

The Venerable Monsignor Stefano Ferrando

Monsignor Stefano Ferrando was an extraordinary example of missionary dedication and episcopal service, combining the Salesian charism with a profound vocation to serve the poorest. Born in Piedmont in 1895, he entered the Salesian Congregation at a young age and, after serving in the military during the First World War, for which he was awarded the Silver Medal for Valour, he dedicated himself to apostolate in India. As Bishop of Krishnagar and then Shillong for over thirty years, he tirelessly walked among the people, promoting evangelisation with humility and profound pastoral love. He founded institutions, supported lay catechists, and embodied the motto "Apostle of Christ" in his life. His life was an example of faith, surrender to God, and total self-giving, leaving a spiritual legacy that continues to inspire the Salesian mission worldwide.

Venerable Bishop Stephen Ferrando knew how to combine his Salesian vocation with his missionary charism and episcopal ministry. Born on 28 September 1895 in Rossiglione (Genoa, diocese of Acqui) to Agostino and Giuseppina Salvi, he was distinguished by an ardent love of God and a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1904 he entered Salesian schools, first at Fossano and then at Valdocco in Turin where he got to know Don Bosco's successors and the first generation of Salesians, and undertook his priestly studies; in the meantime he nurtured the desire to leave as a missionary. On 13 September 1912, he made his first religious profession in the Salesian Congregation at Foglizzo. Called to arms in 1915, he took part in the First World War. For his courage he was awarded the silver medal for valour. Returning home in 1918, he took his perpetual vows on 26 December 1920. He was ordained a priest in Borgo San Martino (Alessandria) on

18 March 1923. On 2 December of the same year, with nine companions, he embarked in Venice as a missionary to India. On 18 December, after 16 days of travel, the group arrived in Bombay and on 23 December in Shillong, the place of his new apostolate. As novice master, he educated the young Salesians in the love of Jesus and Mary and had a great spirit of apostolate.

On 9 August 1934, Pope Pius XI appointed him Bishop of Krishnagar. His motto was "Apostle of Christ". In 1935, on 26 November, he was transferred to Shillong where he remained bishop for 34 years. While working in a difficult situation of cultural, religious and social impact, Bishop Ferrando worked tirelessly to be close to the people entrusted to him, working zealously in the vast diocese that encompassed the entire region of North East India. He preferred to travel on foot rather than by car, which he would have had at his disposal: this allowed him to meet the people, to stop and talk to them, to be involved in their lives. This live contact with people's lives was one of the main reasons for the fruitfulness of his evangelical proclamation: humility, simplicity, love for the poor led many to convert and request Baptism. He established a seminary for the formation of young Indian Salesians, built a hospital, erected a shrine dedicated to Mary Help of Christians and founded the first Congregation of indigenous sisters, the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (1942).

A man of strong character, he was not discouraged in the face of countless difficulties, which he faced with a smile and meekness. Perseverance in the face of obstacles was one of his main characteristics. He sought to unite the Gospel message with the local culture in which it was to be embedded. He was intrepid in his pastoral visits, which he made to the most remote places in the diocese, in order to recover the last lost sheep. He showed particular sensitivity and promotion for lay catechists, whom he considered complementary to the bishop's mission and on whom depended much of the fruitfulness

of the proclamation of the Gospel and its penetration into the territory. His attention to family pastoral work was also immense. Despite his numerous commitments, the Venerable was a man with a rich interior life, nourished by prayer and recollection. As a pastor, he was appreciated by his sisters, priests, Salesian brothers and in the episcopate, as well as by the people, who felt him deeply close to them. He gave himself creatively to his flock, caring for the poor, defending the untouchables, caring for the cholera patients.

The cornerstones of his spirituality were his filial bond with the Virgin Mary, his missionary zeal, his continuous reference to Don Bosco, as emerges from his writings and in all his missionary activity. The most luminous and heroic moment of his virtuous life was his departure from the diocese of Shillong. Archbishop Ferrando had to submit his resignation to the Holy Father when he was still in the fullness of his physical and intellectual faculties, to allow the appointment of his successor, who was to be chosen, according to his superiors' instructions, from among the indigenous priests he had formed. It was a particularly painful moment, experienced by the great bishop with humility and obedience. He understood that it was time to retire in prayer according to the Lord's will.

He returned to Genoa in 1969 and continued his pastoral activity, presiding over the ceremonies for the conferral of Confirmation and dedicating himself to the sacrament of Penance.

He was faithful to the Salesian religious life to the last, deciding to live in community and renouncing the privileges that his position as bishop might have reserved for him. He continued to be "a missionary" in Italy. Not "a missionary who moves, but [...] a missionary who is". His life in this last stage of life became a "radiating" one. He became a "missionary of prayer" who said: "I am glad I came away so that others could take over to do such wonderful works."

From Genoa Quarto, he continued to animate the mission in Assam, raising awareness and sending financial aid. He lived

this hour of purification with a spirit of faith, of abandonment to God's will and obedience, touching with his own hand the full meaning of the evangelical expression "we are only useless servants", and confirming with his life the *caetera tolle*, the sacrificial aspect of the Salesian vocation. He died on 20 June 1978 and was buried in Rossiglione, his native land. In 1987 his mortal remains were brought back to India.

In docility to the Spirit he carried out a fruitful pastoral action, which manifested itself in great love for the poor, in humility of spirit and fraternal charity, in the joy and optimism of the Salesian spirit.

Together with many missionaries who shared the adventure of the Spirit with him in the land of India, including Servants of God Francis Convertini, Costantine Vendrame and Orestes Marengo, Bishop Ferrando gave rise to a new missionary method: to be an itinerant missionary. Such an example is a providential warning, especially for religious congregations tempted by a process of institutionalisation and closure, not to lose the passion to go out to meet people and situations of the greatest material and spiritual poverty and destitution, going where no one wants to go and entrusting themselves as he did. "I look to the future with confidence, trusting in Mary Help of Christians... I will entrust myself to Mary Help of Christians who already saved me from so many dangers."

Becoming a sign of hope in eSwatini – Lesotho – South

Africa after 130 years

In the heart of Southern Africa, amidst the natural beauty and social challenges of eSwatini, Lesotho, and South Africa, the Salesians celebrate 130 years of missionary presence. In this time of Jubilee, General Chapter, and historical anniversaries, the Southern Africa Province shares its signs of hope: fidelity to Don Bosco's charism, educational and pastoral commitment among young people, and the strength of an international community that bears witness to fraternity and resilience. Despite the difficulties, the enthusiasm of young people, the richness of local cultures, and the spirituality of Ubuntu continue to point towards paths of future and communion.

Fraternal greetings from the Salesians of the smallest Vice-Province and the oldest presence in the Africa-Madagascar Region (since 1896, the first 5 confreres were sent by Fr. Rua). This year we thank the 130 SDBs who have worked in our 3 countries and who now intercede for us from heaven. "Small is beautiful"!

In the AFM territory live 65 million people who communicate in 12 official languages, amidst many natural wonders and great underground resources. We are among the few sub-Saharan African Countries where Catholics are a small minority compared to other Christian Churches, with only 5 million faithful.

What are the signs of hope that our young people and society are looking for?

Firstly, we are trying to overcome the infamous world records of the growing gap between rich and poor (100,000 millionaires versus 15 million unemployed young people); the lack of security and increasing violence in daily life; the collapse of the educational system, which has produced a new generation of millions of illiterates, struggling with various addictions

(alcohol, drugs...). Furthermore, 30 years after the end of the apartheid regime in 1994, society and the Church are still divided among the various communities in terms of economy, opportunities, and many unhealed wounds. Indeed, the “Rainbow Nation” community is struggling with many “gaps” that can only be “filled” with the values of the Gospel.

What are the signs of hope that the Catholic Church in South Africa is looking for?

Participating in the triennial “Joint Witness” meeting of religious superiors and bishops in 2024, we realised many signs of decline: fewer faithful, lack of priestly and religious vocations, aging, and decreasing number of religious, some dioceses bankrupt, continuous loss/decrease of Catholic institutions (medical care, education, social works or media) due to the sharp decline in committed religious and laity. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference (SACBC – which includes Botswana, eSwatini, and South Africa) indicates as a priority, assistance to young people addicted to alcohol and various other substances.

What are the signs of hope that the Salesians of Southern Africa are looking for?

We pray daily for new Salesian vocations, to be able to welcome new missionaries. Indeed, the era of the Anglo-Irish Province (until 1988) has ended, and the Africa Project did not include the southern tip of the continent. After 70 years in eSwatini (Swaziland) and 45 years in Lesotho, we have only 4 local vocations from each Kingdom. Today we have only 5 young confreres and 4 novices in initial formation. However, the smallest Vice-Province in Africa-Madagascar, through its 7 local communities, is responsible for education and pastoral care in 6 large parishes, 18 primary and secondary schools, 3 vocational training centres (TVET), and various social assistance programmes. Our provincial community, with 18 different nationalities among the 35 SDBs living in the 7 communities, is a great gift and a challenge to embrace.

As a minority and fragile Catholic community in Southern Africa

We believe that the only way forward is to build more bridges and communion between religious and dioceses. The weaker we are, the more we strive to work together. As the entire Catholic Church seeks to focus on young people, Don Bosco has been chosen by the Bishops as the Patron of Youth Ministry, and his Novena is celebrated with fervour in most dioceses and parishes at the beginning of the pastoral year.

