

Purity and ways it can be safeguarded (1884)

In this dream of Don Bosco, a heavenly garden appears: a green slope, festooned trees, and, in the center, an immense, snow-white carpet adorned with biblical inscriptions praising purity. On its edge sit two twelve-year-old girls, dressed in white with red sashes and floral crowns: they personify Innocence and Penance. With gentle voices, they discuss the value of baptismal innocence, the dangers that threaten it, and the sacrifices needed to preserve it: prayer, mortification, obedience, purity of the senses.

He seemed to see before him an enchanting and immense green slope, gently inclined and leveled. At the foot of it, a meadow formed that was equivalent to a low step from which one could jump off onto the little path where Don Bosco was standing. All around it looked like an earthly paradise, magnificently illuminated by a light that was brighter and purer even than that of the sun. It was covered all around by green vegetation, star-spangled by a thousand different kinds of flowers, and shaded by an infinite number of trees, whose branches intertwined, stretching out like immense festoons.

In the center of the garden and stretching to its further border was a carpet of magic candor, so dazzling that the eyes were blinded. It was several miles wide, as magnificent as royal pomp. Several inscriptions in golden letters ornamented the border encircling it. On one side it read: *Beati immaculati in via, qui ambulant in lege Domini*; on another side: *Non privabit bonis eos, qui ambulant in innocentia*; on the third side: *Non confundentur in tempore malo, in diebus famis saturabuntur*; on the fourth: *Novit Dominus dies immaculatorum et haereditas eorum in aeternum erit.*

At the four corners of the area surrounding a

magnificent rose bed were four more inscriptions: *Cum simplicibus sermocinatio eius; Proteget gradientes simpliciter; Qui ambulant simpliciter, ambulant confidenter; Voluntas eius in iis, qui simpliciter ambulant.*

In the middle of this area was the last inscription: *Qui ambulant simpliciter, salvus erit.* In the middle of the slope and on the upper border of this carpet, there was a pure white streamer with gold letters that read: *Fili mi, tu semper mecum es et omnia mea tua sunt.*

Though Don Bosco was enchanted by the garden, his attention was drawn to two lovely, little maidens who were about twelve years old and who were sitting at the edge of the carpet where the slope formed a low step. Their whole gracious mien emanated a heavenly modesty. One did not only perceive the innocent simplicity of a dove in their eyes that gazed steadily upward, but also a most pure, fervent love and a joyful, heavenly happiness. Their broad, serene brows seemed to harbor candor and sincerity, while a sweet, enchanting smile hovered on their lips. Their features denoted tender, ardent hearts, and the graceful movements of their bodies conferred a dignity and nobility on them that contrasted oddly with their youth.

A pure, white garment fell to their feet, and no stain, wrinkle, or even speck of dust was apparent on it. Around their waists were fiery red sashes, bordered with gold and adorned by what looked like a ribbon embroidered with lilies, violets and roses. They wore a similar ribbon like a necklace that was made of the same flowers, though somewhat different in design. There were little wreaths of white daisies at their wrists, like bracelets, and all of these things and flowers were so beautiful in form and color that it would have been impossible to describe them. Even the most precious jewels of this world mounted with the most exquisite work-manship would have looked like mud in contrast.

Their pure, white shoes were edged with a white ribbon interwoven with gold, handsomely tied into a center bow. They were laced with a narrow white cord, in which small

golden threads glinted.

Their long hair, forming a shadow in its thickness and falling in curled ringlets over their shoulders, was covered by a crown.

They were talking with each other. They took turns to speak, asking each other questions and issuing exclamations. They would both sit, or one sat while the other stood or they would stroll together, but they never stepped off the candid carpet or touched either the grass or the flowers. Don Bosco stood there like a spectator in his dream, without speaking to the little maidens, and they did not seem to be aware of his presence. One of them addressed the other in a harmonious voice: "What is innocence? The happy condition of sanctifying grace preserved by constant, scrupulous observance of the Divine Commandments."

The other girl answered in a voice that was no less sweet: "The purity of innocence preserved is the source and origin of all knowledge and virtue."

The first maiden: "How splendid, how glorious, how magnificent is the virtue to live honestly among those who are evil, to retain the candor of innocence and purity of one's habits amid those who are evil."

The other maiden rose to her feet and standing beside her companion said, "Blessed is the boy who does not heed the council of the godless, who does not walk in the way of the sinner, but who delights in the Commandments of the Lord, contemplating them day and night. He shall be like a tree planted beside the river where the water of God's grace flows, and which shall, in its good time, yield the abundant fruit of good works. The leaves of his holy intentions and his merit shall not fall before the blowing of the wind, and all that he shall do shall be successful. In all circumstances of his life, he shall work to enhance his reward."

So saying, she pointed to the trees laden with beautiful, fragrant fruits in the garden around them, while sparkling little brooks ran between two flowering banks or fell in tiny waterfalls, forming small lakes, bathing the

trunks of the trees with a murmur that sounded like the mysterious strains of distant music.

The first maiden answered, "He is like a lily amid the thorns which God shall pluck in His garden to wear as an ornament over His heart. He may say to his Lord, 'My Beloved is mine, and I am His, who feeds among the lilies.'"

So saying, she pointed to a great cluster of beautiful lilies that lifted their candid heads amid the grass and other flowers, and also to a tall hedge in the distance that surrounded the gardens with greenery. This hedge was thick with thorns and beyond it one could perceive horrible monsters moving around like shadows, trying to get inside the garden, though the thorns on the hedge barred their way.

"It is true! How much truth there is in your words!" the other girl said. "Blessed is the boy who shall be found without sin! But who can he be? How are we to praise him? For he has done wondrous things in his life. He was found to be perfect and shall have glory in eternity. He could sin and did not; he could have done wrong, but did not. For this the Lord has prepared his reward, and his good deeds shall be celebrated by all the Congregations of Saints."

"And what great glory God has in store for them here on earth! He will summon them, giving them a place in His Sanctuary, He will make them ministers of His Mysteries, and shall confer on them an eternal name which shall never perish," the first said.

The second rose to her feet now and exclaimed, "Who could describe the beauty of the innocent? The soul is magnificently arrayed like one of us, adorned with the white stole of Holy Baptism. His neck and arms are ablaze with divine jewels, and on his finger gleams the ring of an alliance with God. His soul moves lightly along its journey toward eternity. Before him there is a path spangled with stars. The innocent is a living tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. The blood of Jesus runs through his veins, staining crimson his cheeks and lips, and the Most Holy Trinity on his immaculate heart sheds torrents of light all around it, which

clothes it in the brightness of the sun. From on high, clouds of celestial flowers fill the air in a downpour of rain. All around him, sweet melodies are heard and the angels echo the prayer of his soul. The Most Holy Mary is at his side, ready to defend him. Heaven stands open for him. The infinite legions of the saints and of the Blessed Spirits stand ranged before him, inviting him to advance by waving their palms. In the inaccessible radiance of His Throne of Glory, God lifts His Right Hand to indicate the place prepared for him, while in His Left, He holds the magnificent crown with which he shall be crowned forever. The innocent is the desire, the joy and the pride of Paradise. An ineffable joy is engraved on his countenance. He is the Son of God. God is his Father. Paradise is his heritage. He is constantly with God. He sees Him, loves Him, serves Him, possesses Him, enjoys Him, and possesses a range of heavenly delights. He is in possession of all treasures, all graces, all secrets, all gifts, all perfections, and the whole of God himself.

“That is why the innocence of saints, and especially of the martyrs in the old and New Testament, is depicted so gloriously. Oh, innocence! How beautiful you are! Tempted, you grow in perfection; humiliated, you soar even higher; embattled, you emerge triumphant; when slain, you soar toward your crown. You are free in slavery, serene and certain in peril, happy when in chains. The mighty bow before you, princes hail you, the great do seek you. The pious obey you, the evil envy you, your rivals emulate you, and your enemies succumb before you. Always shall you be victorious, even when men shall condemn you unjustly!”

The two little maidens were silent for a moment, as if to take a breath after this impassioned rhapsody. Then, they took each other by the hand, exchanged glances, and spoke in turn.

“Oh, if only the young knew how precious is the treasure of innocence, how jealously would they defend the stole of Holy Baptism from the beginning of their days! But alas, they do not reflect, and do not know what it means to

soil it. Innocence is a most precious nectar."

"But it is contained in a jar of fragile clay, and unless one carries it with great care, it is easily broken."

"Innocence is a most precious jewel."

"But if one is unaware of its value, it can be lost and will easily be transformed into base metal."

