the Church and its Magisterium.

In the last part (*Grant, O Mary Help of Christians*), we entrust ourselves to the intercession of the Virgin to obtain fidelity and generosity in the service of God until death and admission into the eternal communion of saints.

This excellent summary, which contains a complete program of spiritual life and outlines the physiognomy of our identity, can serve us today as a point of reference and as a concrete

guideline for our spiritual verification and planning. May it be so for each one of us!

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# The Days of Salesian Spirituality

*This year, the XLIII Days of Salesian Spirituality will take place from January 16 to 19, as usual, in Valdocco. They represent, for the entire Salesian Family spread around the world, a precious opportunity for meeting, reflection, and spiritual renewal. Every year, in January, religious, laypeople, and young people gather to rediscover the roots of the Salesian charism, celebrating the figure and legacy of Saint John Bosco, founder of the Salesian Congregation and a great friend of the young. The goal is to promote a communal reflection on the values of faith, fraternity, and educational mission, according to the Salesian spirit, in a context of celebration and prayer.*

## **Origin and meaning of the Days of Salesian Spirituality**

The tradition of the Days of Salesian Spirituality has its roots in the educational practice of Don Bosco, who understood the importance of cultivating moments of formation for his young people and for the collaborators who assisted him in his mission. From the early decades of the Congregation's life, there was a need to periodically gather to reread the experiences lived in Salesian works and to dialogue with the challenges of the present. Over the years, the Salesian charism has spread well beyond the borders of Piedmont, reaching all five continents. At the same time, the need to come together for common reflection and discernment has become increasingly pressing, making it essential to have an

opportunity for meeting that we now know as the Days of Salesian Spirituality.

The Days, typically celebrated in January close to the liturgical feast of Saint John Bosco (January 31), represent the synthesis of an entire year of work, prayer, and reflection around the theme proposed by the Rector Major of the Salesians with the so-called Strenna. The Strenna is an annual message that, starting from a phrase or a key concept, aims to guide Salesian life and mission in the world. During these days, participants delve into the meaning of this message, engaging with other Salesian realities, sharing testimonies, and allowing themselves to be inspired by moments of prayer and celebration.

### **Structure and highlights**

The Days of Salesian Spirituality usually take place in a location particularly significant for the Congregation, such as Colle Don Bosco or Valdocco in Turin, where Saint John Bosco took his first steps in youth apostolate. In other cases, to facilitate the participation of the faithful and members of the Salesian Family residing in various parts of the world, parallel events or live streaming connections may be organized. This allows anyone interested, even from a distance, to follow the main moments of prayer, listen to meditations, and interact with the speakers.

During these days, the agenda is marked by a series of appointments that range from theological and pastoral reflection to moments of conviviality and celebration. Among the highlights are:

*1. Conferences and thematic presentations:* authoritative figures from the Salesian world, theologians, educators, and leaders of the works present insights on the annual theme. These presentations provide a broad overview of contemporary educational and pastoral challenges, helping to place the Salesian charism in today's context.

*2. Group work and workshops:* to move from the theoretical to the practical, participants are involved in working groups or workshops, where they have the opportunity to compare experiences lived in their own realities and to imagine new ways of evangelization and youth accompaniment.

*3. Celebrations and moments of prayer:* the Days of Salesian Spirituality are not only about study and deepening but also, and above all, an opportunity to meet God. The liturgies and community prayers that punctuate the entire duration of the event constitute a source of spiritual nourishment that supports and strengthens the sense of belonging to the great Salesian Family.

*4. Testimonies and sharing of experiences:* listening to the stories of missionaries, educators, and young people from different socio-cultural contexts is a fundamental element. These concrete testimonies give a face to Salesian values and demonstrate the vitality of a charism that, more than a century after Don Bosco's death, continues to inspire generations of believers.

*5. Meeting with the Rector Major:* a particularly awaited and significant moment is the meeting with the Rector Major, who represents the successor of Don Bosco. In his address, he urges the entire Salesian Family to continue with commitment the educational and pastoral work, reminding them of the importance of uniting spiritual life with concrete action in favor of young people, especially those in need.

### **The protagonists: the Salesian Family on the move**

The Days of Salesian Spirituality involve not only Salesian religious (SDB) and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) but also bring together all the groups that make up the varied Salesian Family: Salesian Cooperators, former students of Don Bosco, Volunteers of Don Bosco, and many others. This plurality of expressions and belonging reveals the richness of a charism that has been able to take on different forms and

sensitivities, but always converging in love for young people and for the Church.

### **Towards a continuous renewal of the charism**

One of the most important messages that emerge from the Days of Salesian Spirituality is the need for a continuous and creative renewal of Don Bosco's charism. The world is changing at a dizzying pace, with unprecedented challenges concerning the technological, social, and educational spheres. To remain faithful to the founder and the Gospel, the Salesian Family is called to always be outgoing, not to settle for "tried and tested" formulas, but to experiment with forms of apostolate that can speak to today's youth.

Faithfulness to Don Bosco does not mean blindly repeating what has been done in the past, but deepening his spirit and preventive method, to find new languages and educational experiences suitable for the present. This is the profound meaning of the Days of Salesian Spirituality: a time of listening, reflection, and sharing that opens to the future, keeping a firm gaze on that original inspiration that has made the Salesian Congregation a point of reference for millions of young people around the world.

The Days of Salesian Spirituality, celebrated every year in January, are not just a fixed appointment on the Salesian calendar, but a true "spiritual laboratory" where the richness of a constantly evolving charism is felt. In an era where human relationships are often fragmented and the search for meaning is increasingly pressing, the Salesian message retains its relevance: to place the young at the center, to love them, to value them, to accompany them on the journey towards human and Christian maturity. And it is precisely in this perspective that the Days of Salesian Spirituality reveal themselves as a precious gift for the Salesian Family and for the entire Church, a sign that Don Bosco's educational passion still lives today, fruitful and full of hope, capable of generating good fruits in every corner of the planet.

To learn more, click [HERE](#).

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# Strenna 2025. Anchored in hope, pilgrims with young people

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# **INTRODUCTION. ANCHORED IN HOPE, PILGRIMS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

Dear sisters and brothers belonging to the different Groups of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco,

My warmest greetings to you at the beginning of this new year 2025!

It is with some emotion that I address each and every one of you in this time of grace marked by two important events for the life of the Church and our Family: the Jubilee 2025 year which began solemnly on 24 December last with the opening of the holy door at St Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican, and the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition at the express wish of our father Don Bosco. This expedition left on 11 November 1875 for Argentina and other countries in the Americas.

These are two important events that find their point of intersection in hope. This is precisely the virtue that Pope Francis identified as a perspective when announcing the Jubilee. Similarly, the missionary experience is a harbinger of hope for everyone: for those who have left (and are leaving) for the missions and for those who have been reached by missionaries.

The year that is given to us is, therefore, rich in ideas for our daily growth in practical terms, so that our humanity becomes fruitful in its attention to others... This will only happen in hearts that place God at the centre, to the point of being able to say, "I have placed you ahead of myself."

I will try to highlight these elements in this commentary, and explore what the Church is invited to experience throughout this year from our charismatic perspective. I will try to emphasise what it is that should guide us, the Family of Don Bosco, towards new horizons.

# **1. ENCOUNTERING CHRIST OUR HOPE TO RENEW DON BOSCO'S DREAM**

The Strenna's title involves the interweaving of two events: the ordinary jubilee of the year 2025 and the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition sent by Don Bosco to Argentina.

This concurrence of the two events, which I venture to call "providential", makes 2025 a decidedly extraordinary year for all of us and even more so for the Salesians of Don Bosco. Indeed the 29th General Chapter will be held in February, March and April, leading to the election of the new Rector Major and the new General Council, among other things.

Global and particular events, therefore, that involve us in different ways and that we will seek to experience profoundly and intensely, because it is precisely thanks to these events that we can experience the joy of encountering Christ, and the importance of remaining anchored in hope.

## 1.1 The Jubilee

*"Spes non confundit! Hope does not disappoint!"* [\[1\]](#)

This is how Pope Francis presents the Jubilee to us. How wonderful! What a "prophetic" cue!

The Jubilee is a pilgrimage for putting Jesus Christ back at the centre of our lives and the life of the world. Because he is our hope. He is the Hope of the Church and of the whole world!

We are all aware that the world today needs the hope that connects us with Jesus Christ and with our other brothers and sisters. We need the hope that makes us pilgrims, that propels us into motion, and prompts us to start walking.

We are speaking of hope as the rediscovery of God's presence. Pope Francis writes "May hope fill your hearts!", not only warm your hearts, but fill them, fill them to overflowing! [\[2\]](#)

## 1.2 Anniversary of the first Salesian missionary expedition

And this overflowing hope filled the hearts of those who took part in the first Salesian missionary expedition to Argentina 150 years ago.

From Valdocco, Don Bosco throws his heart beyond every border, sending his sons to the other side of the world! He sends them beyond all human security, sends them to carry forward what he had begun, setting out with others, hoping and infusing hope. He simply sends them – and the first (young) confreres leave and head off. Where? Not even they know where! But they rely on hope and obey, because it is God's presence that guides us.

Our current hope also finds new energy in that enthusiastic obedience, and urges us to set out as pilgrims.

That is why this anniversary should be celebrated: because it helps us to recognise a gift (not a personal achievement, but a free gift, from the Lord); it allows us to remember and to gain strength from this memory to face and build the future.

Today, therefore, let us live to make this future possible and let us do it in the only way we consider great: by sharing our journey of encountering Christ, our only hope, with young people and with all the people in our settings (starting from the poorest and most forgotten).

## **2. THE JUBILEE: CHRIST OUR HOPE**

The Jubilee is journeying together, anchored in Christ our hope. But what does this really mean?

Let me pick up some of the elements of the Bull of indiction for Jubilee 2025 that highlight some of the characteristics of hope.

### **2.1 Pilgrims, anchored in Christian hope**

We are convinced that nothing and no one can separate us from Christ.[\[3\]](#) Because we want to and must remain anchored, clinging to him. We cannot make the journey without our anchor.

The anchor of hope, therefore, is Christ himself who carries the sufferings and wounds of humanity on the cross in the presence of the Father.

The anchor, in fact, is the shape of a cross, which is why it was also depicted in the catacombs to symbolise the belonging of the deceased faithful to Christ the Saviour.

This anchor is already firmly attached to the port of salvation. Our task is to attach our life to it, the rope that binds our ship to the anchor of Christ.

We are sailing on troubled waters and need to anchor ourselves to something solid. But the task is no longer to cast anchor and fix it to the seabed. The task is to attach our ship to the rope that hangs down from Heaven, so to speak, where the anchor of Christ is firmly fixed. By attaching ourselves to this rope we attach ourselves to the anchor of salvation and make our hope certain.

Hope is certain when the ship of our life is attached to the rope that binds us to the anchor that is fixed in the crucified Christ who is at the right hand of the Father, that is, in the eternal communion of the Father, in the love of the Holy Spirit.[\[4\]](#)

Everything is well expressed in the liturgical prayer for the Solemnity of the Lord's Ascension:

*Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and, where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope.*[\[5\]](#)

Czech writer and politician Vaclav Havel describes hope as a state of mind, a dimension of the soul. It does not depend on prior observation of the world. It is not a prediction.

Byung-Chul Han adds, "Hope is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart that transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons.