As Salesians and Salesian Family, we constantly encourage each other: “work in progress” (constant work)

In the last two years, following the Rector Major’s invitation, we have sought to relaunch our Salesian charism, with the wisdom of a common vision and direction (starting from the annual provincial assembly), with a series of small and simple daily steps in the right direction, and with the wisdom of personal and communal conversion.

We are grateful for the encouragement of Fr. Pascual Chávez for our recent Provincial Chapter of 2024: “You know well that it is more difficult, but not impossible, to ‘re-found’ than to found [the charism], because there are habits, attitudes or behaviours that do not correspond to the spirit of our Holy Founder, Don Bosco, and his Project of Life, and have ‘citizenship rights’ [in the Province]. There is truly a need for a true conversion of every confrere to God, holding the Gospel as the supreme rule of life, and of the entire Province to Don Bosco, assuming the Constitutions as a true project of life.”

Fr. Pascual’s advice and commitment were voted on: “To become more passionate about Jesus and dedicated to young people,” investing in personal conversion (creating a sacred space in our lives, to let Jesus transform it); in communal conversion (investing in systematic monthly ongoing formation according to a theme); and in provincial conversion (promoting the provincial mentality through “One Heart One Soul” – the fruit

of our provincial assembly), and with monthly online meetings of the Directors.

On the souvenir image of our Vice-Province of Blessed Michael Rua, next to the faces of all 46 confreres and 4 novices (35 live in our 7 communities, 7 are in formation abroad, and 5 SDBs are awaiting visas, with one at San Callisto-catacombs and one missionary undergoing chemotherapy in Poland). We are also blessed by a growing number of missionary confreres who are sent by the Rector Major or for a specific period from other African Provinces to help us (AFC, ACC, ANN, ATE, MDG, and ZMB). We are very grateful to each of these young confreres. We believe that, with their help, our hope for charismatic relaunch is becoming tangible. Our Vice-Province – the smallest in Africa-Madagascar, almost 40 years after its foundation, still does not have a proper provincial house. Construction began, with the help of the Rector Major, only last year. Here too we say: “work in progress”...

We also want to share our humble signs of hope with all the other 92 Provinces in this precious period of the General Chapter. The AFM has a unique experience of 31 years of local missionary volunteers (involved in the Youth Ministry of the Bosco Youth Centre in Johannesburg since 1994), the “Love Matters” programme for healthy adolescent sexual development since 2001. Our volunteers, in fact, involved for a whole year in the life of our community, are the most precious members of our Mission and of the new groups of the Salesian Family that are slowly growing (VDB, Salesian Cooperators, and Past Pupils of Don Bosco).

Our mother house in Cape Town will celebrate its one hundred and thirtieth (130th) anniversary next year, and thanks to the one hundred and fiftieth (150th) anniversary of the Salesian Missions, we have created, with the help of the China Province, a special “St. Louis Versiglia Memorial Room,” where our Protomartyr spent a day during his return from Italy to China-Macau in May 1917.

Don Bosco 'Ubuntu' – synodal journey

"We are here thanks to you!" – Ubuntu is one of Southern African cultures' contributions to the global community. The word in the Nguni language means, "I am because you are!" (Other possible translations: "I exist because you exist"). Last year we undertook the "Eco Ubuntu" project (a 3-year environmental awareness project) involving about 15,000 young people from our 7 communities in eSwatini, Lesotho, and South Africa. In addition to the splendid celebration and sharing of the 2024 Youth Synod, our 300 young people [who participated] especially retain Ubuntu in their memories. Their enthusiasm is a source of inspiration. The AFM needs you: We are here thanks to you!

Don Bosco with his Salesians

If Don Bosco happily joked with his boys to see them cheerful and serene, he also revealed in jest with his Salesians the esteem he had for them, the desire to see them form one big family with him, poor yes, but trusting in Divine Providence, united in faith and charity.

Don Bosco's fiefdoms

In 1830 Margaret Occhiena, widow of Francis Bosco, made the division of the property inherited from her husband between her stepson Anthony and her two sons Joseph and John. It consisted, among other things, of eight plots of land comprising meadows, fields and vineyards. We know nothing precise about the criteria followed by Mamma Margaret in dividing her father's inheritance between the three of them. However, among the plots of land there was a vineyard near the Becchi (at Bric dei Pin), a field at Valcapone (or Valcappone) and another at Bacajan (or Bacaiau). In any case, these three

lands constitute the “fiefdoms” as Don Bosco jokingly termed his property.

The Becchi, as we all know, is the lowly hamlet where Don Bosco was born; Valcappone (or Valcapone) was a site to the east of the Colle under the Serra di Capriglio but down in the valley in the area known as Sbaruau (= bogeyman), because it was thickly wooded with a few huts hidden among the branches that served as a place of storage for launderers and as a refuge for brigands. Bacaian (or Bacaiau) was a field east of the Colle between the Valcapone and Morialdo plots. Here are Don Bosco’s “fiefdoms”!

The Biographical Memoirs say that for some time Don Bosco had conferred noble titles on his lay collaborators. So there was the Count of the Becchi, the Marquis of Valcappone, the Baron of Bacaiau, the three lands that Don Bosco must have known to be part of his inheritance. “For some time now he had been in the habit of jestingly conferring titles of nobility such as “Count of Becchi” or “Marquis of Valcappone” on his senior lay co-workers, particularly [Joseph] Rossi, [Charles] Gastini, [Peter] Enria, [Andrew] Pelazza, and [Joseph] Buzzetti, not only within the Oratory but also outside, especially when traveling with any of them during the summer months” (BM VIII, 101).

Among these “noble” Salesians, we know for sure, that the Count of the Becchi (or of the Bricco del Pino) was Giuseppe Rossi, the first lay Salesian, or “Coadjutor” who loved Don Bosco like a most affectionate son and was faithful to him for ever.

Once Don Bosco went to the Porta Nuova station with Joseph Rossi, who was carrying Don Bosco’s suitcase. As usual, he arrived as the train was about to leave and all the coaches were full. The windows were either closed or had passengers blocking the view to convey the impression that there were no vacant seats in their compartments. Turning to Rossi, Don Bosco rather loudly remarked, “My dear Count, I regret inconveniencing you. You shouldn’t be carrying my suitcase.” “Forget it. I feel honoured to be of service to you.” At

hearing this, the passengers closest to them exchanged surprised looks.

"Don Bosco!" they immediately shouted. "We have two seats here. Please come in!"

"But I wouldn't want to trouble you!" Don Bosco replied.

"Never mind! It's a pleasure to have you. We have plenty of room!"

And so the "Count of the Becchi" was able to get on the train with Don Bosco and the suitcase.

The pumps and a shack

Don Bosco lived and died poor. For food he was content with very little. Even a glass of wine was already too much for him, and he systematically watered it down.

"Often he forgot to drink, taken up by quite different thoughts, and his table companions would have to pour wine into his glass. If the wine was good, he then would instantly reach for water to dilute it and 'make it even better,' as he would say. With a smile he would add, 'I've renounced the world and the devil, but not the pumps.' He drank only one glass at each meal." (BM IV, 134).

Even for accommodation we know how he lived. On 12 September 1873 the General Conference of the Salesians was held to re-elect an Economer and three Councillors. On that occasion Don Bosco spoke memorable and prophetic words on the development of the Congregation. Then when he came to speak about the Superior Chapter, which by now seemed to need a suitable residence, he said, amidst universal hilarity: "Were it possible (he went on in a humorous vein) I would like to set up a shed in the middle of the playground for the chapter members so they could be isolated from all other mortals. But since they are still entitled to live on this earth, they may choose to reside in whatever house it may seem best." (BM X, 464).

Otis, botis, pija tutis

Don Bosco also had a mysterious answer for a cleric or a

student who asked him how he could know the future and guess so many secrets.

"I'll tell you," he would reply. "The key to everything is Otis, Batis, Pia, Tutis. Do you know what that means?"

"No, Father!"

"Pay attention. It's Greek." And slowly he would repeat: "Otis, Bo-tis, Pi-a, Tu-tis. Is it clear now?"

"No!"

"I know those words are hard to understand. That's why I never reveal their meaning. No one knows it and no one ever will because it would not be wise for me to reveal it. It is the big secret to all my wonders. With this magic formula I can read consciences and solve any mystery. Let's see how smart you are. See if you can make something out of it!" He would then repeat the four words while placing his forefinger successively on the questioner's forehead, nose, chin, and chest, ending with an unexpected little tap on the cheek. The boy or cleric would laugh and, while kissing Don Bosco's hand, still insist, "But, Father, at least translate those words."

"I could, but you still wouldn't understand." And then playfully he would add in Piedmontese dialect, "When they give you a beating, take it like a man!" This conclusion would set them all laughing heartily. (BM VI, 236-237). And he meant that in order to become a saint, one must accept all the sufferings that life has in store for us.

Protector of tinsmiths

Every year the young boarders went on an outing to Monsieur Olive's villa, the generous cooperator already known to us. On this occasion, the father and mother waited on the superiors while their children waited on their pupils. They also organized a lottery, giving a number to everyone of the superiors and boys so that everyone won something. In this way, the Olive family made a gift of their coach to the Oratory of St. Leo. This outing occurred during Don Bosco's visit to Marseille in 1884, and an amusing incident occurred. While the boys were playing in the gardens, a servant came

running up to Madame Olive, greatly agitated.