"Innocence is a golden mirror which reflects the likeness of God."

"Yet a breath of humid air is enough to make it rusty, and one must needs keep it wrapped in a veil."

"Innocence is a lily."

"Yet a mere touch from a rough hand will wither it."

"Innocence is a candid garment. *Omni tempore sint vestimenta tua candida* [May your garment be always white]."

"Yet a single blemish will defile it, so one must proceed with great caution."

"Innocence and integrity are violated if soiled by only one stain, and will lose the treasure of grace."

"Only one mortal sin is enough."

"And once lost, it is lost forever."

"What a tragedy it is that so many lose their innocence in one single day! When a boy falls victim to sin, Paradise closes its doors; the Blessed Virgin and his Guardian Angel disappear; music is silent; light fades away. God will no longer be in his heart; the star-spangled path he was following vanishes; he falls and will linger like an island in the midst of the sea, in one single place; a sea of fire will extend to the furthest horizon of eternity, falling down into the abyss of chaos. Over his head in the darkly menacing sky, flash the lightning flares of divine justice. Satan has hastened to join him, and loads him now with chains; he places a foot upon his neck, and raising his horrible countenance toward the sky, he shouts, 'I have won. Your son is now my slave. He is no longer yours. Joy is over for him.' If in His Justice God then removes from beneath him that one little

place where he is standing, he will be lost forever.”

“Yet he may rise again! The Mercy of God is infinite! A good confession will restore grace to him and his title as the son of God.”

“But not his innocence! And what consequences will linger on in him after that initial sin! He is now aware of the sin of which he had no knowledge previously; terrible will be the evil inclinations he will experience; he will feel the terrible debt he has contracted toward Divine Justice and will find that he is now weaker in his spiritual battles. He will feel that which he had never felt before: shame, sadness, remorse.”

“To think that previously it was said of him, ‘Let the little children come unto Me. They will be like God’s Angels in Heaven. My Son, give me your heart.’”

“Ah, those wretches who are guilty for the loss of innocence in a child commit a hideous crime. Jesus said, ‘Whoever shall give scandal to any of these little ones who believe in Me, it would have been better if he had put a millstone around his neck, and drown in the depths of the sea. Woe unto the world because of scandal. It is not possible that scandal be prevented, but woe unto him who is guilty of it. Beware, lest you despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in Heaven see constantly the face of My Father Who is in Heaven and Who demands vengeance.’”

“Wretches, indeed, are they! But no less wretched are those who permit them to steal their innocence.”

Then they both began to stroll up and down, talking about how innocence could be preserved.

One of them said, “Boys make a great mistake when they think that only those who have sinned should do penance. Penance is necessary so that innocence may be retained. Had St. Aloysius not done penance, he would, beyond any doubt, have committed mortal sins. This should be preached, driven home, and taught constantly to the young. How many more there would be who would retain their innocence, whereas now there are so few.”

"The Apostle says it. We should be carrying within our own body the mortification of Jesus Christ everywhere, so that the life of Jesus may manifest in our body."

"Jesus, who was holy, immaculate and innocent lived His Life in privation and suffering."

"So did the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints."

"They did this to give an example to youth. St. Paul says, 'If you live by the flesh, you shall die; but if you slay the action of the flesh with the spirit, you shall live.'"

"So innocence can only be retained through penance!"

"Yet, many wish to retain their innocence while living in freedom!"

"Fools! Is it not written that he was taken away, so that malice should not destroy his spirit, and temptation might not lead his soul into sin? For the lure of vanity obscures what is good, and the vortex of lust perverts the innocent soul. The innocent, therefore, has two enemies: the evil maxims and bad words of the wicked and concupiscence. Does not the Lord say that death at an early age is the reward of the innocent because it sets him free from battle? 'Because he was pleasing to God, He was loved, and because he lived among sinners, he snatched him away.' 'He lived but briefly, and had a great career.' 'For his soul was loved by God, and for this He hastened to pluck him forth out of iniquity.' 'He was taken away so that malice might not destroy his spirit, and temptation might not lead his soul into sin.'"

"Fortunate are the young who embrace the cross of penance and who repeat with Job (27:5) with a steadfast resolution '*Donec deficiam, non recedam ab innocentia mea* [I will maintain my innocence to my dying day].'"

"Hence, mortification is needed to overcome the boredom they experience in prayer."

"It is also written: *Psallam et intelligam in via immaculata* (Psalm 100:2). *Quando venies ad me? Petite et accipietis. Pater noster!* [All along the immaculate path I will sing and I will understand. When will you come to me and ask and you shall receive Our Father!]"

"Mortification of the mind by accepting humiliation, by obedience to one's superiors and to the rules."

"It is likewise written: *Si mei non fuerint dominati, tunc immaculatus ero et emendabor a delicto maximo* [Never let (pride) dominate me, then I shall be above reproach and free from grave sin] (Psalm 19:13). This is pride. God resists against the proud and gives grace to the humble. He who humbles himself shall be exalted, and he who exalts himself shall be humbled. Obey your superiors."

"Mortification always in telling the truth, in acknowledging one's faults and whatever dangers one may find himself in. Then, one will always be well advised, especially by his confessor."

"*Pro anima tua ne confundaris dicere verum*, for your soul be not ashamed to tell the truth (Ecclesiasticus 4:24). For there is a kind of blush that calls for sin, and another kind of blush which calls for glory and grace."

"Mortification of the heart by restraining its ill-advised impulses, by loving everyone for God's sake, and resolutely turning away from anyone who we realize is tempting our innocence."

"Jesus said it. If your hand or your foot give scandal, cut it off and cast it from thee; it is better that you go through life without a foot or without a hand than to be cast into eternal fire with both your hands and your feet. If your eye offends you, pluck it out and cast it away from you; it is better that you should enter eternity with but one eye only than to be cast with both your eyes into the flames of Hell."

"Mortification in courageously and frankly enduring the scorn of human respect. *Exacerunt, ut gladium*,

linguas suas: intenderunt arcum, rem amaram, ut sagittent in occultis immaculatum [They sharpened their tongues like swords shooting bitter words like arrows shooting them at the innocent from cover](Psalm 64:3)."

"They will overcome the evil person who scoffs, fearing that his superiors may find him out, at the thought of the terrible words of Jesus: 'The son of man shall be ashamed of the one who will be ashamed of him and his words, when He shall come in all His majesty, and the majesty of His Father and of the Holy Angels.'"

"Mortification of the eyes, in looking at things, and people, in reading, and by avoiding all bad or unsuitable books."

"One essential thing. I have made a pact with my eyes never to even think of a virgin. And in the psalms: Turn away your eyes, so that they may not look on vanity."

"Mortification of the ears: never listen to evil conversations or mawkish or godless speech."

"In Ecclesiasticus 28:28, we read: *Sepi aures tuas spinis, linguam nequam noli audire* [Fence your ears with a quick thorn hedge never heed a wicked tongue]."

"Mortification is speech: do not let curiosity overcome you."

"It is likewise written: Put a door and a lock upon you lips. Take heed, lest you slip with your tongue and fall in the sight of you enemies who lie in wait for you, and your fall will be incurable unto death (Ecclesiasticus, ib)."

"Mortification of the palate: Do not eat or drink too much."

"Too much eating and drinking brought the flood upon the world, and fire rained down over Sodom and Gomorrah, and a thousand other punishments came over the Jewish people."

"In short, mortification by bearing all that happens to us during the course of the day, the cold and heat, without seeking our own comforts. Mortify your members that are on earth (Colossians 3:5)."

"Remember that Jesus told us: *Si quis vult post*

me venire, abneget semetipsum et tollat crucem suam quotidie et sequatur me [If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, carry his cross daily and follow Me] (Luke 9:23)."

"With his provident hand, God surrounds the innocent with crosses and thorns, even as He did with Job, Joseph, Tobias and other saints. *Quia acceptus eras Deo, necesse fuit, ut tentatio probaret te* [Because you were acceptable to God, it was necessary that you be tested]."

"The path of the innocent has its trials and sacrifices, but it finds strength in Holy Communion, for he who goes often to Communion will have life everlasting: he lives in Jesus and Jesus lives in him. He lives of the very life of Jesus, and will he be raised by Him on the Last Day. This is the wheat of the elect, the vine that buds with virgins. *Parasti in conspectu meo mensam adversus eos, qui tribulant me. Cadent a latere tuo mille et decem millia a dextris tuis, ad te autem non appropinquabunt* [You set up a dining table right in front of those who give me trouble, but they will fall thousands and ten thousands by your sides and they shall not get close to you]."