"I feel that its deepest roots are in the transcendental... Hope in this deep and powerful sense is not the same as joy that things are going well. We might think that hoping is simply wanting to smile at life because it in turn smiles at you, but

no, we have to go deeper, we have to walk that rope that leads us to the anchor.

“Hope is the ability of each of us to work for something because it is right to do so, not because that something will have guaranteed success. It could be a failure, it could go wrong: we do not hope it goes well, we are not optimistic. We work to make this happen. That is why hope does not equal optimism. Hope is not the belief that something will go well but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of its outcome.

“Doing something because it makes sense: this is the hope that presupposes values and presupposes faith.

“This is what gives hope the strength to live, and gives us the strength to feel something again and again, even in despair.”[\[6\]](#)

But how can you be on a journey while remaining anchored? The anchor weighs you down, holds you back, and pins you down. Where does this journey lead to? It leads to eternity.

## **2.2 Hope as a journey to Christ, a journey to eternal life**

The promise of eternal life, just as it is made to each of us, does not bypass life's journey, it is not a leap upwards, does not propose mounting a rocket that leaves the earth behind and flies off into space, disregarding the road, the dust of the path, nor does it leave the ship adrift mid-ocean without us.

This promise is indeed an anchor that is fixed in the eternal, but to which we remain attached by a rope that steadies the ship as it crosses the ocean. And it is precisely the fact that it is fixed in Heaven that allows the ship not to remain stationary in the middle of the sea, but to move forward through the waves.

If the anchor of Christ were to pin us to the bottom of the sea, we would all stay in place where we are, maybe calm and problem-free, yet stagnant, without travelling or advancing. On the contrary, anchoring life to Heaven guarantees that the promise that gives rise to our hope does not impede our progress or provide a sense of security in which to shelter and confine ourselves, but rather instils confidence as we walk and proceed along our path. The promise of a sure goal, already reached for us by Christ, makes every step in life firm and decisive.

It is important to understand the Jubilee as a pilgrimage, as an invitation to get moving, to come out of self to go towards Christ.

Jubilee, then, has always been synonymous with a journey. If you really want God, you have to move, you have to walk. Because the desire for God, the longing for God moves you to find him and, at the same time, leads you to find yourself and others.

“Born to never die”.[\[7\]](#)

The title of the life of Servant of God Chiara Corbella Petrillo is beautiful and significant. Yes, because our coming into the world is directed to eternal life. Eternal life is a promise that breaks through the door of death, opening us to being “face to face with God”, forever. Death is a door that closes and at the same time a door that opens to the definitive encounter with God!

We know how keen was Don Bosco’s desire for Heaven, something he joyfully proposed and shared with the young people at the Oratory.

## **2.3 Characteristics of hope**

## 2.3.1 Hope, continuous, ready, visionary and prophetic tension

Gabriel Marcel, [\[8\]](#) the so-called philosopher of hope, teaches us that hope is found in the weaving of experience now in progress. Hope means giving credit to some reality as a bearer of the future.

Eric Fromm [\[9\]](#) writes that hope is not passive waiting, but rather a continuous, constant tension. It is like crouched tiger which will jump only when the time is right.

To have hope is to be vigilant at all times for everything that has not yet happened. The virgins who waited for the bridegroom with their lamps lit hoped; Don Bosco hoped in the face of difficulties and knelt down to pray.

Hope is ready at the moment when everything is about to be born.

It is vigilant, attentive, listening, able to guide in creating something new, in giving life to the future on earth.

This is why it is “visionary and prophetic”. It focuses our attention on what is not yet, it helps to give birth to something new.

## 2.3.2 Hope is our wager on the future

Without hope there is no revolution, no future, there is only a present made of sterile optimism.

Often it is thought that those who hope are optimists while pessimists are essentially their opposite. It is not so. It is important not to confuse hope with optimism. Hope is much more profound because it does not depend on moods, feelings or sentimentality. The essence of **optimism** is innate positivity. The optimist lives in the belief that somehow things will get better. For optimists, time is closure. They do not



contemplate the future: everything will go well and that is it.

Paradoxically, even for **pessimists** time is closure: they find themselves trapped in the time as a prison, rejecting everything without venturing into other possible worlds. The pessimist is as stubborn as the optimist, and both are blind to the possible because the possible is alien to them, they lack the passion for the unprecedented.

Unlike both of them, hope wagers on what can go beyond, on what could be.

And still, the optimist (just like the pessimist), does not act, because every action involves a risk and since they do not want to take this risk they stay put, they do not want to experience failure.

Hope instead goes in search, tries to find a direction, heads towards what it does not know, sets sail for new things. This is the pilgrimage of a Christian.

### **2.3.3 Hope is not a private matter**

We all carry hope in our hearts. It is not possible not to hope, but it is also true that one can delude oneself, considering prospects and ideals that will never come true, that are just illusions and false hopes.

Much of our culture, especially Western culture, is full of false hopes that delude and destroy or can irreparably ruin the lives of individuals and entire societies.

According to positive thinking, it is enough to replace negative thoughts with positive ones to live more happily. Through this simple mechanism, the negative aspects of life are completely omitted and the world appears like an Amazon marketplace that will provide us with anything we want thanks to our positive attitude.

Conclusion: if our willingness to think positively were enough to be happy, then everyone would be solely responsible for their own happiness.

Paradoxically, the cult of positivity isolates people, makes them selfish and destroys empathy, because people are increasingly committed only to themselves and do not care about the suffering of others.

Hope, unlike positive thinking, does not avoid the negativity of life; it does not isolate but unites and reconciles, because the protagonist of hope is not me, focused on my ego, entrenched exclusively on myself. The secret of hope is us.

Therefore, Hope's siblings are Love, Faith, and Transcendence.

## **3. HOPE, THE FOUNDATION OF MISSION**

### **3.1 Hope is an invitation to responsibility**

Hope is a gift and, as such, should be passed on to everyone we meet along the way.

Saint Peter states this clearly: "Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you." [\[10\]](#) He invites us not to be afraid, to act in everyday life, to give our reasons – how much Salesian spirit there is in this word "reasons"! – for hope. This is a responsibility for the Christian. If we are women and men of hope, it shows!

"Giving an account of the hope that is in us" becomes a proclamation of the "good news" of Jesus and his Gospel.

But why is it necessary to respond to anyone who asks us about the hope that is in us? And why do we feel the need to recover hope?

In the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee, *Spes Non Confundit*, Pope Francis reminds us that “All of us, however, need to recover the joy of living, since men and women, created in the image and likeness of God, cannot rest content with getting along one day at a time, settling for the here and now and seeking fulfilment in material realities alone. This leads to a narrow individualism and the loss of hope; it gives rise to a sadness that lodges in the heart and brings forth fruits of discontent and intolerance.”[\[11\]](#)

An observation that strikes us because it describes all the sadness that is breathed in our societies and our communities. It is a sadness masked by false joy, the one constantly touted, promised, and guaranteed to us by the media, advertisements, politicians’ propaganda, and many false prophets of well-being. Settling for well-being prevents us from opening up to a much greater, much truer, much more eternal good: what Jesus and the apostles call “the salvation of the soul, the salvation of life”; a good for which Jesus invites us not to fear losing our life, material goods, false securities that often collapse in an instant.

It is regarding these kinds of more or less articulated “questions” (including by young people) that it is our task to “give an account”. What do I want for the young people and for all the people I meet along the way? What would I like to ask God for them? How would I like it to change their lives?

There is only one answer: *eternal life*. Not only eternal life as a sublime state that we can reach after death, but eternal life possible here and now, eternal life as Jesus defines it: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”, that is, a defined life, enlightened by communion with Christ and,

through him, with the Father.[\[12\]](#)

And we have the task of accompanying the younger generations on this journey towards eternal life, in the educational activity that distinguishes us. An activity that is a mission for us as the Salesian Family. And what drives our mission? Always Christ, our hope.

This educational mission, in fact, has hope at its core.

Ultimately, God's hope is never hope for itself alone. It is always hope for others: it does not isolate us, it makes us supportive and encourages us to educate each other in truth and love.

## **3.2 Hope demands courage from the Christian community in evangelization**

Courage and hope are an interesting combination. In fact, if it is true that it is impossible not to hope, it is equally true that courage is necessary to hope. Courage comes from having the same outlook as Christ,[\[13\]](#) capable of hoping against all hope, of seeing a solution even where there seems to be no way out. And how "Salesian" this attitude is!

All this requires the courage to be oneself, to recognise one's identity in the gift of God and to invest one's energies in a precise responsibility, aware that what has been entrusted to us is not ours, and that we have the task of passing it on to the next generations. This is the heart of God. This is the life of the Church.

It is an attitude that we find in the first missionary expedition.

I find reference to art. 34 of the Constitutions of the

Salesians of Don Bosco very useful: it highlights what lies at the heart of our charismatic and apostolic movement. I suggest to each of the groups in our diverse and beautiful Family that they review the same elements that I offer here, by rereading their respective Constitutions and Statutes.

The article is entitled: Evangelization and catechesis and reads as follows:

*"This Society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson." For us too, evangelizing and catechizing are the fundamental characteristics of our mission.*

*Like Don Bosco, we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity. Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery.*

*We walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord, and so discover in him and in his gospel the deepest meaning of their own existence, and thus grow into new creatures in Christ.*

*The Virgin Mary is present in this process as a mother. We make her known and loved as the one who believed, who helps and who infuses hope."*

This article represents the beating heart that clearly outlines, including for this Strenna, what the energies and opportunities are as the fulfilment and actualisation of the "global dream" that God inspired in Don Bosco.

If living the Jubilee is first of all making sure that Jesus is and returns to being in first place, then the missionary spirit is the consequence of this recognised primacy which strengthens our hope and translates into that educative and pastoral charity that proclaims the person of Jesus Christ to all. This is the heart of evangelisation and characterises genuine mission.

It is significant to recall some opening words from Benedict XVI's first Encyclical, *Deus caritas est*:

*"Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."* [\[14\]](#)

Therefore, the encounter with Christ is a priority and fundamental, not the "simple" dissemination of a doctrine, but a deep personal experience of God that urges us to communicate him, to make him known and experienced, becoming true "mystagogues" of the lives of young people.

### **3.3 "*Da mihi animas*": the "spirit" of mission**

Don Bosco always kept a sentence before his eyes that young people could read passing in front of his room, words that particularly struck Dominic Savio: "*Da mihi animas cetera tolle*".

There is a fundamental balance in this motto that combines the two priorities that guided Don Bosco's life – and which, significantly, we call the "grace of unity" – that allow us to always safeguard interiority and apostolic action.

If the love of God is lacking in the heart, how can there be true pastoral charity? And at the same time, if apostles were not to discover the face of God in their neighbour, how could they be said to love God?

Don Bosco's secret is that he personally experienced the unique "movement of charity towards God and towards his brothers and sisters" [\[15\]](#) that characterises the Salesian spirit.

### 3.3.1 The attitudes of the one who is sent

There are two key dreams in Don Bosco's life in which the attitudes of the apostle, of the one who is sent, are evident:

the "dream at nine years of age" in which Jesus and Mary ask John, just a child, to make himself humble, strong and energetic, to be obedient and acquire knowledge, asking him to be always kind in order to win over the hearts of young people. He is to always keep Mary as his teacher and guide;

the "dream of the pergola of roses" that indicates the "passion" in Salesian life that requires wearing the "good shoes" of mortification and charity.