“Madame, the pot where the soup is cooking for the boys is leaking badly and there is no way to stop it. We will have to go without soup.” The mistress of the house, who had immense faith in Don Bosco, had a sudden idea. She summoned all the boys and told them, “Listen, if you want to have some soup, kneel down here and say a Pater, Ave, and Gloria to Don Bosco, so that he may resolder the soup pot.”

The boys obeyed and instantly the pot stopped leaking. This is an historical event, and when Don Bosco heard it, he laughed heartily, saying, “From this day on, people will say that Don Bosco is the patron of tinsmiths.” (BM XVII, 36-37).

Cardinal Augustus Hlond

The second of 11 children, his father was a railway worker. Having received a simple but strong faith from his parents, at the age of 12, attracted by Don Bosco’ reputation, he followed his brother Ignatius to Italy to dedicate himself to the Lord in the Salesian Society, and soon attracted two other brothers there: Antonio, who was to become a Salesian and a renowned musician, and Clement, who was to become a missionary. The college at Valsalice accepted him for his secondary studies. He was then admitted to the novitiate and received the cassock from Blessed Michael Rua (1896). Having made his religious profession in 1897, his superiors sent him to Rome to the Gregorian University for the philosophy course which he graduated in. From Rome he returned to Poland to do his practical training in the college at Oświęcim. His fidelity to Don Bosco’s system of education, his commitment to assistance and to the school, his dedication to the young and the amiability of his manner won him great acclaim. He also quickly made a name for himself for his musical talent.

Having completed his theology studies, he was ordained a priest on 23 September 1905 in Cracow by Bishop Nowak. In 1905-09 he attended the Faculty of Arts at the Universities of Krakow and Lvov. In 1907 he was placed in charge of the new house in Przemyśl (1907-09), from where he went on to direct the house in Vienna (1909-19). Here his valour and personal ability had an even greater scope due to the particular difficulties the institute faced in the imperial capital. Fr Augustus Hlond, with his virtue and tact, succeeded in a short time not only in sorting out the financial situation, but also in bringing about a flowering of youth work that attracted the admiration of all classes of people. Caring for the poor, the workers, the children of the people attracted him the affection of the humblest classes. Dear to the bishops and apostolic nuncios, he enjoyed the esteem of the authorities and the imperial family itself. In recognition of this social and educational work, he received some of the most prestigious honours three times.

In 1919, the development of the Austro-Hungarian Province advised a division in proportion to the number of houses, and the superiors appointed Fr Hlond as provincial of the German-Hungarian Province based in Vienna (1919-22), entrusting him with the care of the Austrian, German and Hungarian confreres. In less than three years, the young provincial opened a dozen new Salesian presences, and formed them in the most genuine Salesian spirit, raising numerous vocations.

He was in the full fervour of his Salesian activity when, in 1922, the Holy See having to provide religious accommodation for Polish Silesia still bleeding from political and national strife, the Holy Father Pius XI entrusted him with the delicate mission, appointing him as Apostolic Administrator. His mediation between Germans and Poles gave birth in 1925 to the diocese of Katowice, of which he became bishop. In 1926 he was Archbishop of Gniezno and Poznań and Primate of Poland. The following year the Pope created him Cardinal. In 1932 he founded the Society of Christ for Polish emigrants, aimed at assisting the many compatriots who had left the country.

In March 1939 he took part in the Conclave that elected Pius XII. On 1 September of the same year the Nazis invaded Poland: the Second World War began. The cardinal raised his voice against Hitler's violations of human rights and religious freedom. Forced into exile, he took refuge in France, at Hautecombe Abbey, denouncing the persecution of the Jews in Poland. The Gestapo penetrated the Abbey and arrested him, deporting him to Paris. The cardinal categorically refuses to support the formation of a pro-Nazi Polish government. He was interned first in Lorraine and then in Westphalia. Freed by allied troops, he returned to his homeland in 1945.

In the new Poland liberated from Nazism, he finds communism. He courageously defended the Poles against atheistic Marxist oppression, even escaping several assassination attempts. He died on 22 October 1948 of pneumonia, at the age of 67. Thousands of people flocked to the funeral.

Cardinal Hlond was a virtuous man, a shining example of a Salesian religious and a generous, austere pastor, capable of prophetic vision. Obedient to the Church and firm in the exercise of authority, he showed heroic humility and unequivocal constancy in times of greatest trial. He cultivated poverty and practised justice to the poor and needy. The two pillars of his spiritual life, in the school of St John Bosco, were the Eucharist and Mary Help of Christians. In the history of the Church of Poland, Cardinal Augustus Hlond was one of the most eminent figures for the religious witness of his life, for the greatness, variety and originality of his pastoral ministry, for the sufferings he faced with an intrepid Christian spirit for the Kingdom of God. The apostolic ardour distinguished the pastoral work and spiritual physiognomy of the Venerable Augustus Hlond, who took *Da mihi animas coetera tolle* as his episcopal motto. As a true son of St John Bosco he confirmed it with his life as a consecrated man and bishop, bearing witness to tireless pastoral charity.

We must remember his great love for Our Lady, learnt in his family and the great devotion of the Polish people to the

Mother of God, venerated in the shrine of Częstochowa. Moreover, from Turin, where he began his journey as a Salesian, he spread the cult of Mary Help of Christians in Poland and consecrated Poland to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. His entrustment to Mary always sustained him in adversity and in the hour of his final encounter with the Lord. He died with the Rosary beads in his hands, telling those present that the victory, when it came, would be the victory of Mary Immaculate.

Venerable Cardinal Augustus Hlond is an outstanding witness of how we must accept the way of the Gospel every day despite the fact that it brings us problems, difficulties, even persecution: this is holiness. "Jesus himself warns us that the path he proposes goes against the flow, even making us challenge society by the way we live and, as a result, becoming a nuisance. He reminds us how many people have been, and still are, persecuted simply because they struggle for justice, because they take seriously their commitment to God and to others. Unless we wish to sink into an obscure mediocrity, let us not long for an easy life, for 'whoever would save his life will lose it' (Mt 16:25). (Mt 16:25). In living the Gospel, we cannot expect that everything will be easy, for the thirst for power and worldly interests often stands in our way... the cross remains the source of our growth and sanctification." (Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, nos. 90-92).

Don Jose-Luis Carreno, Salesian missionary

Fr. José Luis Carreño (1905-1986) was described by historian Joseph Thekkedath as "the most beloved Salesian of South

India" in the first half of the twentieth century. In every place he lived, whether in British India, the Portuguese colony of Goa, the Philippines, or Spain, we find Salesians who cherish his memory with affection. Strangely, however, we still lack an adequate biography of this great Salesian, except for the lengthy obituary letter written by Fr. José Antonio Rico: "José Luis Carreño Etxeandía, God's labourer." We hope this gap will soon be filled. Fr. Carreño was one of the architects of the South Asia region, and we cannot afford to forget him.

José-Luis Carreño Etxeandía was born in Bilbao, Spain, on 23 October 1905. Orphaned of his mother at the tender age of eight, he was welcomed into the Salesian house in Santander. In 1917, at the age of twelve, he entered the Aspirantate at Campello. He recalled that in those days, "we didn't speak much about Don Bosco... But for us, a Fr. Binelli was a Don Bosco, not to mention Fr. Rinaldi, then General Prefect, whose visits left us with a supernatural sensation, like when Yahweh's messengers visited Abraham's tent."

After novitiate and post-novitiate, he did his practical training as an assistant to the novices. He must have been a brilliant cleric, because Fr. Pedro Escursell wrote about him to the Rector Major, "I am speaking at this very moment with one of the model clerics of this house. He is an assistant in the formation of personnel in this Province. He tells me that for some time he has been asking to be sent to the missions and says he has given up asking because he receives no response. He is a young man of great intellectual and moral worth."

On the eve of his priestly ordination in 1932, the young José-Luis wrote directly to the Rector Major, offering himself for the missions. The offer was accepted, and he was sent to India, where he landed in Mumbai in 1933. Just a year later, when the South India Province was established, he was appointed novice master at Tirupattur; he was only 28 years old. With his extraordinary qualities of mind and heart, he

quickly became the soul of the house and left a deep impression on his novices. "He won us over with his fatherly heart," wrote one of them, Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario of Shillong.

Fr. Joseph Vaz, another novice, often recounted how Carreño noticed him shivering with cold during a conference. "Wait a moment, hombre," said the novice master, and he went out. Shortly after, he returned with a blue jumper which he handed to Joe. Joe noticed that the jumper was strangely warm. Then he remembered that under his cassock, his master was wearing something blue... which was now missing. Carreño had given him his own jumper.

In 1942, when the British government in India interned all foreigners from countries at war with Britain, Carreño, being a citizen of a neutral country, was left undisturbed. In 1943, he received a message via Vatican Radio: he was to take the place of Fr. Eligio Cinato, Provincial of the South India Province, who had also been interned. Around the same time, Salesian Archbishop Louis Mathias of Madras-Mylapore invited him to be his vicar general.

In 1945, he was officially appointed Provincial, a position he held from 1945 to 1951. One of his very first acts was to consecrate the Province to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Many Salesians were convinced that the extraordinary growth of the South Province was due precisely to this gesture. Under Fr. Carreño's leadership, Salesian works doubled. One of his most far-sighted acts was the establishment of a university college in the remote and poor village of Tirupattur. Sacred Heart College would eventually transform the entire district.