"And the most sweet Virgin by Him beloved is His Mother. *Ego mater pulchrae. dilectionis et timoris et agnitionis et sanctae spei. In me gratia omnis (to know) viae et veritatis; in me omnis spes vitae et virtutis. Ego diligentes me diligo. Qui elucidant me, vitam aeternam habebunt Terribilis, ut castrorum acies ordinata.* [I am the mother of beautiful love and fear and knowledge. In me you will come to know the right way and the ways to truth; all hope to live and be virtuous is found in me. I love those who love me. Those who make me known will have eternal life. I am terrible just like an army set for war]."

The two little maidens then turned and slowly climbed the slope. One of them exclaimed, "The salvation of the just stems from the Lord. He is their protector in times of tribulation. The Lord shall help them and shall set them free. He seizes them from the hands of sinners and shall save them because they put their hopes in Him (Psalm 57)."

The other went on: "God girdled me with strength and made the road I was to follow immaculate."

When the two of them came to the center of the magnificent carpet, they turned around.

"Yes!" one of them cried out. "Innocence, when crowned by penance, is the queen of all virtue."

The other also exclaimed, "How beautiful and splendid is a chaste generation! Its memory is immortal in the eyes of God and man. Men imitate it when it is present, and long for it when it is gone to Heaven, crowned triumphantly in eternity, having wrested their reward for their chaste battles. What a triumph! What rejoicing! How glorious a thing to present God with the immaculate stole of one's Holy Baptism after so many battles waged, amid the applause, the canticles, the splendor of the heavenly hosts!"

As they were thus speaking of the rewards awaiting innocence retained through penance, Don Bosco saw hosts of angels appear, who descended on that candid carpet. They joined the two young maidens, who took their place in the middle of them all. There was a vast multitude of them, and they sang, "*Benedictus Deus et Pater Domini Nostri Iesu Christi, qui benedixit nos in ipso in omni benedictione spirituali in coelestibus in Christo; qui elegit nos in ipso ante mundi constitutionem, ut essemus sancti et immaculati in conspectu eius in charitate et praedestinavit nos in adoptionem per Iesum Christum* (Eph. 1:4) [Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of Heaven in Christ. Before the world was made, He chose us, chose us in Christ to be holy and spotless and live through love in His presence, determining that we should become his adopted sons, through Jesus Christ]."

The two maidens then intoned a magnificent hymn, with such words and notes that only the angels nearer to the center were able to follow. The others sang too, but Don Bosco could not hear their voices, although they made gestures and moved their lips as if singing.

The two maidens sang, "*Me propter innocentiam suscepisti et confirmasti me in conspectu tuo in aeternum. Benedictus Dominus Deus a saeculo et usque in saeculum. Fiat! Fiat!* [You have made me welcome because I was innocent, you have made me steadfast in Your presence forever. May the Lord God be ever praised, forever and ever. So be it! So be it!"]

Now, other hosts of angels came to join the first ones, and the others after them. They were arrayed in many colors, with ornaments differing one from the other, and very different from those worn by the two little maidens. Yet, the richness and splendor of it was magnificent. They were each so handsome that the human mind could never in any way conceive even a remote idea of what they were like. Nothing could describe this scene, though if one adds words to words, one may perhaps render some confused idea of it.

When the two girls had completed their canticle, they could all be heard singing together in one immense, harmonious canticle, the likes of which has never before been heard nor will ever be heard here on earth.

They sang, "*Ei, qui potens est vos conservare sine peccato et constituere ante conspectum gloriae suae immaculatos in exultatione, in adventu Domini nostri Iesu Christi; Soli Deo Salvatori nostro, per Iesum Christum Dominum nostrum, gloria et magnificentia, imperium et potestas ante omne saeculum, et nunc et in omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen* [To him, who is able to keep you without sin and has allowed you to stand immaculate right in front of His glory, when our Lord Jesus will appear, to him alone, who is our Savior Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory and splendor, power and rule before all ages for now and for all ages. Amen]."

As they were singing, ever more angels came to join them, and when the canticle was over, they all soared slowly aloft, one after the other, and disappeared together with the entire vision.

Then, Don Bosco woke up.

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Venerable Francesco (Francis) Convertini, pastor according to the Heart of Jesus

The venerable Father Francesco Convertini, a Salesian missionary in India, emerges as a shepherd after the Heart of Jesus, forged by the Spirit and totally faithful to the divine plan for his life. Through the testimonies of those who met him, his profound humility, unconditional dedication to the proclamation of the Gospel, and fervent love for God and neighbor are revealed. He lived with joyful evangelical simplicity, facing hardships and sacrifices with courage and generosity, always attentive to everyone he met along his path. The text highlights his extraordinary humanity and spiritual richness, a precious gift for the Church.

1. Farmer in the vineyard of the Lord

Presenting the virtuous profile of Father Francesco Convertini, Salesian missionary in India, a man who let himself be moulded by the Spirit and knew how to realise his spiritual physiognomy according to God's plan for him, is something both beautiful and serious because it recalls the true meaning of life, as a response to a call, a promise, a project of grace.

There is a quite original summary sketched about him by a priest from his town, Fr Quirico Vasta, who got to know Father Francis (as he was known in India) on rare visits to his beloved Apulia. This witness offers us a summary of the virtuous profile of the great missionary, introducing us in an authoritative and compelling way to discover something of the human and religious stature of this man of God.

"The way to measure the spiritual stature of this holy man,

Father Francis Convertini, is not an analytical approach, comparing his life to the many religious 'parameters of behaviour' (Father Francis, as a Salesian, also accepted the commitments proper to a religious: poverty, obedience, chastity, and remained faithful to them throughout his life). On the contrary, Father Francis Convertini appears, in summary, as he really was from the beginning: a young peasant farmer who, after – and perhaps because of – the ugliness of the war, opened himself up to the light of the Spirit and leaving everything behind, set out to follow the Lord. On the one hand, he knew what he was leaving behind; and he left it not only with the vigour typical of the southern peasant who was poor but tenacious; but also joyfully and with the very personal strength of spirit that the war had invigorated: the strength of someone who intends to pursue headlong, albeit silently and in the depths of his soul, what he has focused his attention on. On the other hand, again like a peasant who has grasped the 'certainties' of the future and the groundedness of his hopes in something or someone and knows 'who to trust' he allowed the light of the one who has spoken to him put him in a position of clarity in what to do. And he immediately adopted the strategies to achieve the goal: prayer and availability without measure, whatever the cost. It is no coincidence that the key virtues of this holy man are silent activity without show (cf. St Paul: 'It is when I am weak that I am strong') and a very respectful sense of others (cf. Acts: 'There is more joy in giving than in receiving').

Seen in this way, Father Francis Convertini was truly a man: shy, inclined to conceal his gifts and merits, averse to boasting, gentle with others and strong with himself, measured, balanced, prudent and faithful; a man of faith, hope and in habitual communion with God; an exemplary religious, in obedience, poverty and chastity."

2. Distinguishing traits: "charm emanated from him, which healed you".

Retracing the stages of his childhood and youth,

his preparation for the priesthood and missionary life, God's special love for his servant and his correspondence with this good Father are evident. In particular, they stand out as distinctive features of his spiritual character:

– *Unbounded faith and trust in God, embodied in filial abandonment to the divine will.*

He had great faith in the infinite goodness and mercy of God and in the great merits of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, in whom he confided everything and from whom he expected everything. On the firm rock of this faith he undertook all his apostolic labours. Cold or heat, tropical rain or scorching sun, difficulty or fatigue, nothing prevented him from always proceeding with confidence when it was a matter of God's glory and the salvation of souls.

– *Unconditional love for Jesus Christ the Saviour, to whom he offered everything as a sacrifice, beginning with his own life, consigned to the cause of the Kingdom.*

Father Convertini rejoiced in the promise of the Saviour and rejoiced in the coming of Jesus, as universal Saviour and sole mediator between God and man: "Jesus gave us all of Himself by dying on the cross, and shall we not be able to give ourselves completely to Him?"

– *Integral salvation of our neighbour, pursued with passionate evangelisation.*

The abundant fruits of his missionary work were due to his unceasing prayer and unsparing sacrifices made for his neighbour. It is people and missionaries of such temperament who leave an indelible mark on the history of the Salesian missions, charism and priestly ministry.

Even in contact with Hindus and Muslims, while on the one hand he was urged by a genuine desire to proclaim the Gospel, which often led to the Christian faith, on the other hand he felt compelled to emphasise the basic truths easily perceived even by non-Christians, such as the infinite goodness of God, love of neighbour as the way to salvation,

and prayer as the means to obtain graces.