### 3.3.2 Recognise, Rethink and Relaunch

Celebrating the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's first missionary expedition is a great gift for

***Recognising and thanking God.***

Recognition makes the fatherly nature of every beautiful accomplishment evident. Without recognition, there is no capacity to accept. All the times we do not recognise a gift in our personal and institutional life, we seriously risk nullifying it and "taking it over".

***Rethinking, because "nothing is forever".***

Fidelity involves the ability to change, through obedience, to a perspective that comes from God and from reading the "signs of the times". Nothing is forever: from a personal and institutional point of view, true fidelity is the ability to change, recognising what the Lord calls each of us to.

Rethinking, then, becomes a generative act in which faith and life come together; a moment in which to ask ourselves: what

do you want to tell us, Lord, with this person, with this situation in the light of the signs of the times that ask me to have the very heart of God in order to interpret them?

***Relaunching**, starting over every day.*

Recognition leads to looking far ahead and welcoming new challenges, relaunching the mission with hope. Mission is to bring the hope of Christ with clear and conscious awareness, linked to faith, which makes me recognise that what I see and experience “is not mine”.

## **4. A JUBILEE AND MISSIONARY HOPE THAT TRANSLATES INTO CONCRETE AND DAILY LIFE**

### **4.1 Hope, our strength in daily life that needs to be witnessed to**

Saint Thomas Aquinas writes: “*Spes introcit ad caritatem*”, hope prepares and predisposes our life, our humanity, to charity.[\[16\]](#) A charity that is also justice, social action.

Hope needs testimony. We are at the heart of the mission, because the mission is not, in the first instance, to do things but is a testimony, the witness of the one who has gone through an experience and speaks about it. The witness is the bearer of a memory, solicits questions from those who meet him or her, evokes wonder.

The testimony of hope requires a community. It is the work of a collective subject and it is contagious, just as our humanity is contagious, because such testimony is a bond with the Lord.



Hope in the testimony of mission is to be built from generation to generation, between adults and young people: this is the way of the future. Consumerism eats away the future in our culture. The ideology of consumption extinguishes everything in the “here and now”, in the “everything, and immediately”. But you cannot consume the future, you cannot appropriate what is other than you; you cannot appropriate the other.[\[17\]](#)

In building the future, hope is the ability to make promises and to keep them... such a splendid and rare thing in our world. To promise is to hope, to set in motion, that is why – as mentioned – hope is a journey, it is the very energy of the journey.

## **4.2 Hope is the art of patience and waiting**

Every life, every gift, everything needs time to grow. So too do God’s gifts take time to mature. This is why in our present time, where everything is instant, in our hurried “consumption” of time and life, we are called to cultivate the virtues of patience, because hope comes to fruition through patience.[\[18\]](#) In fact, hope and patience are intimately linked.

Hope involves the ability to wait, to wait for growth, as if to say that “one virtue leads to another”!

For hope to become reality, to manifest itself in its full sense, patience is required. Nothing manifests itself miraculously, because everything is subject to the law of time. Patience is the art of the farmer who sows and knows how to wait for the seed sown to grow and bear fruit.

Hope begins in us as waiting, expectation, and it is experienced as consciously lived expectation in our humanity.

This waiting, this expectation is a very important dimension of human experience. Human beings know how to wait, are always in a dimension of waiting, because they are creatures who consciously live in time.

Human waiting, expectation, is the true measure of time, a measure that is not numerical or chronological. We have become accustomed to calculating our waiting time, to saying that we have waited an hour, that the train is five minutes late, that the internet has made us wait fourteen endless seconds before responding to our click, but when we measure it in this way we distort our waiting, turning it into a thing, a phenomenon detached from ourselves and what we are waiting for. It is as if the waiting were something in itself, by itself, without any connection. Instead, waiting – and here is the crucial point – is relationship, a dimension of the mystery of relationship.

Only those who have hope have patience. Only those who have hope become capable of “enduring”, of “supporting from below” the different situations that life presents. Those who endure wait, hope, and manage to endure everything because their effort has the sense of waiting, has the tension of waiting, the loving energy of waiting.

We know that the call to patience and waiting sometimes involves the experience of fatigue, work, pain and death.[\[19\]](#) Well, fatigue, pain and death expose the illusion of having time, the meaning of time, the value of time, the meaning and value of our life. They are negative experiences, but also positive because fatigue, pain and death can be opportunities to rediscover the true meaning of life's time.

And, once again, “to give an account of the hope that is in us”, becoming the proclamation of the “good news” of Jesus and his Gospel.

# 5. THE ORIGIN OF OUR HOPE: IN GOD WITH DON BOSCO

Father Egidio Viganò offered the Congregation and the Salesian Family an interesting reflection on the topic of hope, drawing on our very rich tradition and highlighting some specific characteristics of the Salesian spirit read in the light of this theological virtue. He did this by commenting, in particular for participants at the General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, on Don Bosco's dream of the ten diamonds.[\[20\]](#)

Given the depth of the proposed contents, I think it is useful to recall the contribution of the 7th Successor of Don Bosco in reminding us of what we are all called to live, once again from the perspective of hope.

## 5.1 God is the origin of our hope

### 5.1.1 Brief reference to the dream

We all know the story of this extraordinary dream that Don Bosco had in San Benigno Canavese on the night of 10 September 1881. Let me briefly recall its structure.[\[21\]](#)

The Dream takes place in three scenes. *In the first scene*, the main character embodies the profile of the Salesian: on the front of his cloak there are five diamonds – three on the chest, representing “Faith”, “Hope” and “Charity”, and two on the shoulders, representing “Work” and “Temperance”; on the back there are five additional diamonds indicating “Obedience”, “Vow of Poverty”, “Reward”, “Vow of Chastity” and “Fasting”.

Fr Rinaldi calls this character with the ten diamonds “The model of the true Salesian”.

*In the second scene, the character shows the adulteration of the model: his cloak "had become faded, moth-eaten, in tatters. In place of the diamonds there were gaping holes caused by moths and other insects."*

This very sad and depressing scene shows "the opposite to the true Salesian", the anti-Salesian.

*In the third scene, "a handsome young man dressed in a white cloak woven through with gold and silver thread [...] of imposing and charming mien" appears. He is the bearer of a message. He urges the Salesians to "listen", to "understand", to remain "strong and courageous", to "witness" with their words and with their lives, to "be careful" in the acceptance and formation of the new generations, to make their Congregation grow healthily.*

The three dream scenes are lively and provocative; they present us with an agile, personalised and dramatised synthesis of Salesian spirituality. The content of the dream, in Don Bosco's mind, certainly involves an important frame of reference for our vocational identity.

So then, the character in the dream – as is well known – bears the diamond of hope on the front, which stands for the certainty of help from above in an entirely creative life, i.e. one committed to daily planning of practical activities for salvation, especially of youth. Together with the other symbols linked to the theological virtues, the figure of those who are wise and optimistic stands out for the faith that animates them; of those who are dynamic and creative for the hope that moves them, and who are ever prayerful and good human beings for the charity with which they are imbued.

Corresponding to the diamond of hope, on the back of the figure we find the diamond of "reward". While hope visibly highlights the Salesian's energy and activity in building the Kingdom, the constancy of his efforts and the enthusiasm of

his commitment based on the certainty of God's help made present through the mediation and intercession of Christ and Mary, the diamond of "reward" instead underlines a constant conscientious attitude that permeates and animates all ascetic effort, according to Don Bosco's familiar maxim: "A piece of paradise will make up for everything!" [\[22\]](#)

### **5.1.2 Don Bosco, a "giant" of hope**

The Salesian – Don Bosco said – "is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain whenever God's glory and the salvation of souls require it"; [\[23\]](#) the inner support for this demanding ascetic ability is the thought of paradise as a reflection of the good conscience with which he works and lives. "In all we do, our duty, work, troubles or sufferings, we must never forget that... the least thing done for his name's sake is not left forgotten; it is of faith that in his own good time he will give us rich recompense. At the end of our lives as we stand before his judgement seat he will say, radiant with love: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25:2). [\[24\]](#) "In your work and sorrow never forget we have a great reward stored up for us in heaven." [\[25\]](#) And when our Father says that the Salesian exhausted by too much work represents a victory *for the whole Congregation*, it seems to suggest a dimension of fraternal communion in the reward, almost a community sense of paradise!

The thought and continuous awareness of paradise is one of the overarching ideas and one of the driving values of Don Bosco's typical spirituality and also pedagogy. It is like shedding light on and furthering the fundamental instinct of the soul that tends vitally towards its ultimate goal.

In a world prone to secularisation and the gradual loss of a sense of God – especially due to affluence and certain progress – it is important to resist the temptation, for

ourselves and for the young people with whom we journey, that prevents us from looking up to Heaven and does not make us feel the need to sustain and nurture a commitment to asceticism lived out in our daily work. A temporal gaze is growing in its place, according to a somewhat elegant kind of horizontalism that believes it can discover the ideal of everything within human becoming and in the present life. Quite the opposite of hope!

Don Bosco was one of the greats of hope. There are so many elements to prove it. His Salesian spirit is entirely infused with the certainty and industriousness characteristic of this bold dynamism of the Holy Spirit.

Let me pause briefly to recall how Don Bosco was able to translate the energy of hope in his life on two fronts: commitment to personal sanctification and the mission of salvation for others; or rather – and here lies a central characteristic of his spirit – personal sanctification through the salvation of others. We remember the famous formula of the three “S’s”: “Salve, salvando salvati” (a greeting which in today’s language would be something like ‘Hi! By saving others, save yourself’)[\[26\]](#) It is a simple mnemonic, a pedagogical slogan, but it is profound and indicates how the two sides of personal sanctification and the salvation of others are closely linked.

In the “work” and “temperance” pair, the perception is that Don Bosco experienced hope as a practical and daily programme for the tireless work of sanctification and salvation. In contemplation of the mystery of God his faith led him to prefer his ineffable plan of salvation. He saw in Christ the Saviour of humankind and the Lord of history; in his Mother, Mary, the Helper of Christians; in the Church, the great Sacrament of salvation; in his own Christian growth to maturity and in needy youth, the vast field of the “not yet”. Therefore his heart erupted in the cry, “Da mihi animas”, Lord grant that I may save youth, and take the rest away from me!

The following of Christ and the youth mission merge, in his spirit, in a single theological burst of energy that constitutes the supporting structure of the whole.

We know well that the dimension of Christian hope combines the perspective of the “already” and the “not yet”: something present and something in progress that, however, begins to manifest itself from today even if “not yet” fully.

### **5.1.3 Characteristics of Don Bosco’s hope**

#### *The certainty of the “already”*

When we ask theology what the formal object of hope is, it responds that it is the intimate conviction of the presence of God who helps, aids, and assists; the inner certainty about the power of the Holy Spirit; friendship with the victorious Christ that enables us to say with St Paul, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13).

The first constitutive element of hope is, therefore, the certainty of the “already”. Hope encourages faith to exercise itself in consideration of God’s saving presence in human vicissitudes, of the power of the Spirit in the Church and in the world, of Christ’s kingship over history, of the baptismal values that have initiated the life of resurrection within us.

The first constitutive element of hope is, therefore, an exercise of faith in the essence of God as merciful and saving Father, in what Jesus Christ has already done for us, in Pentecost as the beginning of the age of the Holy Spirit, in what is already within us through Baptism, the sacraments, life in the Church, the personal call of our vocation.