Carreño was also the main architect of the "Indianisation" of the Salesian face in India, seeking local vocations from the outset, rather than relying solely on foreign missionaries. A choice that proved providential, first, because the flow of foreign missionaries ceased during the War; then, because independent India decided to no longer grant visas to new foreign missionaries. "If today there are more than two thousand Salesians in India, the credit for this growth must

be attributed to the policies initiated by Fr. Carreño," wrote Fr. Thekkedath in his history of the Salesians in India.

Fr. Carreño, as we have said, was not only Provincial but also vicar to Bishop Mathias. These two great men, who deeply respected each other, were nevertheless very different in temperament. The archbishop favoured severe disciplinary measures for confreres in difficulty, while Fr. Carreño preferred milder procedures. The extraordinary visitor, Fr. Albino Fedrigotti, seems to have sided with the archbishop, describing Fr. Carreño as "an excellent religious, a man with a big heart," but also "a bit too much of a poet."

There was also the accusation of being a poor administrator, but it is significant that a figure like Fr. Aurelio Maschio, great procurator and architect of Salesian works in Mumbai, firmly rejected this accusation. In reality, Fr. Carreño was an innovator and a visionary. Some of his ideas, such as involving non-Salesian volunteers for a few years of service, were viewed with suspicion at the time but are now widely accepted and actively promoted.

In 1951, at the end of his official term as Provincial, Carreño was asked to return to Spain to work with the Salesian Cooperators. This was not the real reason for his departure after eighteen years in India, but Carreño accepted serenely, though not without suffering.

In 1952, however, he was asked to go to Goa, where he remained until 1960. "Goa was love at first sight," he wrote in *Urdimbre en el telar*. Goa, for its part, welcomed him into its heart. He continued the tradition of Salesians serving as spiritual directors and confessors to diocesan clergy and was even patron of the Konkani writers' association. Above all, he governed the Don Bosco Panjim community with love, cared with extraordinary fatherliness for the many poor boys, and once again actively sought vocations to Salesian life. The first Salesians of Goa, people like Thomas Fernandes, Elias Diaz, and Romulo Noronha recounted with tears in their eyes how Carreño and others would go to the Goa Medical College, right next to the Salesian house, to donate blood and thus earn a

few rupees to buy food and other necessities for the boys. In 1961, the Indian military action and annexation of Goa took place. At that time, Fr. Carreño was in Spain and could no longer return to his beloved land. In 1962, he was sent to the Philippines as novice master. He accompanied only three groups of novices because in 1965, he asked to return to Spain. His decision stemmed from a serious divergence of vision between him and the Salesian missionaries from China, especially with Fr. Carlo Braga, superior of the Preprovince. Carreño strongly opposed the policy of sending young Filipino Salesians who had just professed to Hong Kong for philosophy studies. As it happened, in the end, the superiors accepted the proposal to keep the young Salesians in the Philippines, but by then, Carreño's request to return home had already been granted.

Don Carreño spent only four years in the Philippines, but here too, as in India, he left an indelible mark, "an immeasurable and crucial contribution to the Salesian presence in the Philippines," in the words of Salesian historian Nestor Impelido.

Back in Spain, he collaborated with the Missionary Procures of Madrid and of New Rochelle and in the animation of the Iberian Provinces. Many in Spain still remember the old missionary who visited Salesian houses, infecting the young with his missionary enthusiasm, his songs, and his music.

But in his creative imagination, a new project was taking shape. Carreño devoted himself wholeheartedly to the dream of founding a Pueblo Misionero with two objectives: preparing young missionaries – mostly from Eastern Europe – for Latin America; and offering a refuge for 'retired' missionaries like himself, who could also serve as formators. After long and painful correspondence with his superiors, the project finally took shape in the Hogar del Misionero in Alzuza, a few kilometres from Pamplona. The missionary vocational component never took off, and very few elderly missionaries actually joined Carreño. His main apostolate in these last years remained that of the pen. He left more than thirty books, five

of which were dedicated to the Holy Shroud, to which he was particularly devoted.

Fr. José-Luis Carreño died in 1986, in Pamplona at the age of 81. Despite the ups and downs of his life, this great lover of the Sacred Heart of Jesus could affirm, on the golden jubilee of his priestly ordination, "If fifty years ago my motto as a young priest was 'Christ is everything,' today, old and overwhelmed by His love, I would write it in golden letters, because in reality CHRIST IS EVERYTHING."

Fr. Ivo COELHO, SDB

The festive oratory at Valdocco

In 1935, following the canonisation of Don Bosco in 1934, the Salesians took care to collect testimonies about him. A certain Pietro Pons, who as a boy had attended the festive oratory in Valdocco for about ten years (from 1871 to 1882), and who had also attended two years of primary school (with classrooms under the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians) on 8 November gave a beautiful testimony of those years. We excerpt some passages from it, almost all unpublished.

The figure of Don Bosco

He was the centre of attraction for the whole Oratory. This is how our former Oratorian Pietro Pons remembers him at the end of the 1970s: "He no longer had vigour, but he was always calm and smiling. He had two eyes that pierced and penetrated the mind. He would appear among us: he was a joy for everyone. D. Rua, D. Lazzero were at his side as if they had the Lord in their midst. D. Barberis and all the boys were running towards

him, surrounding him, some walking beside him, some backwards, facing him. It was a fortune, a coveted privilege to be able to be close to him, to talk to him. He strolled along talking, and looking at everyone with those two eyes that turned every which way, electrifying hearts with joy."

Among the episodes that have stuck in his mind 60 years later, he recalls two in particular: "One day... he appeared alone at the front door of the sanctuary. Then a flock of boys rushed to run him over like a gust of wind. But he held the umbrella in his hand. It had handle and a shaft as thick as that of the peasants. He raised it and, using it like a sword, juggled it to repel that affectionate assault, o the right, to the left, to open up a passage. He pointed it at one, then off to the side, but in the meantime the others approached from the other side. So the game, the joke continued, bringing joy to hearts, eager to see the good Father return from his journey. He looked like a village priest of the good-natured kind."

Games and teatrino

A Salesian oratory without games is unthinkable. The elderly former pupil recalls: "the courtyard was occupied by a building, the church of Mary Help and at the end of a low wall... a sort of hut rested on the left corner, where there was always someone to watch over those who entered... As soon as you entered the playground on the right, there was a swing with only one seat, then the parallel bars and the fixed bar for the older children, who enjoyed doing their spins and somersaults, and also the trapeze, and the single flying step, which were, however, near the sacristies beyond St Joseph's chapel. And again: "This courtyard was of a beautiful length and lent itself very well to speed races starting from the side of the church and returning there on the way back. Barra rotti, sack races and a game called pignatte were also played. The latter games were announced on the previous Sunday. So was the greasy pole but the pole was planted with the thin end at the bottom so that it would be more difficult to climb. There were lotteries, and the ticket was paid for with a penny or

two. Inside the house was a small library kept in a cupboard."

As well as games there was the famous teatrino "little theatre" where genuine dramas such as "The Crusader's Son" were performed, Don Cagliero's romanze were sung, and musicals such as the Cobbler were presented by the legendary Carlo Gastini [a brilliant past pupil leader]. The play, attended free of charge by the parents, was held in the hall under the nave of the church of Mary Help, but the former oratory boy also recalls that "once it was performed at the Moretta house" [today's parish church near the square]. Poor people lived there in the most squalid poverty. In the cellars that can be seen under the balcony there was a poor mother who would carry her son Charles outside at midday. She had to carry him on her shoulders to sunbathe."

Religious services and formation meetings

At the festive oratory there was no lack of religious services on Sunday mornings: Holy Mass with Holy Communion, prayers of the good Christian; followed in the afternoon by recreation, catechism, and Don Giulio Barberis' sermon. By now an old man, "Don Bosco never came to say Mass or to preach, but only to visit and stay with the boys during recreation... The catechists and assistants had their pupils with them in church during the services and taught them catechism. A little lesson was given to everyone. The lesson was required to be memorised every Sunday and then also an explanation." The solemn feasts ended with a procession and a snack for all: "On leaving church after mass there was breakfast. A young man on the right outside the door would give us a loaf of bread, another on the left would put two slices of salami on it with a fork." Those boys were content with little, but they were delighted. When the boarders joined the oratorians for the singing of vespers, their voices could be heard in Via Milano and Via Corte d'appello!

Formation group meetings were also held at the festive oratory. In the house near the church of St Francis, there was

“a small, low room that could hold about twenty people...In the room there was a small table for the lecturer, there were benches for the meetings and conferences for the older boys in general, and a meeting of the St Aloysius sodality, almost every Sunday.”

Who were the Oratorians?

Of his 200 or so companions – but their number diminished in the winter due to the return of seasonal workers to their families – our sprightly old man recalled that many were from Biella “almost all ‘bic’, that is, they carried the wooden bucket full of lime and the wicker basket full of bricks to the bricklayers at the buildings.” Others were “apprentice bricklayers, mechanics, tinsmiths.” Poor apprentices: they worked from morning to night every day and only on Sundays could they afford a bit of recreation “at Don Bosco’s” (as his oratory was called): “We played Asino vola, under the direction of the then Br Milanese [a future priest who was a great missionary in Patagonia]. Br Ponzano, later a priest, was a gym teacher. He made us do free exercises, with sticks, on the equipment.”