– Unceasing union with God through prayer, the sacraments, entrustment to Mary Mother of God and ours, love for the Church and the Pope, devotion to the saints.

He felt himself to be a son of the Church and served her with the heart of an authentic disciple of Jesus and missionary of the Gospel, entrusted to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and in the company of the saints felt as intercessors and friends.

– Simple and humble evangelical asceticism in the following of the cross, incarnated in an extraordinarily ordinary life.

His profound humility, evangelical poverty (he carried with him only what was necessary) and angelic countenance transpired from his whole person. Voluntary penance, self-control: little or no rest, irregular meals. He deprived himself of everything to give to the poor, even his clothes, shoes, bed and food. He always slept on the floor. He fasted for a long time. As the years went by, he contracted several illnesses that undermined his health: he suffered from asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, heart ailments... many times they attacked him in such a way that he was bedridden. It was a marvel how he could bear it all without complaining. It was precisely this that attracted the veneration of the Hindus, for whom he was the “sanyasi”, the one who knew how to renounce everything for the love of God and for their sake.

His life seemed to be a straight ascent to the heights of holiness in the faithful fulfilment of God’s will and in the gift of himself to his brothers and sisters through the priestly ministry lived faithfully. Lay, religious and clergy alike speak of his extraordinary way of living daily life.

3. Missionary of the Gospel of joy: “I proclaimed Jesus to them. Jesus the Saviour. Merciful Jesus.”

There was not a day when he did not go to some

family to talk about Jesus and the Gospel. Father Francis had such enthusiasm and zeal that he even hoped for things that seemed humanly impossible. Father Francis became famous as a peacemaker between families, or between villages in discord. "It is not through arguments that we come to understand. God and Jesus are beyond dispute. We must above all pray and God will give us the gift of faith. Through faith one will find the Lord. Is it not written in the Bible that God is love? By the way of love one comes to God."

He was an inwardly peaceful man and brought peace. He wanted this to exist among people, in homes or villages, where there should be no quarrels, or fights, or divisions. "In our village we were Catholics, Protestants, Hindus and Muslims. So that peace would reign among us, from time to time father would gather us all together and tell us how we could and should live in peace among ourselves." Then he would listen to those who wanted to say something and at the end, after praying, he would give the blessing: a wonderful way to keep the peace among us. He had a truly astonishing peace of mind; it was the strength that came from the certainty he had of doing God's will, sought with effort, but then embraced with love once found.

He was a man who lived with evangelical simplicity, the transparency of a child, a willingness to make every sacrifice, knowing how to get in tune with every person he met on his path, travelling on horseback, or on a bicycle, or more often walking whole days with his rucksack on his shoulders. He belonged to everyone without distinction of religion, caste or social status. He was loved by all, because to all he brought "the water of Jesus that saves".

4. A man of contagious faith: lips in prayer, rosary in hands, eyes to heaven

"We know from him that he never neglected prayer, both when he was with others and when he was alone, even as a soldier. This helped him to do everything for God, especially

when he did first evangelisation among us. For him, there was no fixed time: morning or evening, sun or rain; heat or cold were no impediment when it came to talking about Jesus or doing good. When he went to the villages he would walk even at night and without taking food in order to get to some house or village to preach the Gospel. Even when he was placed as a confessor in Krishnagar, he would come to us for confessions during the sweltering heat of after lunch. I once said to him, "Why do you come at this hour?" And he replied, "In the passion, Jesus did not choose his convenient time when he was being led by Annas or Caiaphas or Pilate. He had to do it even against his own will, to do the Father's will."

He evangelised not by proselytism, but by attraction. It was his behaviour that attracted people. His dedication and love made people say that Father Francis was the true image of the Jesus he preached. His love of God led him to seek intimate union with him, to collect himself in prayer, to avoid anything that might displease God. He knew that one only knows God through charity. He used to say, "Love God, do not displease Him."

"If there was one sacrament in which Father Francis excelled heroically, it was the administration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For any person in our diocese of Krishnagar to say Father Francis is to say the man of God who showed the Father's fatherhood in forgiveness especially in the confessional. He spent the last 40 years of his life more in the confessional than in any other ministry: hours and hours, especially in preparation for feasts and solemnities. Thus the whole night of Christmas and Easter or patronal feasts. He was always punctually present in the confessional every day, but especially on Sundays before Masses or on the evening eve of feasts and Saturdays. Then he would go to other places where he was a regular confessor. This was a task very dear to him and much expected by all the religious of the diocese, for who he was available weekly. His confessional was always the most crowded and most desired. Priests, religious,

ordinary people: it seemed as if Father Francis knew everyone personally, so pertinent was he in his advice and admonitions. I myself marvelled at the wisdom of his admonitions when I went to confession to him. In fact, the Servant of God was my confessor throughout his life, from the time he was a missionary in the villages until the end of his days. I used to say to myself: "That is just what I wanted to hear from him...". Bishop Morrow, who went to him regularly for confession, considered him his spiritual guide, saying that Father Francis was guided by the Holy Spirit in his counsels and that his personal holiness made up for his lack of natural gifts.

Trust in God's mercy was an almost nagging theme in his conversations, and he used it well as a confessor. His confessional ministry was a ministry of hope for himself and for those who confessed to him. His words inspired hope in all who came to him. "In the confessional the Servant of God was the model priest, famous for administering this sacrament. The Servant of God was always teaching, trying to lead everyone to eternal salvation... The servant of God liked to direct his prayers to the Father who is in heaven, and he also taught people to see the good Father in God. Especially to those in difficulties, including spiritual ones, and to repentant sinners, he reminded them that God is merciful and that one must always trust in him. The Servant of God increased his prayers and mortifications to discount his infidelities, as he said, and for the sins of the world."

Father Rosario Stroschio, religious superior, who concluded the announcement of Father Francis' death, spoke eloquently as follows: "Those who knew Father Francis will always remember with love the little warnings and exhortations he used to give in confession. With his weak little voice, yet so full of ardour: 'Let us love souls, let us work only for souls... Let us approach the people... Let us deal with them in such a way that the people understand that we love them...' His

entire life was a magnificent testimony to the most fruitful technique of priestly ministry and missionary work. We can sum it up in the simple expression: 'To win souls to Christ there is no more powerful means than goodness and love!'"

5. He loved God and loved his neighbour for God's sake: Put love! Put love!

His mother Catherine used to say "Put love! Put love!" to Ciccilluzzo, his nickname at home as he helped in the fields watching turkeys and doing other work appropriate to his young age,

"Father Francisco gave everything to God, because he was convinced that having consecrated everything to him as a religious and missionary priest, God had full rights over him. When we asked him why he did not go home (to Italy), he replied that he had now given himself entirely to God and to us." His being a priest was all for others: "I am a priest for the good of my neighbour. This is my first duty." He felt indebted to God in everything, indeed, everything belonged to God and to his neighbour, while he had given himself totally, reserving nothing for himself: Father Francesco continually thanked the Lord for choosing him to be a missionary priest. He showed this sense of gratitude towards anyone who had done anything for him, even the poorest.

He gave extraordinary examples of fortitude by adapting to the living conditions of the missionary work assigned to him: a new and difficult language, which he tried to learn quite well, because this was the way to communicate with his people; a very harsh climate, that of Bengal, the grave of so many missionaries, which he learned to endure for the love of God and souls; apostolic journeys on foot through unknown areas, with the risk of encountering wild animals.

He was a tireless missionary and evangeliser in a very difficult area such as Krishnagar – which he wanted to transform into Christ-nagar, the city of Christ – where conversions were difficult, not to mention the opposition of

Protestants and members of other religions. For the administration of the sacraments he faced all possible dangers: rain, hunger, disease, wild beasts, malicious people. "I have often heard the episode about Father Francesco, who one night, while taking the Blessed Sacrament to a sick person, came across a tiger crouching on the path where he and his companions had to pass... As the companions tried to flee, the Servant of God commanded the tiger: "Let your Lord pass!", and the tiger moved away. But I have heard other similar examples about the Servant of God, who many times travelled on foot at night. Once a band of brigands attacked him, believing they could steal something from him. But when they saw him thus deprived of everything except what he was carrying, they excused themselves and accompanied him to the next village."

His life as a missionary was constant travelling: by bicycle, on horseback and most of the time on foot. This walking on foot is perhaps the attitude that best portrays the tireless missionary and the sign of the authentic evangeliser: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger of glad tidings who proclaims peace, the messenger of good things who proclaims salvation" (Is 52:7).