It is necessary to reflect that faith and hope interchange in us, their dynamics prompt and complement each other and make us live in the creative and transcendent atmosphere of the power of the Holy Spirit.

## *A clear awareness of the “not yet”*

The second constitutive element of hope is the awareness of the “not yet”. It does not seem very difficult to have this; however, hope demands a clear awareness not so much of what is evil and unjust, as of what is lacking in the stature of Christ in time, and, therefore, of what is unjust and sinful and also of what is immature, partial or stunted in building the Kingdom.

This supposes, as a frame of reference, a clear knowledge of the divine plan of salvation, onto which the critical and discerning capacity of the one who hopes is grafted. Thus any critique by a person of hope is not simply psychological or sociological but transcendent, according to the theological sphere of the “new creature”; it also makes use of the contributions of the human sciences, and far surpasses them.

With the awareness of the “not yet”, those who hope perceive what is evil, what is not yet mature, what is a seed for the Kingdom of God and are committed to the growth of what is good and to fighting sin with the historical perspective of Christ. The ability to discern the “not yet” is always measured by the certainty of the “already”. Therefore, and I would say especially in difficult times, those who hope urge and stir up their faith to discover the signs of God’s presence and the mediations that guide us into the sphere that he has traced out. This is a very important quality today: knowing how to identify seeds to help them sprout and grow.

How can one hope if there is not this capacity for discernment? It is not enough to know how to perceive the full weight of evil. We must also be sensitive to the spring “that shines around us”. So in these times, which we call difficult times (and they really are, comparing them with those with a degree of tranquillity that we experienced earlier), hope helps us to perceive that there is also so much good in the world and that something is growing.



## *Salvific industriousness*

A third constitutive element of hope is its need to be put into action accompanied by a concrete commitment to sanctification, inventiveness and apostolic sacrifice. We must collaborate with the “already” that is growing. We need to act urgently and fight against evil in ourselves and in others, especially in needy youth.

The discernment of the “already” and the “not yet” needs to be translated into practice in life, opening up to resolutions, plans, revision, inventiveness, patience and constancy. Not everything will turn out “as we hoped”: there will be failures, setbacks, falls, misunderstandings. Christian hope also naturally shares in the darkness of faith.

### **5.1.4 The “fruits” of Don Bosco’s hope**

Some particularly significant fruits for the Salesian spirit of Don Bosco derive from the three constitutive elements of hope which I have just indicated.

#### *Joy*

*Joy derives from the first constitutive element – the certainty of the “already” – as the most characteristic fruit. All true hope explodes into joy.*

The Salesian spirit takes on the joy of hope through an affinity all its own. Even biology suggests some examples. Youth, which is human hope (and thus suggests a certain analogy with the mystery of Christian hope), is eager for joy. And we see Don Bosco translate hope into an atmosphere of joy for the youth to be saved. Dominic Savio, raised at his school, said, “We make holiness consist in being very cheerful.” It is not a superficial cheerfulness typical of the world but an inner joy, a substrate of Christian victory, a vital harmony with hope, which explodes in joy. A joy that ultimately proceeds from the depths of faith and hope.

There is little to do. If we are sad, it is because we are superficial. I understand that there is a Christian sadness: Jesus Christ experienced it. In Gethsemane his soul was saddened to death, he sweated blood. This is certainly another kind of sadness.

However, the affliction or melancholy through which a Sister gets the impression of not being understood by anyone, that others do not take her into consideration, that they are envious or misunderstand her qualities, etc., is a sadness that must not be fed. This must be contrasted with the depth of hope: God is with me and loves me; what does it matter if others don't consider me so much?

Joy, in the Salesian spirit, is a daily atmosphere; it stems from a faith that hopes and from a hope that believes, in other words from the dynamic quality of the Holy Spirit that proclaims in us the victory that overcomes the world!... Joy is essential if we are to witness to what we believe and hope in.

This is what the Salesian spirit is, first and foremost, and not something reduced to mere observance and mortification. Hope will also lead us to practise mortification, but as flight training and not as prison jabs! So: from hope, so much joy!

The world tries to overcome its limitations and disorientation with a life filled with exciting sensations. It cultivates the promotion and satisfaction of the senses, a spicy film, eroticism, drugs, etc. It is a way of escaping from a fleeting situation that seems to make no sense, to seek something that borders on a "caricature of transcendence".

### *Patience*

Another "fruit" of hope – which comes from the awareness of the "not yet" – is *patience*. Every hope entails an indispensable gift of patience. Patience is a Christian attitude, intrinsically linked with hope in its "not yet"

quality with its troubles, its difficulties and its darkness. Believing in the resurrection and working for the victory of faith, while being mortal and immersed in the transient, demands an inner structure of hope that leads to patience.

The most sublime expression of Christian patience was what Jesus experienced especially during his passion and death. It is a fruitful patience, precisely because of the hope that fuels it. Rather than initiative and action, patience involves conscious acceptance and virtuous passivity that endures so that God's plan may be accomplished.

Don Bosco's Salesian spirit often reminds us of patience. In the introduction to the Constitutions, Don Bosco recalls, alluding to Saint Paul, that the pains we must endure in this life do not compare with the reward that awaits us. He used to say, "So take heart! When patience would falter, let hope sustain us!"[\[27\]](#) "the hope of a reward is what buoys up our patience."[\[28\]](#)

Mother Mazzarello also insisted on this. One of her first biographers, Maccone, states that hope always comforted her by supporting her in her sufferings, her infirmities, her doubts, and cheered her up at the hour of death: "Her hope was very alive and active. It seems to me" a Sister testified "that she was animated by hope in everything and that she tried to instil this in others. She urged us to carry the small daily crosses well, and to do everything with great purity of intention."[\[29\]](#)

Hope is the mother of patience and patience is the defence and shield of hope.

### *Pedagogical sensitivity*

From the third constitutive element of hope – "salvific industriousness" – comes another fruit: *pedagogical sensitivity*. It is an initiative of appropriate commitment, both in the context of one's own sanctification (following

Christ), and in the context of the salvation of others (mission). It involves practical, measured and constant commitment, translated by Don Bosco into a concrete methodology that involves attention to the following:

*prudence (or holy “cunning”): when it comes to initiatives, to solving problems, Don Bosco tries everything without pretending to be perfect but with humble practicality; he often said, “The best is the enemy of the good”.[\[30\]](#)*

**Boldness.** Evil is organised, the children of darkness act intelligently. The Gospel tells us that the children of light must be more cunning and courageous. Therefore, to work in the world we must arm ourselves with genuine prudence, that is, with the “auriga virtutum” that makes us agile, timely and penetrating in the application of true fearlessness for the good.

**Magnanimity.** We must not confine our gaze within the walls of our house. We have been called by the Lord to save the world; we have a more important historical mission than astronauts and scientists do... We are committed to the full liberation of humankind. Our soul must be open to very broad perspectives. Don Bosco wanted us to be “at the forefront of progress” (and when he said this he meant communications media).

We know the magnanimity of Don Bosco in launching youth into apostolic responsibilities; think, for example, of the first missionaries who left for America. Both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were little more than boys and girls!

Don Bosco operated within expansive horizons. Neither Valdocco nor Mornese was enough for him; he could not remain only within the confines of Turin, Piedmont, Italy or Europe. His heart beat with the heart of the universal Church, because he felt almost invested with the responsibility of saving all the needy youth of the world. He wanted the Salesians to feel that

the most urgent and biggest youth issues of the Church were their own, so they could be available everywhere. And, as he cultivated magnanimity in his plans and initiatives, he was concrete and practical in their implementation, with a sense of gradualness, and modest beginnings.

So magnanimity must always radiate from the face of the Salesian as a mark of sympathy: Salesians must not be narrow-minded without vision, but have greatness of soul because hope abides in their hearts.

Péguy, with his somewhat violent acumen, wrote: “A capitulation is in essence an operation in which one begins to explain instead of implementing. Cowards have always been people of many explanations.” The mysticism of decision and the humble courage of practicality must always radiate from the Salesian face, as a mark of sympathy. Don Bosco was determined in being committed to good, even if he could not begin with the best; he said that his works perhaps began in disorder and then tended towards order!

Hope brings the joy of divine sonship to the face of the Salesian, in addition to deep contemplation, the enthusiasm of gratitude and optimism that stem from “faith”. It also instils the courage to take initiative, the spirit of patience and sacrifice, the wisdom of gradual pedagogy, the visionary ideals of magnanimity, the humility of practicality, the wisdom of cunning, and the smile of joy.

## **5.2 God’s faithfulness: to the very end**

So far we have taken a look at what Don Bosco and our Saints and Blesseds have clearly expressed in their lives. These are things that urge each of us personally and as a Salesian Family to bring forth or – to take up the words of Fr Egidio Viganò – to make shine the hope we are called to “give our

reasons” for, especially to young people and, among them, the poorest.

The time has come to “peek” a little beyond what is “immediately visible” and try to understand what lies ahead in our lives and gives us the courage to wait diligently as we work together for the coming of the “day of the Lord”.

Therefore, and continuing to take up the candid and poignant analysis of the Seventh Successor of Don Bosco, let us focus our attention on the perspective of the “reward”.

The diamond of “reward” is placed with four others on the back of the cloak worn by the character in the dream. It is almost a secret, a force that operates from within, which gives us the impetus and helps us to support and defend the great values seen on the front. It is interesting to note that the diamond of “reward” is placed under the one of “poverty” because it certainly is related to the “privations” linked to it.

On its rays we read the following words: “If the rich reward attracts you, do not be afraid of the many hardships.” “Whoever suffers with me will rejoice with me.” “Whatever we suffer on earth is momentary, the joys of my friends in Heaven are eternal.”

The true Salesian has the vision of the reward in their imagination, in their heart, their desires, their horizons of life , as the fullness of the values proclaimed by the Gospel. This is why “he is always cheerful. He radiates this joy and is able to educate to the happiness of Christian life and a sense of celebration.”[\[31\]](#)

There was a lot of talk about Heaven in Don Bosco’s house and in our Salesian houses. It was a permanent and ever present idea summarised in some famous sayings: “Bread, work and Paradise”[\[32\]](#); “A piece of Paradise will make up for everything”.[\[33\]](#) These were recurrent sayings in Valdocco and

Mornese.

Certainly many Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will remember the description Mother Henriette Sorbonne gave of the spirit of Mornese: "Here we are in Paradise, in the house there is an atmosphere of Paradise!"[\[34\]](#) And it certainly wasn't because of privations or lack of problems. It was like the spontaneous translation, sprung from the heart, of the sign that Don Bosco had put up: "Servite Domino in laetitia"[\[35\]](#).

Dominic Savio had also perceived the same warm and transcendent atmosphere of life: "We make holiness consist in being very cheerful."[\[36\]](#)

In the Lives of Dominic Savio, Francis Besucco and Michael Magone, Don Bosco, even when describing their death throes, sought to stress this ineffable joy, combined with a true yearning for Paradise. Much more than the horror of death, his boys felt the attraction of Easter joy.

The thought of reward is one of the fruits of the presence of the Holy Spirit, that is, of the intensity of faith, hope and charity, all three together, although it is more closely linked to hope. It instils a joy and gladness in the heart that comes from above and are beautifully attuned to the innate tendencies of the human heart. We can see this as we live among boys and girls: young people instinctively understand more clearly that human beings are born for happiness.