Pietro Pons’ memories are much broader, as rich in distant suggestions as they are pervaded by a shadow of nostalgia; they wait to be known in full. We hope to do so soon.

Salesian House of Castel Gandolfo

Amidst the green hills of the Castelli Romani and the tranquil waters of Lake Albano lies a place where history, nature, and spirituality converge in a unique way: Castel Gandolfo. In this setting rich in imperial memory, Christian faith, and

scenic beauty, the Salesian presence stands as a steadfast point of welcome, education, and pastoral life. The Salesian House, with its parish, educational, and cultural activities, continues the mission of St. John Bosco, offering believers and visitors an experience of a living and open Church, immersed in an environment that invites contemplation and fraternity. It is a community that, for nearly a century, has walked in service of the Gospel at the very heart of Catholic tradition.

A place blessed by history and nature

Castel Gandolfo is a jewel of the Castelli Romani, located about 25 km from Rome, nestled in the natural beauty of the Alban Hills and overlooking the picturesque Lake Albano. At an altitude of about 426 metres, this place stands out for its mild and welcoming climate, a microclimate that seems prepared by Providence to receive those seeking rest, beauty, and silence.

Even in Roman times, this territory was part of the *Albanum Caesaris*, an ancient imperial estate frequented by emperors since the time of Augustus. However, it was Emperor Tiberius who first resided here permanently, while later Domitian built a splendid villa, the remains of which can still be seen in the papal gardens. The Christian history of the place began with Constantine's donation to the Church of Albano, a gesture that symbolically marked the transition from imperial glory to the light of the Gospel.

The name Castel Gandolfo derives from the Latin *Castrum Gandulphi*, the castle built by the Gandolfi family in the 12th century. When in 1596 the castle passed to the Holy See, it became the summer residence of the Popes, and the bond between this place and the ministry of the Successor of Peter became deep and lasting.

The Vatican Observatory: contemplating the heavens, praising the Creator

Of particular spiritual significance is the Vatican Observatory, founded by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 and relocated in the 1930s to Castel Gandolfo due to Rome's light pollution. It testifies to how even science, when directed towards truth, leads to praising the Creator.

Over the years, the Observatory has contributed to major astronomical projects such as the *Carte du Ciel* and the discovery of numerous celestial objects.

With further deterioration of observing conditions even in the Castelli Romani, in the 1980s scientific activity shifted primarily to the Mount Graham Observatory in Arizona (USA), where the *Vatican Observatory Research Group* continues astrophysical research. Castel Gandolfo, however, remains an important centre of study. Since 1986, it has hosted the *Vatican Observatory Summer School* every two years, dedicated to astronomy students and graduates from around the world. The Observatory also organises specialist conferences, public outreach events, meteorite exhibitions, and presentations of historical and artistic materials on astronomical themes, all in a spirit of research, dialogue, and contemplation of the mystery of creation.

A church at the heart of the city and of the faith

In the 17th century, Pope Alexander VII entrusted Gian Lorenzo Bernini with the construction of a palatine chapel for the employees of the Pontifical Villas. The project, initially conceived in honour of St. Nicholas of Bari, was ultimately dedicated to St Thomas of Villanova, an Augustinian canonised in 1658. The church was consecrated in 1661 and entrusted to the Augustinians, who administered it until 1929. With the signing of the Lateran Treaty, Pope Pius XI entrusted the same Augustinians with the pastoral care of the new Pontifical Parish of St. Anne in the Vatican, while the Church of St. Thomas of Villanova was later entrusted to the Salesians.

The architectural beauty of this church, a product of Baroque

genius, serves faith and the encounter between God and man. Today, numerous weddings, baptisms, and liturgies are celebrated here, attracting faithful from all over the world.

The Salesian house

The Salesians have been present in Castel Gandolfo since 1929. In those years, the village experienced significant demographic and tourist development, further enhanced by the beginning of papal celebrations in the Church of St. Thomas of Villanova. Every year, on the Solemnity of the Assumption, the Pope celebrated Holy Mass in the pontifical parish, a tradition begun by St. John XXIII on 15 August 1959, when he walked out of the Pontifical Palace to celebrate the Eucharist among the people. This custom continued until the pontificate of Pope Francis, who discontinued summer stays in Castel Gandolfo. In 2016, the entire complex of the Pontifical Villas was transformed into a museum and opened to the public.

The Salesian house was part of the Roman Province and, from 2009 to 2021, of the Central Italy Salesian Circumscription. Since 2021, it has been under the direct responsibility of the Central Office, with a Director and community appointed by the Rector Major. Currently, the Salesians present come from various nations (Brazil, India, Italy, Poland) and are active in the parish, chaplaincies, and oratory.

The pastoral spaces, though belonging to the Vatican City State and thus considered extraterritorial, are part of the Diocese of Albano, in whose pastoral life the Salesians actively participate. They are involved in diocesan adult catechesis, teaching at the diocesan theological school, and in the Presbyteral Council as representatives of consecrated life.

In addition to the parish of St. Thomas of Villanova, the Salesians also manage two other churches: Mary Help of Christians (also called "St. Paul," after the name of the neighbourhood) and Madonna del Lago, desired by St. Paul VI.

Both were built between the 1960s and 1970s to meet the pastoral needs of the growing population.

The parish church designed by Bernini is now a destination for numerous weddings and baptisms celebrated by faithful from around the world. Every year, with the necessary permissions, dozens, sometimes hundreds, of celebrations take place here. The parish priest, in addition to leading the parish community, is also chaplain of the Pontifical Villas and provides spiritual accompaniment to Vatican employees working there.

The oratory, currently run by laypeople, sees the direct involvement of the Salesians, especially in catechesis. On weekends, feast days, and during summer activities like Estate Ragazzi, Salesian students residing in Rome also collaborate, offering valuable support. At the Church of Mary Help of Christians, there is also an active theatre, with parish groups organising performances—a place of encounter, culture, and evangelisation.

Pastoral life and traditions

Pastoral life is marked by the main feasts of the year: St John Bosco in January, Mary Help of Christians in May with a procession in the St. Paul neighbourhood, the feast of the Madonna del Lago—and thus the Feast of the Lake—on the last Saturday of August, with the statue carried in procession on a boat across the lake. This latter celebration is increasingly involving neighbouring communities, attracting many participants, including motorcyclists, with whom moments of encounter have been initiated.

On the first Saturday of September, the patronal feast of Castel Gandolfo is celebrated in honour of St. Sebastian, with a large town procession. Devotion to St. Sebastian dates back to 1867, when the town was spared from an epidemic that severely affected nearby villages. Although the liturgical memorial falls on 20 January, the local feast is celebrated in September, both in memory of the protection received and for

practical and climatic reasons.

On 8 September, the patron of the church, St. Thomas of Villanova, is celebrated, coinciding with the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On this occasion, the feast of families is also held, aimed at couples who married in Bernini's church. They are invited to return for a communal celebration, a procession, and a shared meal. The initiative has been well received and is becoming a lasting tradition.

A curiosity: the letterbox

Next to the entrance of the Salesian house is a post-box, known as the "Mailbox of Correspondence," considered the oldest still in use. It dates back to 1820, twenty years before the introduction of the world's first postage stamp, the famous *Penny Black* (1840). It is an official mailbox of the Italian Post Office still in operation, but also a symbolic invitation to communication, dialogue, and opening one's heart. The return of Pope Leo XIV to his summer residence will surely increase its use.

Castel Gandolfo remains a place where the Creator speaks through the beauty of creation, the proclaimed Word, and the witness of a Salesian community that, in the simplicity of Don Bosco's style, continues to offer welcome, education, liturgy, and fraternity, reminding those who approach these lands in search of peace and serenity that true peace and serenity are found only in God and His grace.

Don Bosco and the Church of

the Holy Shroud

The Holy Shroud of Turin, one of Christianity's most revered relics, has a thousand-year history intertwined with that of the House of Savoy and the Savoyard city. Arriving in Turin in 1578, it became an object of profound devotion, with solemn exhibitions linked to historical and dynastic events. In the 19th century, figures such as Saint John Bosco and other Turin saints promoted its veneration, contributing to its widespread appeal. Today, preserved in Guarini's Chapel, the Shroud is at the centre of scientific and theological studies. In parallel, the Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome, linked to the House of Savoy and the Piedmontese community, represents another significant place, where Don Bosco attempted to establish a Salesian presence.

The Holy Shroud of Turin, improperly called the "Santo Sudario" in Italian due to the French custom of calling it "Le Saint Suaire" was owned by the House of Savoy since 1463, and was transferred from Chambery to the new Savoy capital in 1578.

In that same year, the first exposition was held, commissioned by Emanuele Filiberto in homage to Card. Charles Borromeo who came to Turin on pilgrimage to venerate it.

Expositions in the 19th century and veneration of the Shroud

In the 19th century, the Expositions in 1815, 1842, 1868 and 1898 are particularly worthy of note: the first for the return of the Savoy family to their states, the second for the wedding of Victor Emmanuel II to Maria Adelaide of Habsburg-Lorraine, the third for the wedding of Umberto I to Margaret of Savoy-Genoa, and the fourth for the Universal Exhibition.

The nineteenth-century Turin saints, Cottolengo, Cafasso and Don Bosco, were devotees of the Holy Shroud, emulating the example of Blessed Sebastiano Valfré, the apostle of Turin during the siege of 1706.