6. Clear eyes turned to heaven

"Observing the smiling face of the Servant of God and looking at his eyes clear and turned to heaven, one thought that he did not belong here, but in heaven. On seeing him for the very first time, many reported an unforgettable impression of him: his shining eyes that showed a face full of simplicity and innocence and his long, venerable beard recalled the image of a person full of goodness and compassion. One witness stated: "Father Francis was a saint. I do not know how to make a judgement, but I think that such people are not easily found. We were small, but he talked to us, he never despised anyone. He did not differentiate between Muslims and Christians. Father went to everyone in the same way and when we were together he treated us all the same. He would give us children advice: 'Obey your parents, do your

homework well, love each other as brothers'. He would then give us little sweets: in his pockets there was always something for us."

Father Francis displayed his love for God above all through prayer, which seemed to be uninterrupted. He could always be seen moving his lips in prayer. Even when he spoke to people, he always kept his eyes raised as if he were seeing someone he was talking to. What most often struck people was Father Convertini's ability to be totally focused on God and, at the same time, on the person in front of him, looking with sincere eyes at the brother he met on his path: "Without a doubt he had his eyes fixed on the face of God. This was an indelible trait of his soul, a spiritual concentration of an impressive level. He followed you attentively and answered you with great precision when you spoke to him. Yet, you sensed that he was 'elsewhere', in another dimension, in dialogue with the Other."

He encouraged others to holiness, as in the case of his cousin Lino Palmisano, who was preparing for the priesthood: "I am very happy knowing you are already in practical training; this too will soon pass, if you know how to take advantage of the graces of the Lord that he will give you every day, to transform yourself into a Christian saint of good sense. The most satisfying studies of theology await you, which will nourish your soul with the Spirit of God, who has called you to help Jesus in His apostolate. Think not of others, but of yourself alone, of how to become a holy priest like Don Bosco. Don Bosco also said in his time: times are difficult, but we will *puf, puf*, we will go ahead even against the current. It was the heavenly mother telling him: *infirmum mundi elegit Deus*. Don't worry, I will help you. Dear brother, the heart, the soul of a holy priest in the eyes of the Lord is worth more than anything else. The day of your sacrifice together with that of Jesus on the altar is near, prepare yourself. You will never regret being generous to Jesus and to your Superiors. Trust in them, they will help you overcome the

little difficulties of the day that your beautiful soul may encounter. I will remember you at Holy Mass every day, so that you too may one day offer yourself wholly to the Good Lord.”.

Conclusion

As at the beginning, so also at the end of this brief excursus on the virtuous profile of Father Convertini, here is a testimony that summarises what has been presented.

“One of the pioneer figures that struck me deeply was that of the Venerable Father Francis Convertini, a zealous apostle of Christian love who managed to bring the news of the Redemption to churches, parish areas, to the alleyways and huts of refugees and to anyone he met, consoling, advising, helping with his exquisite charity: a true witness to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, on which we shall be judged: always ready and zealous in the ministry of the sacrament of forgiveness. Christians of all denominations, Muslims and Hindus, accepted with joy and readiness the one they called the man of God. He knew how to bring to each one the true message of love, which Jesus preached and brought to this land: with evangelical direct and personal contact, for young and old, boys and girls, poor and rich, authorities and pariahs (outcasts), that is, the last and most despised rung of (sub)human refuse. For me and for many others, it was deeply emotional experience that helped me to understand and live the message of Jesus: ‘Love one another as I have loved you’.”

The last word goes to Father Francis, as a legacy he leaves to each of us. On 24 September 1973, writing to his relatives from Krishnagar, the missionary wanted to involve them in the work for non-Christians that he had been doing with difficulty since his recent illness, but always with zeal: “After six months in hospital my health is a little weak, I feel like a broken and patched piñata. However, the merciful Jesus miraculously helps me in his work for souls. I let Him take me to the city and then return on foot, after

making Jesus and our holy religion known. Having finished hearing confessions at home, I go among the pagans who are much better than some Christians. Affectionately yours in the Heart of Jesus, Father Francis.”.

Don Elia Comini: martyr priest at Monte Sole

On December 18, 2024, Pope Francis officially recognized the martyrdom of Don Elia Comini (1910-1944), a Salesian of Don Bosco, who will thus be beatified. His name joins that of other priests—such as Don Giovanni Fornasini, already Blessed since 2021—who fell victim to the brutal Nazi violence in the Monte Sole area, in the Bologna hills, during World War II. The beatification of Don Elia Comini is not only an event of extraordinary significance for the Bologna Church and the Salesian Family, but also constitutes a universal invitation to rediscover the value of Christian witness: a witness in which charity, justice, and compassion prevail over every form of violence and hatred.

From the Apennines to the Salesian courtyards

Don Elia Comini was born on May 7, 1910, in the locality of “Madonna del Bosco” in Calvenzano di Vergato, in the province of Bologna. His birthplace is adjacent to a small Marian sanctuary dedicated to the “Madonna del Bosco,” and this strong imprint in the sign of Mary will accompany him throughout his life.

He is the second child of Claudio and Emma Limoni, who were married at the parish church of Salvaro on February 11, 1907. The following year, the firstborn Amleto was born. Two years later, Elia came into the world. Baptized the day

after his birth—May 8—at the parish of Sant'Apollinare in Calvenzano, Elia also received the names “Michele” and “Giuseppe” that day.

When he was seven years old, the family moved to the locality of “Casetta” in Pioppe di Salvaro in the municipality of Grizzana. In 1916, Elia began school: he attended the first three elementary classes in Calvenzano. During that time, he also received his First Communion. Still young, he showed great involvement in catechism and liturgical celebrations. He received Confirmation on July 29, 1917. Between 1919 and 1922, Elia learned the first elements of pastoral care at the “school of fire” of Mons. Fidenzio Mellini, who had known Don Bosco as a young man and had prophesied his priesthood. In 1923, Don Mellini directed both Elia and his brother Amleto to the Salesians of Finale Emilia, and both would treasure the pedagogical charisma of the saint of the young: Amleto as a teacher and “entrepreneur” in the school; Elia as a Salesian of Don Bosco.

A novice from October 1, 1925, at San Lazzaro di Savena, Elia Comini became fatherless on September 14, 1926, just a few days (October 3, 1926) before his First Religious Profession, which he would renew until Perpetual, on May 8, 1931, on the anniversary of his baptism, at the “San Bernardino” Institute in Chiari. In Chiari, he would also be a “trainee” at the Salesian Institute “Rota.” He received the minor orders of the ostiariate and lectorate on December 23, 1933; of the exorcist and acolyte on February 22, 1934. He was ordained subdeacon on September 22, 1934. Ordained deacon in the cathedral of Brescia on December 22, 1934, Don Elia was consecrated a priest by the imposition of hands of the Bishop of Brescia, Mons. Giacinto Tredici, on March 16, 1935, at just 24 years old: the next day he celebrated his First Mass at the Salesian Institute “San Bernardino” in Chiari. On July 28, 1935, he would celebrate with a Mass in Salvaro.

Enrolled in the Faculty of Classical Letters and Philosophy at the then Royal University of Milan, he was always very well-liked by the students, both as a teacher and

as a father and guide in the Spirit: his character, serious without rigidity, earned him esteem and trust. Don Elia was also a fine musician and humanist, who appreciated and knew how to make others appreciate “beautiful things.” In the written compositions, many students, in addition to following the prompt, naturally found it easy to open their hearts to Don Elia, thus providing him with the opportunity to accompany and guide them. Of Don Elia “the Salesian,” it was said that he was like a hen with chicks around her (“You could read all the happiness of listening to him on their faces: they seemed like a brood of chicks around the hen”): all close to him! This image recalls that of Mt 23:37 and expresses his attitude of gathering people to cheer them and keep them safe.

Don Elia graduated on November 17, 1939, in Classical Letters with a thesis on Tertullian’s *De resurrectione carnis*, with Professor Luigi Castiglioni (a renowned Latinist and co-author of a famous Latin dictionary, the “Castiglioni-Mariotti”): focusing on the words “*resurget igitur caro*”, Elia comments that it is the song of victory after a long and exhausting battle.

A one-way journey

When his brother Amleto moved to Switzerland, their mother—Mrs. Emma Limoni—was left alone in the Apennines: therefore, Don Elia, in full agreement with his superiors, would dedicate his vacations to her every year. When he returned home, he helped his mother but—as a priest—he primarily made himself available in local pastoral work, assisting Mons. Mellini.