But we don't even need to go looking for it among the young. Let's pick up a mirror and look at ourselves: we just have to listen to the beating of our heart. We are born to achieve happiness, we expect it even without confessing it.

The idea of Paradise, always there in Don Bosco's house, is not a utopia for naive deceptions. It is not the carrot that tricks the horse into trotting, but the substantial yearning

of our being; and it is above all the reality of the love of God, of the resurrection of Jesus Christ at work in history; it is the living presence of the Holy Spirit that urges us toward the reward.

Don Bosco did not despise any of young people's joys. On the contrary, he gave rise to them, increased them, developed them. The famous "cheerfulness" which holiness consists of is not only an intimate joy, hidden in the heart as the fruit of grace. This is the root of it. It is also expressed externally, in life, in the playground and in the sense of celebration.

How he prepared for religious solemnities, name days and feast days at the Oratory! He was even busy organising the celebrations for his name day, not for himself but to create an atmosphere of joyful gratitude in the surroundings.

Let's think about courageous autumn walks: two or three months to prepare them, 15 or 20 days to experience them; then the extended memories and comments: a joy spread out over time. What imagination and courage! From Turin to Becchi, to Genoa, to Mornese, to many towns in Piedmont, with dozens and dozens of young people... Outings, games, the music, singing, theatre: these are substantial elements of the Preventive System which, also as a pedagogical method, embrace an appropriate and dynamic spirituality, the result of a convinced faith, hope, and charity, heavenly values right here on earth.

Heaven was always overlooking the firmament of Valdocco, day and night, with or without clouds. Witnessing to the values of reward today is an urgent prophecy for the world and especially for youth. What has the techno-industrial civilisation brought to the consumer society? A huge possibility of comfort and pleasure, with a consequent heavy sadness.

Among other things, we read in the Constitutions of the



Salesians of Don Bosco – but it applies to every Christian – that “the Salesian [is] a sign of the power of the resurrection” and that “in the simplicity and hard work of daily life” he is “an educator who proclaims to the young ‘new heavens and a new earth’, awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise.” [\[37\]](#)

In Mornese and Valdocco there were neither comforts nor dictatorships and everything breathed spontaneity and joy. Technical progress has facilitated many things today, but the true joy of human beings has not increased. Anguish has grown instead, nausea, a lack of meaning in life has become more acute, something unfortunately that we continue to observe – especially in affluent societies – in the tragic statistics of adolescent and youth suicides.

Today, in addition to the material poverty that still afflicts a very large portion of humanity, it is urgent to find a way to help young people see the meaning of life, the higher ideals, the originality of Jesus Christ.

Happiness, a fundamental human tendency, is sought, but the right path to it is no longer known, and then immense disillusionment grows.

Young people, also due to the lack of significant adults, feel unable to face suffering, duty and constant commitment. The problem of fidelity to ideals and one’s own vocation has become crucial. Young people feel unable to accept suffering and sacrifice. They live in an atmosphere in which the separation between love and sacrifice triumphs, so that the pursuit and achievement of wealth alone ends up stifling the ability to love and, therefore, to dream of the future.

Rightly, as we said, the diamond of reward is placed below the one of poverty, as if to indicate that the two complement and support each other. In fact, evangelical poverty entails a concrete and transcendent vision of the whole reality with a

realistic perspective also regarding renunciation, suffering, setbacks, privation and pain.

What is the inner energy that allows one to face everything confidently and with a cheerful countenance, without getting discouraged? It is, ultimately, the sense of heaven's presence on earth. This sense proceeds from faith, hope and charity, which enables us to reread our whole life with the perspective of the Holy Spirit.

The world urgently needs prophets who proclaim the great truth of Paradise with their lives. Not some alienating escape, but an intense and stimulating reality!

Therefore, in the spirit of Don Bosco, there is a constant concern to cultivate familiarity with Paradise, almost as if to constitute the firmament of the mind, the horizon of the Salesian heart: we work and struggle, sure of a reward, looking towards our Homeland, the house of God, the Promised Land.

It should be made clear that the prospect of the reward does not consist, in some reductionist way, in the attainment of a kind of "recompense", some kind of consolation for a life lived amidst so many sacrifices, so much endurance... None of this! If it were just "recompense," it would resemble blackmail. But God doesn't work that way. In his love he can only offer human beings himself. This – as Jesus says – is eternal life: the knowledge of the Father. Where "knowing" means "loving", becoming fully partakers of God, in continuity with earthly existence lived "in grace", that is, in love for God and for our brothers and sisters.

We are invited to turn our gaze to Mary in this journey, who appears as daily help, Mother, forerunner and helper. Don Bosco was sure of her presence among us and wanted signs that remind us of it.

He built a Basilica for her, a centre for the animation and

dissemination of the Salesian vocation. He wanted her image in our settings; he bound every apostolic initiative to her intercession and commented with emotion on her real and maternal effectiveness. We recall, for example, what he said to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the house at Nizza Monferrato: "Our Lady is truly here, here among you! Our Lady walks in this house and covers it with her mantle." [\[38\]](#)

In addition to her, we also look for other friends in God's house. Our Saints and Blesseds, starting with the faces that are most familiar to us and that are part of the so-called "Salesian garden".

We are not making these choices to divide the great house of God into small private apartments, but rather to feel more easily at home and be able to speak of God, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, Christ and Mary, creation and history, not with the trepidation of those who have listened to the lofty lesson of a dense, difficult and even inscrutable thinker, but with that sense of familiarity and joyful simplicity with which we converse with those who have been our relatives, our brothers and sisters, our colleagues and our workmates. Some of them we have not met in life, but we feel close to them and they inspire us with particular confidence. Speaking with Saint Joseph, Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello, Father Rua, Dominic Savio, Laura Vicuña, Father Rinaldi, Bishop Versiglia and Father Caravario; with Sister Teresa Valsè, Sister Eusebia Palomino, etc., really is an "in house", family conversation.

This is what the diamond of reward suggests to us: to feel at home with God, with Christ, with Mary, with the Saints; to feel their presence in our own house, in a family atmosphere that gives a sense of Paradise to the daily settings of our life.

## 6. WITH... MARY, HOPE AND MATERNAL PRESENCE

At the end of this commentary we can only but turn our hearts and gaze to the Virgin Mary, as Don Bosco taught us.

Hope requires confidence, the ability to surrender and trust.

In all this we have a guide and a teacher in Mary Most Holy.

She testifies to us that to hope is to trust and surrender, and it is true for this life as well as for eternal life.

On this journey Our Lady takes us by the hand, teaches us how to trust in God, how to give ourselves freely to the love passed on by her Son Jesus.

The direction and the “navigation map” that she presents us with is always the same: “Do whatever he tells you.” [\[39\]](#) An invitation that we take up every day in our lives.

We see the achievement of the reward in Mary.

Maria embodies the attractiveness and concreteness of the Reward in herself:

*“on the completion of her earthly sojourn, [she] was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen of the universe, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and the conqueror of sin and death.”* [\[40\]](#)

On her lips we can read some beautiful expressions from Saint Paul. Since they are inspired by the Holy Spirit, Mary’s Spouse, they are certainly shared by her.

Here they are:

*“It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at*

*the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*[\[41\]](#)

Dear sisters and brothers, dear young people,

Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and all our Saints and Blesseds are close to us in this extraordinary year. May they accompany us in living the demands of the Jubilee at depth, helping us to place the person of Jesus Christ “the Saviour announced in the gospel, who is alive today in the Church and in the world”[\[42\]](#) at the centre of our lives.

May they encourage us, following the example of the first missionaries sent by Don Bosco, to make our lives always and everywhere a free gift for others, especially for the young and among them the poorest.

Finally, a wish: that this year the prayer for peace, for a peaceful humanity, may grow in us. Let us invoke the gift of peace – the biblical *shalom* – which contains all others and finds fulfilment only in hope.

My warmest best wishes,

Father Stefano Martoglio S.D.B.

*Vicar of the Rector Major*

Rome, 31 December 2024

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[1] francis, *Spes Non Confundit*. Bull of indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee for the Year 2025, Vatican City, 9 May 2024.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Cf. *Rom* 8:39.

[4] *Rom* 5:3-5

[5] *Roman Missal*, LEV, Rome 2020<sup>3</sup>, 240.

[6] BYUNG-CHUL HAN, *El espíritu de la esperanza*, p.18, Herder, Barcelona 2024. The translator, however, has translated here from the Italian text in front of him, with some reference also to the English translation of *The Spirit of Hope*, Polity Press, 2024 (an e-book version).

[7] C. PACCINI – S. TROISI, *Siamo nati e non moriremo mai più. Storia di Chiara Corbella Petrillo*, Porziuncola, Assisi (PG) 2001.

[8] GABRIEL MARCEL, *Philosophie der Hoffnung*, Munich, List 1964.

[9] ERICH FROMM, *La revolución de la esperanza*, Ciudad de México 1970.

[10] *1 Pet* 3:15.

[11] Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 9.

[12] *Jn* 17:3.

[13] Cf. *Rom* 4:18.

[14] BENEDICT XVI, *Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est*, Vatican City 25 December 2005, 1.

[15] *SDB C.* 3.

[16] THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, II<sup>a</sup>-IIae q. 17 a. 8 co.

[17] Cf. E. LEVINAS, *Totalità e infinito. Saggio sull'esteriorità*, Jaca Book, Milano 2023.

[18] For these reflections I drew on the rich reflection of the Abbot General of the Order of Cistercians M. G. LEPORI, *Capitoli dell'Abate Generale OCist al CFM 2024. Sperare in Cristo* available in several languages at: [www.ocist.org](http://www.ocist.org)

[19] Cf. Rom, 5:3-5

[20] E. VIGANÒ, *Un progetto evangelico di vita attiva*, Elle Di Ci, Leumann (TO) 1982, 68-84.

[21] Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The Salesian according to Don Bosco's dream of the ten diamonds*, in ASC 300 (1981), 3-37. The complete account can be found in ASC 300 (1981), 40-44; or in BM XV, 147-152.

[22] BM VIII, 200.

[23] SDB C. 18.

[24] p. braido (ed), *Don Bosco Fondatore "Ai Soci Salesiani" (1875-1885). Introduzione e testi critici*, LAS, Roma 1995, 159 (Don Bosco's 'To the Salesian Confreres' from which this is quoted, is also an appendix to the SDB Constitutions and Regulations).

[25] BM VI, 249.

[26] MB VI, 227.

[27] BM XII, 332.

[28] *Ibid*, 331.

[29] F. MACCONO, *Santa Maria Domenica Mazzarello. Confondatrice e prima Superiora Generale delle FMA. Vol. I*, FMA, Torino 1960, 398.

[30] *BM X*, 418.

[31] *SDB C.* 17.

[32] *BM XII*, 443.

[33] *BM VIII*, 200.

[34] Quoted in E. VIGANÒ, *Rediscovering the spirit of Mornese*, in *ASC* (1981), 62.

[35] *Ps* 99.

[36] *BM V*, 228.

[37] *SDB C.* 63. See also E. VIGANÒ, “*Giving reason for the joy and commitments of hope, bearing witness to the unfathomable riches of Christ*”. *Strenna 1994. Rector Major’s Commentary*, Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Rome 1993.