The *Biographical Memoirs* assure us that Don Bosco venerated it in particular at the Exposition in 1842 and 1868, when he also brought the boys from the oratory to see it (BM II, 91; IX, 70-71).

Today, the priceless canvas, donated by Umberto II of Savoy to the Holy See, is entrusted to the Archbishop of Turin's "Pontifical Custodian" and kept in the sumptuous Guarini Chapel behind the Cathedral.

In Turin there is also, in Via Piave at the corner of Via San Domenico, the Church of the Holy Shroud, built by the Confraternity of the same name and rebuilt in 1761. Adjacent to the church is the "Sindonological Museum" and the headquarters of the "Cultores Sanctae Sindonis" Sodality, a centre for sindonological studies to which Salesian scholars such as Fr Natale Noguier de Malijay, Fr Antonio Tonelli, Fr Alberto Caviglia, Fr Pietro Scotti and, more recently, Fr Pietro Rinaldi and Fr Luigi Fossati, to name but the main ones, have made valuable contributions.

The Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome

A [Church of the Holy Shroud](#) also exists in Rome along the street of the same name that runs from Largo Argentina parallel to Corso Vittorio. Constructed in 1604 to a design by Carlo di Castellamonte, it was the Church of the Piedmontese, Savoyards and Niçois, built by the Confraternity of the Holy Shroud that had sprung up in Rome at that time. After 1870 it became the special church of the House of Savoy.

During his stays in Rome, Don Bosco celebrated Mass in that church several times and formulated a plan for it and the adjacent house in line with the purpose of the then extinct Confraternity, dedicated to charitable works for abandoned youth, the sick and prisoners.

The Confraternity had ceased operating at the beginning of the century and the ownership and administration of the church had passed to the Sardinian Legation to the Holy See. By the 1960s, the church was in need of major renovations, so much so that in 1868 it was temporarily

closed.

But already in 1867 Don Bosco had come up with the idea of proposing to the Savoy Government to hand over the use and administration of the church to him, offering his collaboration in money to complete the restoration work. Perhaps he foresaw the entry of the Piedmontese troops into Rome not far away and, wishing to open a house there, he thought of doing so before the situation precipitated making it more difficult to obtain the Holy See's approval and the State's respect for agreements (BM IX, 192, 223, 301).

He then presented the request to the government. In 1869, during a stopover in Florence, he prepared a draft agreement which, on reaching Rome, he presented to Pius IX. Having obtained his assent, he moved on to the official request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but, unfortunately, the occupation of Rome then came to jeopardise the whole affair. Don Bosco himself saw the inappropriateness of insisting. Taking on a Roman church belonging to the Savoy by a religious Congregation with its Mother House in Turin at that time, could have appeared an act of opportunism and servility towards the new Government.

After the breach of Porta Pia, with a minute dated 2 December 1871, the Church of the Most Holy Shroud was annexed to the Royal House and designated as the official seat of the Palatine Chief Chaplain. Following Pius IX's interdict on the Chapels of the former Apostolic Palace of the Quirinal, it was in the Church of the Shroud that all the sacred rites of the Royal Family took place.

In 1874 Don Bosco again tested the ground with the Government. But, unfortunately, intemperate news leaked from the newspapers definitively put a stop to the project (BM X, 532-533).

With the end of the monarchy on 2 June 1946, the entire Shroud complex passed under the management of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic. In 1984, following the new Concordat which sanctioned the abolition of the Palatine Chapels, the Church of the Shroud

was entrusted to the Military Ordinariate and has remained so to this day.

However, we would like to recall the fact that Don Bosco, in seeking a favourable opportunity to open a house in Rome, set his eyes on the Church of the Holy Shroud.

The Tenth Hill (1864)

Don Bosco's dream of the "Tenth Hill", recounted in October 1864, is one of the most evocative passages in Salesian tradition. In it, the saint finds himself in a vast valley filled with young people: some already at the Oratory, others yet to be met. Guided by a mysterious voice, he must lead them over a steep embankment and then through ten hills, symbolising the Ten Commandments, towards a light that prefigures Paradise. The chariot of Innocence, the penitential ranks, and the celestial music paint an educational fresco: they show the effort of preserving purity, the value of repentance, and the irreplaceable role of educators. With this prophetic vision, Don Bosco anticipates the worldwide expansion of his work and the commitment to accompany every young person on the path to salvation.

It came to him the night of October 21, and he narrated it the following night. [Surprisingly] C ...E... a boy from Casale Monferrato, had the same dream, during which he seemed to be with Don Bosco, talking to him. In the morning the boy was so deeply impressed that he went to tell it all to his teacher, who urged him to report to Don Bosco. The youngster met Don Bosco as he was coming down the stairs to look for the boy and tell him the very same dream. [Here is the dream]:

Don Bosco seemed to be in a vast valley swarming with

thousands and thousands of boys-so many, in fact, that their number surpassed belief. Among them he could see all past and present pupils; the rest, perhaps, were yet to come. Scattered among them were priests and clerics then at the Oratory.

A lofty bank blocked one end of the valley. As Don Bosco wondered what to do with all those boys, a voice said to him: "Do you see that bank? Well, both you and the boys must reach its summit."

At Don Bosco's word, all those youngsters dashed toward the bank. The priests too ran up the slope, pushing boys ahead, lifting up those who fell, and hoisting on their shoulders those who were too tired to climb further. Father Rua, his sleeves rolled up, kept working hardest of all, gripping two boys at a time and literally hurling them up to the top of the bank where they landed on their feet and merrily scampered about. Meanwhile Father Cagliero and Father Francesia ran back and forth encouraging the youngsters to climb.

It didn't take long for all of them to make it to the top. "Now what shall we do?" Don Bosco asked.

"You must all climb each of the ten bills before you," the voice replied.

"Impossible! So many young, frail boys will never make it!"

"Those who can't will be carried," the voice countered. At this very moment, at the far end of the bank, appeared a gorgeous, triangular-shaped wagon, too beautiful for words. Its three wheels swiveled in all directions. Three shafts rose from its comers and joined to support a richly embroidered banner, carrying in large letters the inscription *Innocentia* [Innocence]. A wide band of rich material was draped about the wagon, bearing the legend: *Adiutorio Dei Altissimi, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*. [With the help of the Most High, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.]

Glittering with gold and gems, the wagon came to a stop in the boys' midst. At a given order, five hundred of the smaller ones climbed into it. Among the untold thousands, only these few hundred were still innocent.

As Don Bosco kept wondering which way to go, a wide, level road strewn with thorns opened before him. Suddenly there also appeared six white-clad former pupils who had died at the Oratory. Holding aloft another splendid banner with the inscription *Poenitentia* [Penance], they placed themselves at the head of the multitude which was to walk the whole way. As the signal to move was given, many priests seized the wagon's prow and led the way, followed by the six white-clad boys and the rest of the multitude.

The lads in the wagon began singing *Laudate pueri Dominum* [Praise the Lord, you children – Ps. 112, 1] with indescribable sweetness.

Don Bosco kept going forward, enthralled by their heavenly melody, but, on an impulse, he turned to find out if the boys were following. To his deep regret he noticed that many had stayed behind in the valley, while many others had turned back. Heartbroken, he wanted to retrace his steps to persuade those boys to follow him and to help them along, but he was absolutely forbidden to do so. "Those poor boys will be lost!" he protested.

"So much the worse for them," he was told. "They too received the call but refused to follow you. They saw the road they had to travel. They had their chance."

Don Bosco insisted, pleaded, and begged, but in vain.

"You too must obey," he was told. He had to walk on.

He was still smarting with this pain when he became aware of another sad fact: a large number of those riding in the wagon had gradually fallen off, so that a mere hundred and fifty still stood under the banner of innocence. His heart was aching with unbearable grief. He hoped that it was only a dream and made every effort to awake, but unfortunately it was all too real. He clapped his hands and heard their sound; he groaned and heard his sighs resound through the room; he wanted to banish this horrible vision and could not.

"My dear boys," he exclaimed at this point of his narration, "I recognized those of you who stayed behind in the valley and those who turned back or fell from the wagon. I saw you all.

You can be sure that I will do my utmost to save you. Many of you whom I urged to go to confession did not accept my invitation. For heaven's sake, save your souls."

Many of those who had fallen off the wagon joined those who were walking. Meanwhile the singing in the wagon continued, and it was so sweet that it gradually abated Don Bosco's sorrow. Seven hills had already been climbed. As the boys reached the eighth, they found themselves in a wonderful village where they stopped for a brief rest. The houses were indescribably beautiful and luxurious.

In telling the boys of this village, Don Bosco remarked, "I could repeat what St. Teresa said about heavenly things-to speak of them is to belittle them. They are just too beautiful for words. I shall only say that the doorposts of these houses seemed to be made of gold, crystal, and diamonds all at once. They were a most wonderful, satisfying, pleasing sight. The fields were dotted with trees laden simultaneously with blossoms, buds, and fruit. It was out of this world!" The boys scattered all over, eager to see everything and to taste the fruit.

(It was in this village that the boy from Casale met Don Bosco and talked at length with him. Both of them remembered quite vividly the details of their conversation. The two dreams had been a singular coincidence.)