In agreement with the superiors and particularly with the Inspector, Don Francesco Rastello, Don Elia returned to Salvaro in the summer of 1944: that year he hoped to evacuate his mother from an area where, at a short distance, Allied forces, partisans, and Nazi-fascist troops defined a situation of particular risk. Don Elia was aware of the danger he faced leaving his Treviglio to go to Salvaro, and a confrere, Don Giuseppe Bertolli SDB, recalls: “As I said

goodbye to him, I told him that a journey like his could also be without return; I also asked him, of course jokingly, what he would leave me if he did not return; he replied in my same tone that he would leave me his books...; then I never saw him again." Don Elia was already aware that he was heading towards "the eye of the storm" and did not seek a form of protection in the Salesian house (where he could easily have stayed): "The last memory I have of him dates back to the summer of 1944, when, during the war, the Community began to dissolve; I still hear my words that kindly addressed him, almost jokingly, reminding him that he, in those dark times we were about to face, should feel privileged, as a white cross had been drawn on the roof of the Institute and no one would have the courage to bomb it. However, he, like a prophet, replied to me to be very careful because during the holidays I might read in the newspapers that Don Elia Comini had heroically died in the fulfillment of his duty." "The impression of the danger he was exposing himself to was vivid in everyone", commented a confrere.

Along the journey to Salvaro, Don Comini stopped in Modena, where he sustained a serious injury to his leg: according to one account, he interposed himself between a vehicle and a passerby, thus averting a more serious accident; according to another, he helped a gentleman push a cart. In any case, he helped his neighbor. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "When a madman drives his car onto the sidewalk, I cannot, as a pastor, be content to bury the dead and console the families. I must, if I find myself in that place, jump and grab the driver at the wheel."

The episode in Modena expresses, in this sense, an attitude of Don Elia that would emerge even more in Salvaro in the following months: to interpose, mediate, rush in personally, expose his life for his brothers, always aware of the risk this entails and serenely willing to pay the consequences.

A pastor on the front line

Limping, he arrived in Salvaro at sunset on June 24, 1944, leaning on a cane as best he could: an unusual instrument for a 34-year-old young man! He found the rectory transformed: Mons. Mellini was hosting dozens of people, belonging to families of evacuees; moreover, the 5 Ancelle del Sacro Cuore sisters, responsible for the nursery, including Sister Alberta Taccini. Elderly, tired, and shaken by the war events, that summer Mons. Fidenzio Mellini struggled to make decisions; he had become more fragile and uncertain. Don Elia, who had known him since childhood, began to help him in everything and took a bit of control of the situation. The injury to his leg also prevented him from evacuating his mother: Don Elia remained in Salvaro, and when he could walk well again, the changed circumstances and the growing pastoral needs would ensure that he stayed there.

Don Elia revitalized the pastoral work, followed catechism, and took care of the orphans abandoned to themselves. He also welcomed the evacuees, encouraged the fearful, and moderated the reckless. Don Elia's presence became a unifying force, a good sign in those dramatic moments when human relationships were torn apart by suspicion and opposition. He put his organizational skills and practical intelligence, honed over years of Salesian life, at the service of many people. He wrote to his brother Amleto: "Certainly, these are dramatic moments, and worse ones are foreseen. We hope everything in the grace of God and in the protection of the Madonna, whom you must invoke for us. I hope to be able to send you more news."

The Germans of the Wehrmacht were stationed in the area, and on the heights, there was the partisan brigade "Stella Rossa." Don Elia Comini remained a figure estranged from any claims or partisanship: he was a priest and asserted calls for prudence and pacification. He told the partisans: "Boys, watch what you do, because you ruin the population..., " exposing it to reprisals. They respected him, and in July and September 1944, they requested Masses in the parish church of Salvaro. Don Elia accepted, bringing down the partisans and

celebrating without hiding, instead preferring not to go up to the partisan area and, as he would always do that summer, to stay in Salvaro or nearby areas, without hiding or slipping into “ambiguous” attitudes in the eyes of the Nazi-fascists.

On July 27, Don Elia Comini wrote the last lines of his Spiritual Diary: “July 27: I find myself right in the middle of the war. I long for my confreres and my home in Treviglio; if I could, I would return tomorrow.”

From July 20, he shared a priestly fraternity with Father Martino Capelli, a Dehonian, born on September 20, 1912, in Nembro in the Bergamo area, and already a teacher of Sacred Scripture in Bologna, also a guest of Mons. Mellini and helping with the pastoral work.

Elia and Martino are two scholars of ancient languages who now have to attend to more practical and material matters. The rectory of Mons. Mellini becomes what Mons. Luciano Gherardi later called “the community of the ark,” a place that welcomes to save. Father Martino was a religious who became passionate when he heard about the Mexican martyrs and wished to be a missionary in China. Elia, since he was young, has been pursued by a strange awareness of “having to die,” and by the age of 17, he had already written: “The thought that I must die always persists in me! – Who knows?! Let us act like the faithful servant: always prepared for the call, to ‘render account’ of the management.”

On July 24, Don Elia begins catechism for the children in preparation for their First Communions, scheduled for July 30. On the 25th, a baby girl is born in the baptismal font (all spaces, from the sacristy to the chicken coop, were overflowing) and a pink bow is hung.

Throughout August 1944, soldiers of the Wehrmacht are stationed at the rectory of Mons. Mellini and in the space in front. Among Germans, displaced persons, and consecrated individuals... the tension could have exploded at any moment: Don Elia mediates and prevents even in small matters, for example, acting as a “buffer” between the too-loud volume of the Germans’ radio and the now too-short patience of Mons.

Mellini. There was also some praying of the Rosary together. Don Angelo Carboni confirms: "In the constant effort to comfort Monsignore, Don Elia worked hard against the resistance of a company of Germans who, having settled in Salvaro on August 1, wanted to occupy various areas of the Rectory, taking away all freedom and comfort from the families and displaced persons hosted there. Once the Germans were settled in Monsignore's archive, they again disturbed, occupying a good part of the church square with their vehicles; with even gentler manners and persuasive words, Don Elia also obtained this other liberation to comfort Monsignore, who the oppression of the struggle had forced to rest." In those weeks, the Salesian priest is firm in protecting Mons. Mellini's right to move with a certain ease in his own home – as well as that of the displaced persons not to be removed from the rectory –: however, he recognizes some needs of the Wehrmacht men, which attracts their goodwill towards Mons. Mellini, whom the German soldiers will learn to call the good pastor. From the Germans, Don Elia obtains food for the displaced persons. Moreover, he sings to calm the children and tells stories from the life of Don Bosco. In a summer marked by killings and reprisals, with Don Elia, some civilians even manage to go listen to a bit of music, evidently broadcast from the Germans' device, and to communicate with the soldiers through brief gestures. Don Rino Germani sdb, Vice-Postulator of the Cause, states: "Between the two warring forces, the tireless and mediating work of the Servant of God intervenes. When necessary, he presents himself to the German Command and, with politeness and preparation, manages to win the esteem of some officers. Thus, many times he succeeds in avoiding reprisals, looting, and mourning."

With the rectory freed from the fixed presence of the Wehrmacht on September 1, 1944 – "On September 1, the Germans left the Salvaro area free, only a few remained for a few more days in the Fabbri house" – life in Salvaro can take a breath of relief. Don Elia Comini continues in his apostolic initiatives, assisted by the other priests and the nuns.

Meanwhile, however, Father Martino accepts some invitations to preach elsewhere and goes up into the mountains, where his light hair gets him into big trouble with the partisans who suspect him of being German, while Don Elia remains essentially stationary. On September 8, he writes to the Salesian director of the House of Treviglio: "I leave you to imagine our state of mind in these moments. We have gone through very dark and dramatic days. [...] My thoughts are always with you and with the dear confreres there. I feel a deep nostalgia [...]".

From the 11th, he preaches the Exercises to the Sisters on the theme of the Last Things, religious vows, and the life of the Lord Jesus.

The entire population – declared a consecrated person – loved Don Elia, also because he did not hesitate to spend himself for everyone, at every moment; he did not only ask people to pray, but offered them a valid example with his piety and the little apostolate that, given the circumstances, was possible to exercise.

The experience of the Exercises gives a different dynamic to the entire week and involves both consecrated and lay people. In the evening, in fact, Don Elia gathers 80-90 people: he tried to ease the tension with a bit of cheerfulness, good examples, and charity. During those months, both he and Father Martino, along with other priests, first among them Don Giovanni Fornasini, were on the front lines in many works of charity.