[38] G. CAPETTI, *Il cammino dell’Istituto nel corso di un secolo. Vol. I*, FMA, Roma 1972-1976, 122.

[39] *Jn* 2:5.

[40] *LG*, 59.

[41] *Rom* 8:34-39.

[42] *SDB C.* 196.

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# Community of the Mission of



# Don Bosco, a story of “family” and “prophecy”

*The Salesian Family, born from Don Bosco's intuition, has continued to grow over time and has taken on different forms, while remaining faithful to its roots. Among these Salesian realities is the Community of the Mission of Don Bosco (CMB), a private missionary association of the faithful, which has officially been part of the Salesian Family since 2010.*

## **The origins of the CMB**

It all began in 1983 in Rome, at the Gerini Institute, during a meeting of young Salesian Cooperators. At the concluding Mass, a clear inspiration remained imprinted in the hearts and minds of some of the participants: *your life and your faith must take on a missionary dimension wherever you may be*. From this inspiration, the Community of the Mission of Don Bosco was born at the Salesian Institute in Bologna.

We asked Deacon Guido Pedroni, founder and general custodian of the CMB, to narrate the story of its foundation. The CMB is composed of laypeople presently found in various parts of the world. It is a missionary community in style and in preferences, deeply rooted in the Salesian spirit and in the lives of its founders. Alongside Guido Pedroni, four other laypeople have shared the ideal of the CMB from the beginning: Paola Terenziani (who passed away a few years ago and whose cause for beatification has begun), Rita Terenziani, Andrea Bongiovanni, and Giacomo Borghi. Recently, Daniele Landi, who was already present at the origins of the Community, has joined these figures, gathered in the so-called “Mother Tent.”

## **A Marian and Missionary Community**

It is noteworthy that the CMB is the only group of the Salesian Family founded by a layperson and born from a

missionary and community dream. It is profoundly Marian, as the definitive act of belonging to the Community, the Act of Dedication, is inspired by the life of Mary, who was entirely dedicated to Jesus. As Guido Pedroni recounts, the CMB was born from “an intuition, the Act of Dedication, which for us is a true consecration to God and to the Community after the example of Mary and Don Bosco.”

### **Its Way of Life and Spirituality**

The CMB way of life of the CMB is one of living faith, of opening new missionary presences, of carrying out various projects, of establishing educational relationships, and of experiencing community life. It is a way of life marked by initiative, that can even be described as “recklessness.” It is based on four pillars: *to inspire, to involve, to create, and to believe*. This means to inspire motivations, to involve people in action, to create authentic relationships, and to believe in the Providence of the Spirit that precedes and safeguards every choice made.

For the CMB, living in a “State of Mission” means witnessing to the Gospel at every moment of the day and in every place, whether it be Africa, America, Italy, a nomadic camp, or a classroom. The essential thing is to feel part of the Church’s mission, embodied in the way of Don Bosco for the good of young people.

There are three cornerstones of the spirituality of the CMB:

- *Unity*, built on fraternal dialogue;
- *Charity*, towards young people and the poor in the spirit of communion;
- *Essentiality*, embodied in the simple and familial sharing typical of the Salesian spirit.

Other distinctive elements are the conferral of a specific mandate and the awareness of the “State of Mission.” The charismatic identity is rooted in the Salesian spirituality, enriched by some unique traits of the CMB. In particular, these traits are a spirituality of quest and an

attitude of familiarity, which lay the foundations for unity among the members of the Community and of the Association.

### **Missions and Dissemination in the world**

Initially, the CMB was engaged in the Ethiopian missions. However, over time, the commitment shifted from mere leisure time activity to commitment in daily life. These have guided the fundamental CMB options. In a climate of deep friendship, of intense spiritual life rooted in the Word of God, and of concrete work for the poor and for young people, the Dedication emerged. It became clear that the missionary endeavor was meant not only for Ethiopia but for every needy place in the world.

In 1988, the first Rule of Life was drafted. In 1994 the CMB became an Association with its own legal structure in order to continue the missionary commitment and animation initiatives in the Bologna area.

All the missionary presences of the CMB arose from a call and a sign. Currently, the Community is present in Europe, Africa, South America, and Central America. The first missionary expedition took place in 1998 in Madagascar. Since then, it has spread to nine countries: Italy, Madagascar, Burundi, Haiti, Ghana, Chile, Argentina, Ukraine, and Mozambique. The two most recent "adventures" concern Mozambique and Ukraine.

In the coming months, a new presence will be opened in Mozambique. Last September, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin-Valdocco, the missionary crucifix was handed over to Angelica and, symbolically, to three other young people from Madagascar and Burundi, who were absent for bureaucratic reasons. They will form the first community in that country.

In Ukraine, several CMB members have traveled multiple times to provide aid to this war-stricken place and now, with the help of the Salesians, are trying to understand what new challenge that the Spirit is showing.

## **A Vocation of Trust and Service**

It is evident that the CMB vocation is missionary and Marian within the Salesian charism. But it also possesses its own peculiar identity, forged by history and the signs of the Lord's presence that have emerged in the Community's pivotal events. It is a story intertwined with the life of Don Bosco and that of the people who were part of it. It has never been easy to remain faithful to the call of the Spirit, as he always invites people to widen their horizon and to trust even "in the dark."

The CMB mission is one of testimony and of service, of fraternal sharing and of unrelenting trust in God. The witness of one's life, of educational service, of the sharing of goods, time, and talent resulting from community discernment, and the taking on of responsibility for every project is rooted in that undiminished trust in God after the example of Don Bosco.

*Marco Fulgaro*

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# **Profiles of families wounded in the history of Salesian holiness**

## **1. Stories of wounded families**

We are used to imagining the family as a harmonious reality, characterized by the coexistence of multiple generations and the guiding role of parents who set the norm, and of children who – in learning it – are guided by them in the experience of reality. However, families are often affected by dramas and misunderstandings or marked by wounds

that undermine their ideal structure, leaving a distorted, misleading, and deceptive image of them.

The history of Salesian holiness is also marked by stories of wounded families: families where at least one parental figure is absent, or where the presence of the mother and father becomes, for various reasons (physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual), detrimental to their children, who are now on the path towards sainthood. Don Bosco himself, who experienced the premature death of his father and the separation from his family due to the prudent plan of Mama Margaret, desired – it is no coincidence – that the Salesian work be particularly dedicated to the “poor and abandoned youth” and did not hesitate to reach out to the young people who were formed in his Oratory with an intense vocational pastoral care (demonstrating that no wound from the past is an obstacle to a full human and Christian life). It is therefore natural that Salesian holiness, which draws from the lives of many of Don Bosco’s young people who were later consecrated through him to the cause of the Gospel, bears within itself traces of wounded families. This is a logical consequence of its origins.

Of these boys and girls who grew up in contact with Salesian works, three will be presented, whose story is to be “grafted” into the biographical legacy of Don Bosco. The main characters are:

- Blessed Laura Vicuña, born in Chile in 1891, orphaned of her father and whose mother began a cohabitation in Argentina with the wealthy landowner Manuel Mora; Laura, therefore, wounded by her mother’s morally irregular situation, was ready to offer her life for her;

- The Servant of God Carlo Braga, from Valtellina, born in 1889, abandoned as a very young child by his father, while his mother was sent away due to a mix of ignorance and malicious gossip, being deemed mentally unstable. Carlo, therefore, had to face great humiliations and saw his Salesian vocation called into question multiple times by those who feared in him a compromising resurgence of the mental distress

falsely attributed to his mother;

– Finally, the Servant of God Ana María Lozano, born in 1883 in Colombia, who followed her father to the leper colony, where he was forced to move due to the appearance of dreaded leprosy. She was hindered in her religious vocation, but was finally able to realise it thanks to her providential encounter with Blessed Luigi Variara, *sdb*.

## **2. Don Bosco and the search for the father**

Like Laura, Carlo, and Ana María – marked by the absence of or the “wounds” by one or more parental figures – before them, and in a certain sense “on their behalf”, Don Bosco also experienced the absence of a strong family unit.

The *Memoirs of the Oratory* soon dwelt on the early loss of the father: Francesco died at 34, and Don Bosco – not without resorting to an expression that is, in some respects, disconcerting – acknowledged that, “God, *merciful* as He is, struck them all with a great misfortune”. Thus, among the very first memories of the future saint of the young, a lacerating experience emerged: that of his father’s lifeless body, from which his mother tried to take him away, but encountered Johnny’s resistance, “I absolutely wanted to stay”, explains Don Bosco, and then added, “If Dad doesn’t come, I don’t want to go [away]”. Margaret then responded, “Poor son, come with me, you no longer have a father”. She cried, and Johnny, who lacked a rational understanding of the situation, intuitively grasped the full extent of the drama. With an emotional intuition, he empathised and shared in his mother’s sadness, “I cried because she cried, since at that age I certainly could not understand how great a misfortune the loss of a father was”.

In front of his dead father, Johnny shows that he still considered him the centre of his life. He indeed said, “I don’t want to *go* [with you, Mom]” and not, as we would expect, “I don’t want to *come*”. His point of reference is his father – the starting point and the hoped-for point of return – in relation to whom every distancing appears destabilising.

In the tragedy of those moments, moreover, Johnny had not yet understood what the death of a parent means. He indeed hoped ("if Dad doesn't come...") that his father could still remain close to him: yet he already sensed the immobility, the silence, the inability to protect and defend him, and the impossibility of being taken by the hand to become a man in his turn. The immediately subsequent events then confirm John in the certainty that the father lovingly protects, directs, and guides, and that, when he is missing, even the best of mothers, like Margaret, can only provide partial support. On his path as an exuberant boy, the future Don Bosco, however, encounters other "fathers": his near peers Luigi Comollo, who awakened in him the emulation of virtues, and Saint Joseph Cafasso, who called him "my dear friend", gave him a "gracious gesture to come closer", and, in doing so, confirmed him in the persuasion that fatherhood is closeness, confidence, and concrete interest. But there is above all Fr Calosso, the priest who "bumped into" the curly-haired Johnny during a "popular mission" and became decisive for his human and spiritual growth. The gestures of Fr Calosso operated a true revolution in the pre-adolescent John. Fr Calosso first of all *spoke to him*. Then he *allowed him to speak*. Then he *encouraged* him. Still: he took an *interest* in the story of the Bosco family, showing that he knew how to contextualize the "moment" of that boy within the "whole" of his story. Moreover, he revealed the world to him, or rather, in some way, he brought him back to life, introducing him to new things, gifting him new words, and showing him that he had the abilities to do much and well. Finally, he *watched over* him with his gestures and gaze, and provided for his most urgent and real needs, "While I spoke, he never took his gaze off me. 'Be of good cheer, my friend, I will take care of you and of your studies'".

In Fr Calosso, John Bosco thus experienced that true fatherhood deserves a total and all-encompassing entrustment; it leads to self-awareness; it opens up an "ordered world" where rules provide security and educate to

freedom:

“I immediately placed myself in the hands of Fr Calosso. It was then that I learned what it means to have a stable guide [...], a faithful friend of the soul. He encouraged me; all the time I could, I spent with him. From that time on, I began to taste what spiritual life truly is, since before I acted more materially, like a machine doing something without knowing the reason behind it.”

The earthly father, however, is also the one who would always like to be with his son, but at a certain point can no longer do so. Fr Calosso also died; even the best father, at a certain point, steps aside, to give his son the strength of that detachment and autonomy which are typical of adulthood.