Here another surprise awaited Don Bosco. His boys suddenly looked like old men: toothless, wrinkled, white-haired, bent over, lame, leaning on canes. He was stunned, but the voice said, "Don't be surprised. It's been years and years since you left that valley. The music made your trip seem so short. If you want proof, look at yourself in the mirror and you will see that I am telling the truth." Don Bosco was handed a mirror. He himself had grown old, with his face deeply lined and his few remaining teeth decayed.

The march resumed. Now and then the boys asked to be allowed to stop and look at the novelties around them, but he kept urging them on. "We are neither hungry nor thirsty," he said.

"We have no need to stop. Let's keep going!"

Far away, on the tenth hill, arose a light which grew increasingly larger and brighter, as though pouring from a gigantic doorway. Singing resumed, so enchanting that its like may possibly be heard and enjoyed only in paradise. It is simply indescribable because it did not come from instruments or human throats. Don Bosco was so overjoyed that he awoke, only to find himself in bed.

He then explained his dream thus: "The valley is this world; the bank symbolizes the obstacles we have to surmount in detaching ourselves from it; the wagon is self-evident. The young sters on foot were those who lost their innocence but repented of their sins." He also added that the ten hills symbolized the Ten Commandments whose observance leads to eternal life. He concluded by saying that he was ready to tell some boys confidentially what they had been doing in the dream: whether they had remained in the valley or fallen off the wagon.

When he came down from the stand, a pupil, Anthony Ferraris, approached him and told him within our hearing that, the night before, he had dreamed that he was with his mother and that when the latter had asked him whether he would be coming home next Easter, he had replied that by then he would be in paradise. He then whispered something else in Don Bosco's ear. Anthony Ferraris died on March 16, 1865.

We jotted down Don Bosco's dream that very evening, October 22, 1864, and added this note: "We are sure that in explaining the dream Don Bosco tried to cover up what is most mystifying, at least in some instances. The explanation that the ten hills symbolized the Ten Commandments does not convince us. We rather believe that the eighth hill on which Don Bosco called a halt and saw himself as an old man symbolizes the end of his life in the seventies. The future will tell."

The future is now past; facts have borne out our belief. The dream revealed Don Bosco's life-span. For comparative purposes, let us match this dream with that of The Wheel of Eternity, which we came to learn only years later. In that

dream each tum of the wheel symbolized a decade, and this also seems to be the case in the trek from hill to hill. Each hill stands for a decade, and the ten hills represent a century, man's maximum life-span. In his life's first decade, Don Bosco, as a young boy, begins his mission among his companions at Becchi and starts on his journey; he climbs seven hills-seven decades-and reaches the age of seventy; he climbs the eighth hill and goes no farther. He sees beautiful buildings and meadows, symbols of the Salesian Society which, through God's infinite goodness, has grown and borne fruit. He has still a long way to go on the eighth hill and therefore sets out again, but he does not reach the ninth because he wakes up. Thus he did not live out his eighth decade; he died at the age of seventy-two years and five months.

What do our readers think of this interpretation? On the following evening, Don Bosco asked us our opinion of the dream. We replied that it did not concern only the boys, but showed also the worldwide spread of the Salesian Society.

"What do you mean?" a confrere countered. "We already have schools at Mirabella and Lanzo, and we'll have a few more in Piedmont. What else do you want?"

"No," we insisted. "This dream portends far greater things."

Don Bosco smiled and nodded approval.

(1864, BM VII, 467-471)

Female education with Saint Francis de Sales

The educational thinking of Saint Francis de Sales reveals a profound and innovative vision of the role of women in the Church and society of his time. Convinced that the education of women was fundamental for the moral and spiritual growth of

the entire community, the holy bishop of Geneva promoted a balanced education that respected female dignity but was also attentive to fragility. With a paternal and realistic gaze, he was able to recognise and value the qualities of women, encouraging them to cultivate virtue, culture, and devotion. Founder of the Visitation with Jane de Chantal, he vigorously defended the female vocation even in the face of criticism and prejudice. His teaching continues to offer relevant insights into education, love, and freedom in choosing one's own life.

During his trip to Paris in 1619, Francis de Sales met Adrien Bourdoise, a reformist priest, who reproached him for paying too much attention to women. The bishop calmly replied that women were half of humanity and that by forming good Christian women, there would be good young people, and with good young people, there would be good priests. After all, did not St. Jerome devote a great deal of time and various writings to them? Francis de Sales recommended the reading of his letters to Madame de Chantal, who found in them, among other things, numerous instructions "for educating her daughters". It can be deduced that, in his eyes, the role of women in education justified the time and attention devoted to them.

Francis de Sales and the women of his time

"We must help the female sex, which is despised," the Bishop of Geneva once said to Jean-François de Blonay. To understand Francis de Sales' concerns and thinking, it is necessary to place him in his own time. It must be said that a number of his statements still seem very much in line with the thinking of the current time. In the women of his time, he deplored "this feminine tenderness towards themselves," their ease "in pitying themselves and desiring to be pitied," a greater propensity than men "to give credence to dreams, to be afraid of spirits, and to be credulous and superstitious," and above all, the "twists and turns of their vain thoughts." Among the advice he gave to Madame de Chantal

on the education of her daughters, he wrote without hesitation, "Remove vanity from their souls; it is born almost at the same time as sex."

However, women are endowed with great qualities. He wrote about Madame de La Fléchère, who had just lost her husband, "If I had only this perfect sheep in my flock, I would not be distressed at being the shepherd of this afflicted diocese. After Madame de Chantal, I do not know if I have ever met a stronger soul in a female body, a more reasonable spirit and a more sincere humility." Women are by no means the last in the practice of virtue. "Have we not seen many great theologians who have said wonderful things about virtue, but not in order to practise it, while, on the contrary, there are many holy women who cannot speak of virtue, but who nevertheless know very well how to practise it?"

Married women are the worthiest of admiration, "Oh my God! How pleasing to God are the virtues of a married woman; for they must be strong and excellent to endure in such a vocation!" In the struggle to preserve chastity, he believed that "women have often fought more courageously than men."

Founder of a congregation of women together with Jeanne de Chantal, he was in constant contact with the first religious. Alongside praise, criticism began to rain down. Pushed into these trenches, the founder had to defend himself and defend them, not only as religious women, but also as women. In a document that was to serve as a preface to the Constitutions of the Visitandines, we find the polemical vein he was capable of displaying, directing himself no longer against 'heresiarchs' but against malicious and ignorant 'censors':

The presumption and inappropriate arrogance of many children of this century, who ostentatiously condemn everything that is not in accordance with their spirit [...], gives me the opportunity, or rather compels me, to write this Preface, my dearest Sisters, to arm and defend your holy vocation against

the barbs of their pestilent tongues, so that good and pious souls, who are undoubtedly attached to your lovable and honoured Institute, may find here how to repel the arrows shot by the temerity of these bizarre and insolent censors.

Perhaps foreseeing that such a preamble might damage the cause, the founder of the Visitation wrote a second, softened edition, with the aim of highlighting the fundamental equality of the sexes. After quoting Genesis, he commented as follows, "Woman, therefore, no less than man, has the grace of having been made in the image of God; equal honour in both sexes; their virtues are equal."

The education of daughters

The enemy of true love is "vanity". This was the flaw that Francis de Sales, like the moralists and educators of his time, feared most in the education of young women. He points out several manifestations of it. Look at "these young ladies of the world, who, having established themselves well, go about puffed up with pride and vanity, with their heads held high, their eyes open, eager to be noticed by the worldly."

The Bishop of Geneva amuses himself a little in mocking these "society girls", who "wear loose, powdered hats", with their heads "shod like horses' hooves", all "plumed and flowered beyond description" and "laden with frills". There are those who "wear dresses that are tight and very uncomfortable, just to show that they are slim; this is true madness that mostly makes them incapable of doing anything."

What then are we to think of certain artificial beauties transformed into "boutiques of vanity"? Francis de Sales prefers a "clear and clean face;" he wants "nothing affected, because everything that is embellished is displeasing." Should we therefore condemn all "artifice"? He readily admits that "in the case of some defect of nature, it must be corrected so that the correction can be seen, but

stripped of all artifice.”

And perfume? the preacher asked himself when speaking of Mary Magdalene. “It is an excellent thing,” he replied, “even the one who is perfumed perceives something excellent in it,” adding, as a connoisseur, that “Spanish musk is highly prized throughout the world.” In the chapter on “decency in dress,” he allows young women to wear clothes with various adornments, “because they may freely desire to be pleasing to many, but with the sole purpose of winning a young man with a view to holy matrimony.” He concluded with this indulgent observation, “What do you want? It is only fitting that young ladies should be a little pretty.”

It should be added that reading the Bible had prepared him not to be harsh in the face of female beauty. In the lover of the *Song of Songs*, admired “the remarkable beauty of her face, like a *bouquet* of flowers.” He describes Jacob who, meeting Rachel at the well, “wept tears of joy when he saw a virgin who pleased him and enchanted him with the grace of her face.” He also loved to tell the story of St. Brigid, born in Scotland, a country where “the most beautiful creatures one can see” are admired; she was “an extremely attractive young woman,” but her beauty was “natural,” our author points out.