The massacre of Montesole

The most brutal and largest massacre carried out by the Nazi SS in Europe during the war of 1939-45 was that which took place around Monte Sole, in the territories of Marzabotto, Grizzana Morandi, and Monzuno, although it is commonly known as the "massacre of Marzabotto."

Between September 29 and October 5, 1944, there were 770 casualties, but overall the victims of Germans and fascists, from the spring of 1944 to liberation, were 955,

distributed across 115 different locations within a vast territory that includes the municipalities of Marzabotto, Grizzana, and Monzuno and some portions of the surrounding territories. Of these, 216 were children, 316 were women, 142 were elderly, 138 were recognized partisans, and five were priests, whose fault in the eyes of the Germans was being close, with prayer and material help, to the entire population of Monte Sole during the tragic months of war and military occupation. Along with Don Elia Comini, a Salesian, and Father Martino Capelli, a Dehonian, three priests from the Archdiocese of Bologna were also killed during those tragic days: Don Ubaldo Marchioni, Don Ferdinando Casagrande, and Don Giovanni Fornasini. The cause for beatification and canonization is underway for all five. Don Giovanni, the “Angel of Marzabotto,” fell on October 13, 1944. He was twenty-nine years old, and his body remained unburied until 1945, when it was found heavily mutilated; he was beatified on September 26, 2021. Don Ubaldo died on September 29, shot by a machine gun on the altar step of his church in Casaglia; he was 26 years old and had been ordained a priest two years earlier. The German soldiers found him and the community engaged in the prayer of the rosary. He was killed there, at the foot of the altar. The others – more than 70 – in the nearby cemetery. Don Ferdinando was killed on October 9, shot in the back of the neck, along with his sister Giulia; he was 26 years old.

From the Wehrmacht to the SS

On September 25, the Wehrmacht leaves the area and hands over command to the SS of the 16th Battalion of the 16th Armored Division “Reichsführer – SS,” a division that includes SS elements “Totenkopf – Death’s Head” and was preceded by a trail of blood, having been present at Sant’Anna di Stazzema (Lucca) on August 12, 1944; at San Terenzo Monti (Massa-Carrara, in Lunigiana) on the 17th of that month; at Vinca and surroundings (Massa-Carrara, in Lunigiana at the foot of the Apuan Alps) from August 24 to 27.

On September 25, the SS establish the "High Command" in Sibano. On September 26, they move to Salvaro, where Don Elia is also present: an area *outside* the immediate influence of partisans. The harshness of the commanders in pursuing total contempt for human life, the habit of lying about the fate of civilians, and the paramilitary structure – which willingly resorted to "scorched earth" techniques, in disregard of any code of war or legitimacy of orders given from above – made it a death squad that left nothing intact in its wake. Some had received training explicitly focused on concentration and extermination, aimed at: the suppression of life, for ideological purposes; hatred towards those who professed the Jewish-Christian faith; contempt for the small, the poor, the elderly, and the weak; persecution of those who opposed the aberrations of National Socialism. There was a veritable catechism – anti-Christian and anti-Catholic – of which the young SS were imbued.

"When one thinks that the Nazi youth was formed in the contempt for the human personality of Jews and other 'non-chosen' races, in the fanatical cult of an alleged absolute national superiority, in the myth of creative violence and of the 'new weapons' bringing justice to the world, one understands where the roots of the aberrations lay, made easier by the atmosphere of war and the fear of a disappointing defeat."

Don Elia Comini – with Father Capelli – rushes to comfort, reassure, and exhort. He decides to welcome primarily the survivors of families in which the Germans had killed in retaliation. In doing so, he removes the survivors from the danger of finding death shortly after, but above all, he tears them – at least to the extent possible – from that spiral of loneliness, despair, and loss of the will to live that could have translated into a desire for death. He also manages to speak to the Germans and, on at least one occasion, to dissuade the SS from their intention, making them pass by and thus being able to subsequently warn the refugees to come out of hiding.

The Vice-Postulator Don Rino Germani sdb wrote: "Don Elia arrives. He reassures them. He tells them to come out because the Germans have left. He speaks with the Germans and makes them go on."

Paolo Calanchi, a man whose conscience reproaches him nothing and who makes the mistake of not fleeing, is also killed. It is still Don Elia who rushes, before the flames attack his body, trying at least to honor his remains, having not arrived in time to save his life: "The body of Paolino is saved from the flames by Don Elia who, at the risk of his life, collects him and transports him with a cart to the Church of Salvaro."

The daughter of Paolo Calanchi testified: "My father was a good and honest man ['in times of ration cards and famine, he gave bread to those who had none'] and had refused to flee, feeling at peace with everyone. He was killed by the Germans, shot, in retaliation; later, the house was also set on fire, but my father's body had been saved from the flames by Don Comini, who, at the risk of his own life, had collected him and transported him with a cart to the Church of Salvaro, where, in a coffin he built with spare planks, he was buried in the cemetery. Thus, thanks to the courage of Don Comini and, very likely, also of Father Martino, after the war, my mother and I were able to find and have our dear one's coffin transported to the cemetery of Vergato, alongside that of my brother Gianluigi, who died 40 days later while crossing the front."

Once, Don Elia had said of the Wehrmacht: "We must also love these Germans who come to disturb us." "He loved everyone without preference." Don Elia's ministry was very precious for Salvaro and many displaced persons during those days. Witnesses have stated: "Don Elia was our fortune because we had a parish priest who was too old and weak. The entire population knew that Don Elia had this interest in us; Don Elia helped everyone. One could say that we saw him every day. He said Mass, but then he was often on the church steps watching: the Germans were down, towards the Reno; the

partisans were coming from the mountain, towards the Creda. Once, for example, (a few days before the 26th) the partisans came. We were coming out of the Church of Salvaro, and there were the partisans there, all armed; and Don Elia urged them so much to leave, to avoid trouble. They listened to him and left. Probably, if it hadn't been for him, what happened afterward would have happened much earlier"; "As far as I know, Don Elia was the soul of the situation, as with his personality he knew how to keep many things in hand that were of vital importance in those dramatic moments."

Although he was a young priest, Don Elia Comini was reliable. This reliability, combined with a deep rectitude, had accompanied him for a long time, even as a cleric, as evidenced by a testimony: "I had him for four years at the Rota, from 1931 to 1935, and, although still a cleric, **he gave me help that I would have found it hard to get from any other older confrere.**"

The triduum of passion

The situation, however, deteriorates after a few days, on the morning of September 29, when the SS carry out a terrible massacre in the locality "Creda." The signal for the start of the massacre is a white rocket and a red one in the air: they begin to shoot, the machine guns hit the victims, barricaded against a porch and practically without a way out. Hand grenades are then thrown, some incendiary, and the barn – where some had managed to find refuge – catches fire. A few men, seizing a moment of distraction from the SS in that hell, rush down towards the woods. Attilio Comastri, injured, is saved because the lifeless body of his wife Ines Gandolfi shielded him: he will wander for days, in shock, until he manages to cross the front and save his life; he had lost, in addition to his wife, his sister Marcellina and his two-year-old daughter Bianca. Carlo Cardi also manages to save himself, but his family is exterminated: Walter Cardi was only 14 days old, he was the youngest victim of the Monte Sole massacre. Mario Lippi, one of the survivors, attests: "I don't even know

how I miraculously saved myself, given that of the 82 people gathered under the porch, 70 were killed [69, according to the official reconstruction]. I remember that besides the fire from the machine guns, the Germans also threw hand grenades at us, and I believe that some shrapnel from these slightly injured me in the right side, in the back, and in the right arm. I, along with seven other people, took advantage of the fact that on [one] side of the porch there was a small door leading to the street, and I ran away towards the woods. The Germans, seeing us flee, shot at us, killing one of us named Gandolfi Emilio. I specify that among the 82 people gathered under the aforementioned porch, there were also about twenty children, two of whom were in swaddling clothes, in the arms of their respective mothers, and about twenty women."

In Creda, there are 21 children under 11 years old, some very small; 24 women (including one teenager); almost 20 "elderly." Among the most affected families are the Cardi (7 people), the Gandolfi (9 people), the Lolli (5 people), and the Macchelli (6 people).