What then is, for Don Bosco, the difference between successful and failed families? One would be tempted to say that it all lies here: a “successful” family is characterised by parents who educate their children to be free, and if they let them go, it is only due to an unforeseen impossibility or for their own good. A “wounded” family, on the other hand, is one where the parent/s no longer give life, but carry within themselves problems of various kinds that hinder the child’s growth: a parent who is indifferent to them and, in the face of difficulties, even abandons them, with an attitude so different from that of the Good Shepherd.

The biographical events of Laura, Carlo, and Ana María confirm this.

### **3. Laura: a daughter who “gives life” to her own mother**

Born in Santiago, Chile, on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1891, and baptized on May 24<sup>th</sup> of the same year, Laura was the eldest daughter of José D. Vicuña, a disgraced nobleman who married Mercedes Pino, daughter of modest farmers. Three years later, a little sister, Julia Amanda, arrived, but soon after, their father died, having suffered a political defeat that undermined his health and compromised also their honour, along



with the family's economic support. Devoid of any "protection and future perspective", Laura's mother landed in Argentina, where she sought the protection of the landowner Manuel Mora: a man "of proud and haughty character", who "did not hide hatred and contempt for anyone who opposed his plans". A man, in short, who only seemingly offered protection, but was actually accustomed to taking, if necessary, by force, whatever he wanted, manipulating people. Meanwhile, he paid for Laura and her sister's studies at the boarding school of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Their mother – who was under the psychological influence of Mora – lived with him without finding the strength to break the bond. However, when Mora began to show signs of improper interest towards Laura herself, and especially when she embarked on the path of preparation for her First Holy Communion, she suddenly understood the gravity of the situation. Unlike her mother – who justified an evil (cohabitation) in view of a good (her daughters' education at the boarding school) – Laura understood that this was a morally illegitimate argument, which put her mother's soul in grave danger. Around this time, Laura also expressed the desire to become a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians herself; but her request was rejected, because she was the daughter of a 'public concubine'. And it is at this point that a change took place in Laura – received into the boarding school when 'impulsiveness, ease of resentment, irritability, impatience and propensity to appear' still dominated in her – that only Grace, combined with the person's commitment, can bring about: she asked God for her mother's conversion, offering herself for her. At that moment, Laura could move neither 'forwards' (entering the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians) nor 'backwards' (returning to her mother and Mora). With a gesture imbued with the creativity typical of saints, Laura embarks on the only path still available to her: one that reached towards the heights of transcendence and the depths of inner transformation. In her First Holy Communion resolutions she had written down:

I propose to do all that I know and can to [...]

repair the offenses that you, Lord, receive every day from people, especially from those of my family; my God, grant me a life of love, mortification, and sacrifice.

Then she finalised her intention in an “Act of Offering”, which included the sacrifice of her very life. Her confessor, recognising that the inspiration came from God but ignoring its consequences, consented, and confirmed that Laura was “aware of the offering she had just made”. She lived her last two years in silence, joy, and with a smile, and a disposition that was rich in human warmth. Yet the gaze she directed at the world – as confirmed by a photographic portrait quite different from the well-known hagiographic stylisation – revealed all the deep awareness and pain that dwelt within her. In a situation where she lacked both the “freedom from” (conditioning, obstacles, struggles) and the “freedom to” do many things, this pre-adolescent testified to “freedom for”: that of the total gift of self.

Laura did not despise but loved life: her own and that of her mother. For this reason, she offered herself. On April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1902, Good Shepherd Sunday, she asked: “If He gives his life... what prevents me from doing so for my mother?” Dying, she added: “Mom, I am dying, I myself asked Jesus for this... I have been offering my life for you for almost two years, to obtain the grace of your return!”

These are words free of regret and reproach, but full of great strength, great hope, and great faith. Laura had learned to accept her mother for who she was. She even offered herself to give her what she could not achieve by herself. When Laura died, her mother converted. *Laurita de los Andes*, the daughter, thus contributed to giving life to her mother in faith and grace.

#### **4. Carlo Braga and his mother's shadow**

Carlo Braga, who was born two years before Laura, in 1889, was also marked by his mother's fragility: when her husband abandoned her and the children, Matilde “almost

stopped eating and was visibly declining". She was then taken to Como, where she died four years later of tuberculosis, although everyone was convinced that her depression had turned into a real madness. Carlo then began to be "pitied as the son of an irresponsible [father] and an unhappy mother". However, three providential events helped him.

He later rediscovered the meaning of the first event, which occurred when he was very small: he had fallen into the hearth and his mother Matilde, in rescuing him, had consecrated him to the Virgin Mary at that very instant. Thus, the thought of his absent mother became for Carlo as a child 'a painful and consoling memory at the same time': sorrow for her absence; but also, the certainty that she had entrusted him to the Mother of all mothers, Mary Most Holy. Years later, Fr Braga wrote to a Salesian confrere struck by the loss of his own mother:

"Now your mother belongs to you much more than when she was alive. Let me tell you about my personal experience. My mother left me when I was six years old [...]. But I must confess that she followed me step by step, and when I cried desolately at the murmur of the Adda [river], while, as a little shepherd, I felt called to a higher vocation, it seemed to me that Mom was smiling at me and drying my tears".

Carlo then met Sister Giuditta Torelli, a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians who "saved little Carlo from the disintegration of his personality when at nine he realised he was just tolerated and sometimes heard people say about him, 'Poor child, why is he even in the world?'" There were indeed those who claimed that his father deserved to be shot for the betrayal of abandonment, and regarding his mother, many schoolmates replied to him, "Shut up, your mother was crazy, anyway". But Sr Giuditta loved him and helped him in a special way; she looked at him with a "new" gaze; moreover, she believed in his vocation and encouraged it.

After entering the Salesian boarding school in Sondrio, Carlo experienced the third and decisive event: he

met Fr Rua, of whom he had the honour of being the little secretary for a day. Fr Rua smiled at Carlo and, repeating the gesture that Don Bosco had once performed with him ("Little Michael, you and I will always go halves"), he "put his hand inside his own and said to him, 'we will always be friends'". If Sr Giuditta had believed in Carlo's vocation, Fr Rua allowed him to realise it, "helping him overcome all obstacles". Certainly, Carlo Braga would not lack difficulties at every stage of life – as a novice, young Salesian, and even as Provincial – manifested as *prudent* delays and sometimes taking the form of slander; but he had learned to face them. Meanwhile, he became a man capable of radiating extraordinary joy, humble, active, and marked by a gentle sense of irony—all traits that reflect his personal balance and sense of reality. Under the action of the Holy Spirit, Fr Braga himself developed a radiant fatherhood, joined by a great tenderness for the young entrusted to him. Fr Braga rediscovered love for his father, forgave him, and embarked on a journey to reconcile with him. He underwent countless hardships just to be always among his Salesians and boys. He defined himself as one who had been "put in the vineyard to act as a pole", that is, without seeking recognition but for the good of others. A father, in entrusting his son to him as a Salesian aspirant, said, "With a man like you, I would let him go even to the North Pole!" Fr Carlo was not scandalised by the needs of the children; rather, he educated them to express them, to increase their desire, "Do you need some books? Don't be afraid, write a longer list". Above all, Fr Carlo learned to look at others with that gaze of love from which he himself had once felt reached thanks to Sr Giuditta and Fr Rua. Fr Joseph Zen, now a cardinal, testified in a long passage that deserves to be read in full and begins with his mother's words to Fr Braga:

"Look, Father, this boy is not so good anymore. Perhaps he is not suitable to be accepted in this institution. I wouldn't want you to be deceived. Ah, if you only knew how he troubled me this last year! I really didn't know what to do

anymore. And if he gives you trouble here too, just let me know, and I'll come to pick him up right away". Fr Braga, instead of responding, looked me in the eyes; I too looked at him, but with my head down. I felt like a defendant accused by the prosecutor, rather than defended by my own lawyer. But the judge was on my side. With his gaze, he understood me deeply, immediately and better than all my mother's explanations. He himself, writing to me many years later, applied to himself the words of the Gospel: "*Intuitus dilexit eum* ('looking at him, he loved him')". And, from that day on, I had no more doubts about my vocation.

## **5. Ana María Lozano Díaz and the fruitful illness of her father**

The parents of Laura and Carlo had – in various ways – revealed themselves to be “distant” and “absent”. One final figure, that of Ana María, instead attests to the opposite dynamism: that of a father *too* present, who, with his presence, opened up a new path to sanctification for his daughter. Ana was born on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1883, in Oicatà, Colombia, into a large family, characterised by the exemplary Christian life of her parents. When Ana was very young, her father – one day, while washing – discovered a concerning mark on his leg. It was leprosy, which he managed to hide for some time, but was ultimately forced to acknowledge, first accepting to separate from his family, then reuniting with them at the leper colony of Agua de Dios. His wife heroically told him, “Your fate is our fate”. Thus, the healthy accepted the conditions imposed on them by adopting the rhythm of life of the sick. In this context, her father's illness conditioned Ana María's freedom of choice, forcing her to plan her life within the leper colony. Like Laura before her, she was unable to pursue her religious vocation due to her father's illness. She then experienced, inwardly, the profound rift that leprosy causes in the lives of the sick. However, Ana María was not alone. Just as Don Bosco found help through Fr Calosso, Laura in her confessor, and Carlo in Fr Rua, so she found a friend

of the soul in Blessed Luigi Variara, sdb, who assured her, "If you have a religious vocation, it will be realized", and involved her in the founding of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in 1905. It was the first Institute to welcome leprous women or daughters of lepers. When Lozano died on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1982, at almost 99 years old, after more than fifty years as Mother General, Fr Variara's insight had fully manifested in an experience that confirmed and reinforced the Salesian charism's *victim and reparative* dimension.

## 6. The saints teach

In their inescapable difference, the stories of Laura Vicuña (blessed), Carlo Braga, and Ana María Lozano (servants of God) are united by several noteworthy aspects:

a) Laura, Ana, and Carlo, like Don Bosco, suffered situations of discomfort and difficulty, variously related to their parents. One cannot forget Mama Margaret, who was forced to send Johnny away from home when the absence of paternal authority facilitated the clash with his brother Anthony; nor forget that Laura was threatened by Mora and rejected by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians as their aspirant; and that Carlo Braga suffered misunderstandings and slanders; or that her father's leprosy seemed at one point to rob Ana María of all hope for the future.

A family, wounded in various ways, therefore caused an *objective harm* to those who were part of it: to fail to acknowledge or attempt to downplay the extent of this damage would be as illusory as it is unjust. Indeed, every suffering is associated with an element of loss that the "saints", with their realism, capture and learn to name.

b) Johnny, Laura, Ana María, and Carlo then took a second, more arduous step: instead of passively enduring the situation or lamenting it, they moved with increased awareness to address the problem. In addition to a lively realism, they demonstrated the ability, which is typical of saints, to react promptly, avoiding any self-centred withdrawal. They expanded

through the gift and integrated it into the concrete conditions of life. In doing so, they bound the 'da mihi animas' to the 'cetera tolle'.

c) The limits and wounds are never erased: they are always recognised and named; in fact, they are 'lived with'. Even Blessed Alexandrina Maria da Costa and Servant of God Nino Baglieri, Venerable Andrea Beltrami and Blessed Augusto Czaratoryski, were "reached" by the Lord in the debilitating conditions of their illness. Blessed Titus Zeman, Venerable José Vandor, and Servant of God Ignatius Stuchlý – part of larger historical events that seemed to overwhelm them – taught the difficult art of persevering through hardships and allowing the Lord to make the person flourish within them. Here, the freedom of choice takes on the highest form of a freedom of adherence, in the 'fiat'!