The Salesian ideal of beauty is called ‘good grace,’ which designates not only “the perfect harmony of the parts that make something beautiful,” but also the “grace of movements, gestures, and actions, which is like the soul of life and beauty,” that is, goodness of heart. Grace requires “simplicity and modesty.” Now, grace is a perfection that comes from within the person. It is beauty combined with grace that makes Rebecca the feminine ideal of the Bible. She was “so beautiful and graceful at the well where she drew water for the flock,” and her “familiar goodness” inspired her to give water not only to Abraham’s servants but also to his camels.

Education and preparation for life

In the time of St. Francis de Sales, women had little opportunity to pursue higher education. Girls learned what they heard from their brothers and, when the family could afford it, attended a convent. Reading was certainly more common than writing. Colleges were reserved for boys, so learning Latin, the language of culture, was practically forbidden to girls.

We must believe that Francis de Sales was not opposed to women becoming educated, but on condition that they did not fall into pedantry and vanity. He admired Saint Catherine, who was "very learned, but humble in her great knowledge," Among the bishop of Geneva's female interlocutors, the Lady of La Fléchère had studied Latin, Italian, Spanish, and the fine arts, but she was an exception.

In order to find their place in life, both socially and religiously, young women often needed special help at a certain point. Georges Rolland reports that the bishop personally took care of several difficult cases. A woman from Geneva with three daughters was generously assisted by the bishop, "with money and credit; he placed one of her daughters as an apprentice with an honest lady in the city, paying her board for six years, in grain and money." He also donated 500 florins for the marriage of the daughter of a printer in Geneva.

The religious intolerance of the time sometimes caused tragedies, which Francis de Sales tried to remedy. Marie-Judith Gilbert, educated in Paris by her parents in the 'errors of Calvin,' discovered the book *Filotea* at the age of nineteen, which she dared to read only in secret. She took a liking to the author, whom she had heard about. Closely watched by her father and mother, she managed to be taken away by carriage, was instructed in the Catholic religion, and entered the Visitation Sisters.

The social role of women was still rather limited. Francis de Sales was not entirely opposed to women's involvement in public life. He wrote in these terms, for example, to a woman who was given to intervene in public

affairs, both appropriately and inappropriately:

Your sex and your vocation allow you to repress evil outside yourselves, but only if this is inspired by good and accomplished with simple, humble, and charitable remonstrances towards transgressors and by warning your superiors as far as possible.

On the other hand, it is significant that a contemporary of Francis de Sales, Mademoiselle de Gournay, an early feminist *ante litteram*, an intellectual and author of controversial texts such as her treatise *L'égalité des hommes et des femmes* (The Equality of Men and Women) and *La plainte des femmes* (The Complaint of Women), expressed great admiration for him. She devoted her entire life to demonstrating this equality, gathering all possible evidence on the subject, without forgetting that of the "good and holy bishop of Geneva".

Education to love

Francis de Sales spoke a lot about God's love, but he was also very attentive to the manifestations of human love. For him, in fact, love is one, even if its 'object' is different and unequal. To explain God's love, he could do no better than start from human love.

Love arises from the contemplation of beauty, and beauty can be perceived by the senses, especially by the eyes. An interactive phenomenon is established between the gaze and beauty. "Contemplating beauty makes us love it, and love makes us contemplate it." The sense of smell reacts in the same way; in fact, "perfumes exercise their unique power of attraction through their sweetness."

After the intervention of the external senses, the internal senses take over, the imagination and fantasy, which exalt and transfigure reality. "By virtue of this reciprocal movement of love towards sight and sight towards love, just as love makes the beauty of the beloved more

resplendent, so the sight of the beloved makes love more enamoured and pleasant." We can then understand why "those who have painted Cupid have blindfolded him, affirming that love is blind." At this point, love-passion arrives; it makes us "seek dialogue, and dialogue often nourishes and increases love;" moreover, "it desires secrecy, and when lovers have no secrets to tell each other, they sometimes take pleasure in telling them secretly;" and finally, it leads us to "utter words that would certainly be ridiculous if they did not spring from a passionate heart."

Now, this love-passion, which perhaps boils down to nothing more than 'amorucci' (little loves) and 'galanterie' (gallantries), is exposed to various vicissitudes, to such an extent that it prompts the author of the *Filotea* to intervene with a series of considerations and warnings about "frivolous friendships that are formed between people of the opposite sex and without any intention of marriage." Often, they are nothing more than "abortions or, rather, semblances of friendship."

St. Francis de Sales also expressed his views on kissing, wondering, for example, along with the ancient commentators, why Rachel allowed Jacob to embrace her. He explains that there are two kinds of kisses: one bad, the other good. Kisses that are easily exchanged between young people and that are not bad at first can become so later because of human frailty. But a kiss can also be good. In certain places, it is required by custom. "Our Jacob embraces his Rachel very innocently; Rachel accepts this kiss of courtesy from this man of good character and clean face." "Oh!" concluded Francis de Sales, "give me people who have the innocence of Jacob and Rachel, and I will allow them to kiss each other."

On the question of dancing, which was also on the agenda, the Bishop of Geneva avoided absolute commands, as did the rigorists of the time, both Catholic and Protestant, while still showing great prudence. He was even harshly reproached for writing that "dances and ballroom dancing are

in themselves indifferent things." As with certain games, they too become dangerous when one becomes so attached to them that one can no longer detach oneself from them. Dancing "must be done for recreation and not for passion; for a short time and not to the point of exhaustion and dizziness." What is more dangerous is that these pastimes often become occasions that provoke "quarrels, envy, mockery, and love affairs."

The choice of lifestyle

When the little daughter grows up, "the day comes when it is necessary to talk to her, I mean to refer to the decisive word, the one in which one tells young women that one wants to marry them off." A man of his time, Francis de Sales largely shared the idea that parents had an important role in determining their children's vocation, whether to marriage or religious life. "One does not usually choose one's prince or bishop, one's father or mother, and often, not even one's husband," noted the author of *Filotea*. However, he clearly states that "daughters cannot be given in marriage as long as they say no."

The current practice is well explained in this passage from the *Philothea*: "For a marriage to truly take place, three things are necessary with regard to the young woman who is to be given in marriage. First, that the proposal be made to her; second, that she accepts it; and third, that she consents to it." Since girls often married at a very young age, their emotional immaturity is not surprising. "Girls who marry very young truly love their husbands, if they have them, but they never cease to love their rings, their jewellery, and their friends with whom they have so much fun playing, dancing, and acting foolishly."

The problem of freedom of choice arose equally for children who were destined for religious life. La Franceschetta, daughter of the Baroness of Chantal, was to be placed in a convent by her mother, who wanted her to become a nun, but the bishop intervened. "If Franceschetta willingly wants to be a nun, fine; if not, I do not approve of her will

being anticipated by decisions that are not hers.” Moreover, it would not be appropriate for the reading of St. Jerome’s letters to lead the mother too much in the direction of severity and coercion. He therefore advised her to “use moderation” and to proceed with “gentle inspiration”.

Some young women hesitate between religious life and marriage, without ever making up their minds. Francis de Sales encouraged the future Mrs. de Longecombe to take the step of marriage, which he wanted to celebrate himself. He did this good work, her husband would later say, in response to his wife’s request “that she wished to marry by the hands of the bishop, and without his presence, she would never have been able to take this step, because of the great aversion she felt towards marriage.”

Women and ‘devotion’

Unfamiliar with any form of feminism *ante litteram*, Francis de Sales was aware of the exceptional contribution of femininity on a spiritual level. It has been pointed out that by encouraging devotion in women, the author of *Philothea* also encouraged the possibility of greater autonomy, a “private life for women”.

It is not surprising that women have a particular disposition for ‘devotion’. After listing a number of doctors and experts, he was able to write in the preface to *Teotimo*: “But in order that it may be known that this kind of writing is better composed with the devotion of lovers than with the doctrine of the wise, the Holy Spirit has caused many women to perform wonders in this regard. Who has ever better manifested the heavenly passions of divine love than Saint Catherine of Genoa, Saint Angela of Foligno, Saint Catherine of Siena, and Saint Matilda?” The influence of Chantal’s mother in the writing of the *Teotimo* is well known, particularly in the ninth book, “your ninth book on the *Love of God*,” according to the author’s expression.

Could women get involved in matters concerning religion? “Here is this woman who acts as a theologian,” says

Francis de Sales, speaking of the Samaritan woman in the Gospel. Must we necessarily see this as disapproval of women theologians? Not necessarily. Especially since he strongly affirms, "I tell you that a simple and poor woman can love God as much as a doctor of theology." Superiority does not always reside where one thinks it does.

There are women who are superior to men, starting with the Blessed Virgin. Francis de Sales always respected the principle of order established by the religious and civil laws of his time, to which he preached obedience, but his practice testified to a great freedom of spirit. Thus, for the government of women's monasteries, he believed that it was better for them to be under the jurisdiction of the bishop rather than dependent on their religious brothers, who risked weighing excessively on them.

The Visitation Sisters, for their part, would not depend on any male order and would have no central government, each monastery being under the jurisdiction of the local bishop. He dared to give the unexpected title of 'apostles' to the sisters of the Visitation setting out on a new foundation.

If we interpret the thinking of the Bishop of Geneva correctly, the ecclesial mission of women consists in proclaiming not the word of God, but 'the glory of God' through the beauty of their witness. The heavens, prays the psalmist, tell of God's glory only by their splendour. "The beauty of the heavens and the firmament invites men to admire the greatness of the Creator and to proclaim his wonders;" and "is it not a greater wonder to see a soul adorned with many virtues than a sky studded with stars?"