#### *Bibliographic Note:*

To preserve the character of "witness" rather than "report" of this writing, a critical apparatus of notes has been avoided. However, it should be noted that the quotes present in the text are taken from the *Memoirs of the Oratory* of St John Bosco; from Maria Dosio, *Laura Vicuña. A Path of Salesian Youth Holiness*, LAS, Rome 2004; from *Fr Carlo Braga Recounts His Missionary and Educative Experience* (autobiographical testimony of the Servant of God) and from the *Life of Fr Carlo Braga, "The Don Bosco of China"*, written by Fr Mario Rassiga, sdb and now available in stencilled form. To these sources are added the materials from the beatification and canonisation causes, which are accessible for Don Bosco and Laura, while still reserved for the Servants of God.

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# **“Corso respiro” 2024. Salesian missionary renewal course**

*The Mission Sector of the Salesian Congregation, with its headquarters in Rome, organised a Missionary renewal course called Corso Respiro, in English language, for the missionaries who are already in the missions for many years and were desirous of a spiritual renewal and updating. The course which began at Colle Don Bosco on 11 September 2024 was successfully concluded in Rome on 26 October 2024.*

The *Corso Respiro* had 24 participants from 14 countries: Azerbaijan, Botswana, Brazil, Cambodia, Eritrea, India, Japan, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Samoa, South Sudan, Tanzania and Turkey. Though we, the participants of the course came from various countries with our diverse cultural backgrounds and belonged to the different branches of the Salesian Family, we quickly established a strong bond among ourselves, and all of us felt at home in each other's company.

One of the uniqueness of the *Corso Respiro* was that it was a missionary course in which several members of the Salesian Family took part for the first time: 16 Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), 3 Sisters of Charity of Jesus (SCG), 2 Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC), 2 Visitation Sisters of Don Bosco (VSDB) and 1 Salesian Cooperator. Another positive aspect was the lived experience with some of the lesser known and smaller members of the Salesian Family.

The seven weeks of the *Corso Respiro* was a time of spiritual renewal which enabled us to deepen our knowledge of Don Bosco, Salesian history, charism, spirit and spirituality and to know better the different members of the Salesian Family. The Salesian Lectio Divina, pilgrimages to the places connected



with the life and apostolate of Don Bosco at Becchi, Castelnuovo Don Bosco, Chieri and Valdocco, the days spent at Annecy and at Mornese, pilgrimage in the footsteps of St Paul the Apostle in Rome, participation in the general audience given by Pope Francis at the Vatican, visit to the Basilica of Sacro Cuore built by Don Bosco and the Salesian Generalate, sharing of missionary experiences by all the participants of the course, taking part in the solemn "Missionary Sending" from the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco, time spent daily in personal prayer and reflection, common eucharistic celebration and so on helped us very much to personalise and deepen our Salesian values and missionary vocation. The days we spent in Rome reflecting on the various aspects of the theology of the missions, sessions on Salesian youth ministry, personal discernment, on-going formation, missionary catechesis, emotional literacy, missionary volunteering, missionary animation of the Congregation, etc., with the help of experts in the respective fields were also very enriching. The pilgrimage to Assisi, the place sanctified by Saint Francis of Assisi, with the theme to "thank", to "re-think" and to "re-launch", was an occasion for us to thank God for our missionary vocation and ask Him for the grace to return to our mission lands with greater enthusiasm to do better in the future. Another speciality of the *Corso Respiro* was that it was not academic in nature with credits, theses, examinations and grading, but one which laid emphasis on the Word of God, sharing of experiences, reflection, prayer and contemplation with only a minimum theoretical input.

As participants of the *Corso Respiro*, we had the special privilege of witnessing the 155th "Missionary Sending" from the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco, Turin, on 29 September 2024. A total of 27 Salesians, practically all of them very young, left for different countries as missionaries after having received the missionary cross from Don Stefano Martoglio, the Vicar of the Rector Major. That memorable event reminded us of our own reception of the missionary cross and

the departure for the missions many years ago. We were also made aware of the uninterrupted "Missionary Sending" from Valdocco since 1875, and the perennial commitment of the Salesians Congregation to the missionary charism of Don Bosco.

A very enriching aspect of the *Corso Respiro* was the sharing of the vocation stories and the missionary experiences by all the participants. Each one prepared himself or herself for it in advance and shared their vocational story and missionary experiences in creative ways. While some shared their experiences in the form of simple talks, others used photos, video clips and PowerPoint presentations. There was ample time to interact with each missionary to clarify doubts and gather more information about their missionary vocation, the country and the culture of their missions. This sharing was an excellent spiritual exercise because each one of us had the opportunity to reflect deeply on our own missionary vocation and to discover the hand of God at work in our life. This interior journey was very formative and it enabled us to strengthen our missionary vocation and helped us to resolve to commit ourselves with greater generosity to *Missio Dei* ("Mission of God").

During the *Corso Respiro*, through the sharing of our missionary experiences, we were once again deeply convinced that the life of a missionary is not an easy one. Most of the missionaries work in the "peripheries" of various kinds (geographical, existential, economic, cultural, spiritual and psychological), and a good number of them in very difficult conditions, under challenging circumstances and with many privations. In many contexts there is no religious freedom to preach the Gospel openly. In other places there are governments with fascist ideologies which oppose Christianity and have anti-conversion laws in force. There are countries where one cannot reveal one's priestly or religious identity. Then there are places where neither the Catholic institution nor the religious personnel is permitted to exhibit Christian

religious symbols like the cross, the Bible, statues of Christ or saints or religious habit. There are territories where the missionaries cannot come together for meetings or spiritual exercises or lead a community life. There are nations that do not allow any foreign Christian missionary to enter their country and block all financial assistance from abroad to Christian institutions. There are mission lands that do not have enough vocations to priestly and religious life, and as a consequence, the missionary is overburdened with many works and responsibilities. Then there are situations where finding the financial resources needed to meet the ordinary expenses of running institutions like schools, boarding houses, technical institutions, youth centres, dispensaries and so on is one of the major worries of the missionaries. There are missions that lack the financial resources needed to build up the much needed infrastructure or persons qualified to teach in schools and technical institutions or offer basic health care services to the poor. This list of the problems which the missionaries face is not exhaustive. But the positive thing about the missionaries is that they are people of deep faith and happy in their missionary vocation. They are glad to be with the people and satisfied with what they have, and trusting in God's Providence they go ahead with their missionary work in spite of the numerous challenges and privations. Some of the missionaries are radiant examples of Christian holiness which make their life itself a powerful proclamation of the Gospel. These valiant missionaries deserve our appreciation, encouragement, spiritual and material support to continue with their missionary work.

A special word of appreciation to all the members of the Mission Sector who worked very hard and made many sacrifices to organise the *Corso Respiro* 2024. I hope that the Mission Sector will continue to offer this course every year, and if possible, in different languages, and with the participation of more members of the Salesian Family, especially the smaller and the lesser known ones. The course will definitely provide

opportunity for the missionaries to have a spiritual renewal, theological updating, physical and mental rest, which are essential to offer better quality missionary and pastoral service in the missions and to establish stronger bonds among the members of the Salesian Family.

*Fr. Jose Kuruvachira, sdb*

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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.

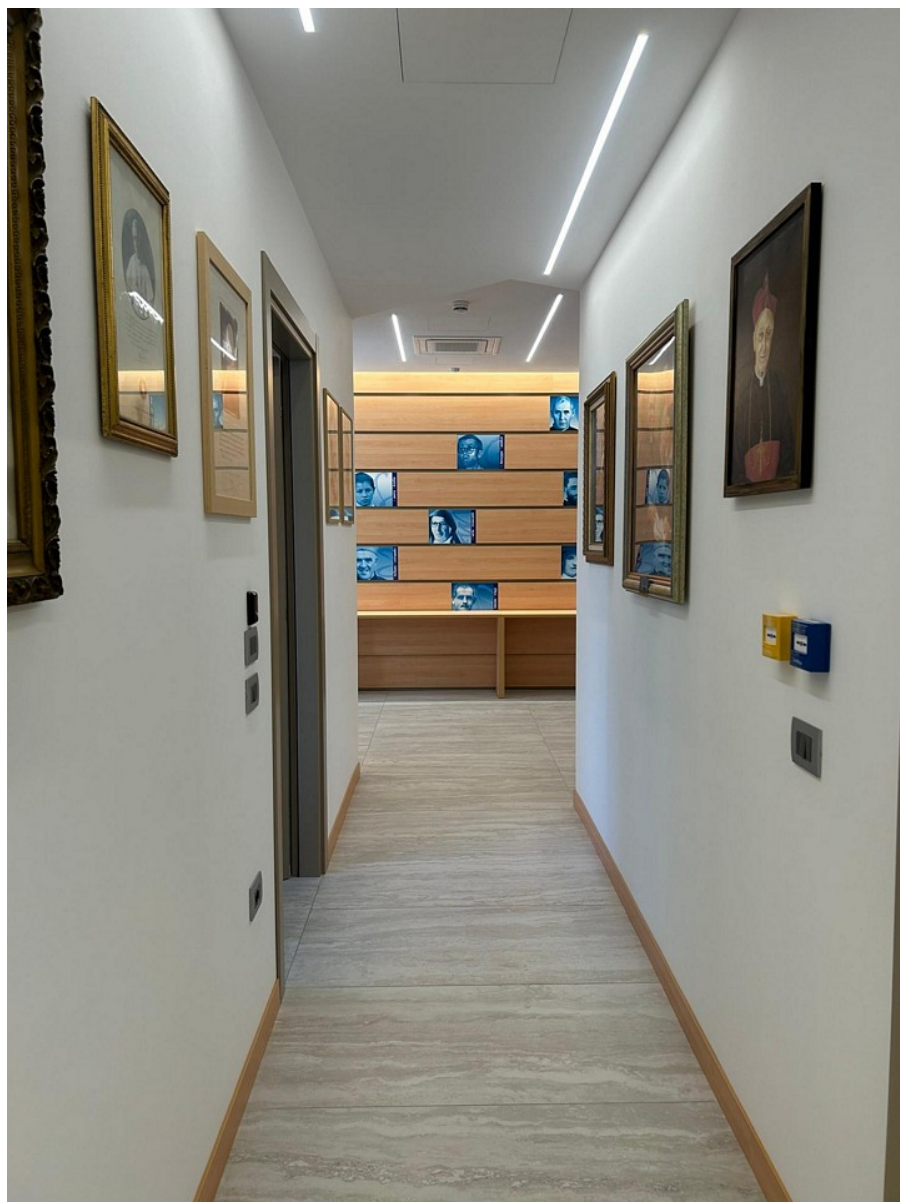
In order to promote the Causes of Beatification and Canonisation of the Salesian Family and to get to know at first hand the heritage of holiness that flourished from Don Bosco, the Postulation is available to **welcome people and groups who wish to get to know and visit these environments**, also offering 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 Santità dans la Famille Salesienne  
Santidade na Família Salesiana