From the rectory of Mons. Mellini, looking up, at a certain point, smoke is seen: but it is early morning, Creda remains hidden from view, and the woods muffles the sounds. In the parish that day – September 29, the feast of the Archangels – three Masses are celebrated, in immediate succession: that of Mons. Mellini; that of Father Capelli, who then goes to bring Extreme Unction in the locality "Casellina"; that of Don Comini. And it is then that the drama knocks at the door: "Ferdinando Castori, who also escaped the massacre, arrived at the Church of Salvaro smeared with blood like a butcher and went to hide inside the spire of the bell tower." Around 8, a distraught man arrives at the rectory: he looked "like a monster for his terrifying appearance," says Sister Alberta Taccini. He asks for help for the wounded. About seventy people are dead or dying amid terrible tortures. Don Elia, in a few moments, has the clarity to hide 60/70 men in the sacristy, pushing an old wardrobe against the door that left the threshold visible from below, but was nonetheless the

only hope of salvation: "It was then that Don Elia, he himself, had the idea to hide the men next to the sacristy, then putting a wardrobe in front of the door (one or two people who were in Monsignore's house helped him). The idea was Don Elia's; but everyone was against the fact that it was Don Elia who did that work... He wanted it. The others said: 'And what if they discover us?'" Another account: "Don Elia managed to hide about sixty men in a room adjacent to the sacristy and pushed an old wardrobe against the door. Meanwhile, the crackle of machine guns and the desperate screams of people came from the nearby houses. Don Elia had the strength to begin the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the last of his life. He had not yet finished when a terrified and breathless young man from the locality 'Creda' arrived asking for help because the SS had surrounded a house and arrested sixty-nine people, men, women, and children."

"Still in sacred vestments, **prostrated at the altar, immersed in prayer**, he invokes for all the help of the Sacred Heart, the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco, and St. Michael the Archangel. Then, with a brief examination of conscience, reciting the act of sorrow three times, he prepares them for death. He commends all those people to the care of the sisters and to the Superior to lead the prayer strongly so that the faithful may find in it the comfort they need."

Regarding Don Elia and Father Martino, who returned shortly after, "some dimensions of a priestly life spent consciously for others until the last moment are evident: their death was a prolongation in the gift of life of the Mass celebrated until the last day." Their choice had "distant roots, in the decision to do good even if it were the last hour, even willing to martyrdom": "Many people came to seek help in the parish, and unbeknownst to the parish priest, Don Elia and Father Martino tried to hide as many people as possible; then, ensuring that they were somehow assisted, they rushed to the site of the massacres to bring help to the most unfortunate; even Mons. Mellini did not realize this and

continued to look for the two priests to get help to receive all those people" ("We are certain that none of them was a partisan or had been with the partisans").

In those moments, Don Elia demonstrates great clarity, which translates into both organizational spirit and the awareness of putting his own life at risk: "In light of all this, and Don Elia knew it well, we cannot therefore seek that charity which leads to the attempt to help others, but rather that type of charity (which was the same as Christ's) that leads **to participating fully in the suffering of others**, not even fearing death as its ultimate manifestation. The fact that his choice was **lucid and well-reasoned** is also demonstrated by the organizational spirit he manifested until just a few minutes before his death, trying promptly and intelligently to hide as many people as possible in the hidden rooms of the rectory; then the news of the Creda and, after fraternal charity, heroic charity."

One thing is certain: if Don Elia had hidden with all the other men or even just stayed next to Mons. Mellini, he would have had nothing to fear. Instead, Don Elia and Father Martino took the stole, the holy oils, and a container with some consecrated Hosts: "They then set off for the mountain, armed with the stole and the oil of the sick": "When Don Elia returned from having gone to Monsignore, **he took the Ciborium with the Hosts** and the Holy Oil and turned to us: that face again! It was so pale that he looked like someone already dead. And he said: 'Pray, pray for me, because I have a mission to fulfill.' 'Pray for me, do not leave me alone!' 'We are priests and we must go and we must do our duty.' **'Let us go to bring the Lord to our brothers.'**

Up at the Creda, there are many people dying in agony: they must hurry, bless, and – if possible – try to intercede regarding the SS.

Mrs. Massimina [Zappoli], also a witness in the military investigation in Bologna, recalls: "Despite the prayers of all of us, they quickly celebrated the Eucharist and, driven only by the hope of being able to do something for

the victims of such ferocity, at least with a spiritual comfort, they **took the Blessed Sacrament and ran towards the Creda**. I remember that while Don Elia, already launched in his run, passed by me in the kitchen, **I clung to him in a last attempt to dissuade him**, saying that we would be left at the mercy of ourselves; he made it clear that, as serious as our situation was, there were those who were worse off than us and it was from them that they had to go."

He is unyielding and refuses, as Mons. Mellini later suggested, to delay the ascent to the Creda when the Germans had left: "It was [therefore] a passion, before being bloody, [...] of the heart, the passion of the spirit. In those times, everyone was terrified by everything and everyone: there was no longer trust in anyone: anyone could be a decisive enemy for one's life. When the two priests realized that someone truly needed them, they had no hesitation in deciding what to do [...] and above all they did **not resort to what was the immediate decision for everyone, that is, to find a hiding place**, to try to cover themselves **and to be out of the fray**. The two priests, on the other hand, went right in, consciously, knowing that their lives were 99% at risk; and they went in to be truly priests: that is, to assist and to comfort; to also provide the service of the Sacraments, therefore of prayer, of the comfort that faith and religion offer."

One person said: "Don Elia, for us, was already a saint. **If he had been a normal person [...] he would have hidden too, behind the wardrobe, like all the others.**"

With the men hidden, it is the women who try to hold back the priests, in an extreme attempt to save their lives. The scene is both frantic and very eloquent: "Lidia Macchi [...] and other women tried to prevent them from leaving, they tried to hold them by the cassock, they chased them, they called out loudly for them to come back: driven by an inner force that is the ardor of charity and missionary solicitude, they were now decisively walking towards the Creda bringing religious comforts."

One of them recalls: "I hugged them, I held them firmly by the arms, saying and pleading: – Don't go! – Don't go!"

And Lidia Marchi adds: "I was pulling Father Martino by the robe and holding him back [...] but both priests kept repeating: – We must go; the Lord is calling us."

"We must fulfill our duty. And [Don Elia and Father Martino,] like Jesus, went to meet a marked fate."

"The decision to go to the Creda was made by the two priests out **of pure pastoral spirit; despite everyone trying to dissuade them**, they wanted to go driven by the hope of being able to save someone among those who were at the mercy of the soldiers' rage."

At the Creda, almost certainly, they never arrived. Captured, according to a witness, near a "little pillar," just outside the parish's field of vision, Don Elia and Father Martino were later seen loaded with ammunition, at the head of those rounded up, or still alone, tied up, with chains, near a tree while there was no battle going on and the SS were eating. Don Elia urged a woman to run away, not to stop to avoid being killed: "Anna, for charity, run, run."

"They were loaded and bent under the weight of many heavy boxes that wrapped around their bodies from front to back. Their backs curved so much that their noses were almost touching the ground."

"Sitting on the ground [...] very sweaty and tired, with ammunition on their backs."

"Arrested, they are forced to carry ammunition up and down the mountain, witnesses of unheard-of violence."

"[The SS make them] go up and down the mountain several times, under their escort, and also committing, under the eyes of the two victims, the most gruesome acts of violence."

Where are the stole, the holy oils, and above all the Blessed Sacrament now? There is no trace of them left. Far from prying eyes, the SS forcibly stripped the priests of them, getting rid of that Treasure of which nothing would ever

be found again.

Towards the evening of September 29, 1944, they were taken with many other men (rounded up and not for reprisal or because they were pro-partisan, as the sources show), to the house “of the Birocciai” in Pioppe di Salvaro. Later, they, divided, would have very different fates: few would be released after a series of interrogations. The majority, deemed fit for work, would be sent to forced labor camps and could – later – return to their families. Those deemed unfit, for mere age criteria (cf. concentration camps) or health (young, but injured or pretending to be sick hoping to save themselves) would be killed on the evening of October 1 at the “Botte” of the Canapiera in Pioppe di Salvaro, now a ruin because it had been bombed by the Allies days before.

Don Elia and Father Martino – who were interrogated – were able to move until the last moment in the house and receive visits. Don Elia interceded for everyone and a very troubled young man fell asleep on his knees: in one of them, Don Elia received the Breviary, so dear to him, which he wanted to keep with him until the last moments. Today, careful historical research through documentary sources, supported by the most recent historiography from a secular perspective, has shown how no attempt to free Don Elia, made by Cavalier Emilio Veggetti, ever succeeded, and how Don Elia and Father Martino were never truly considered or at least treated as “spies.”

The Holocaust

Finally, they were included, although young (34 and 32 years old), in the group of the unfit and executed with them. They lived those last moments praying, making others pray, having absolved each other and giving every possible comfort of faith. Don Elia managed to transform the macabre procession of the condemned up to a walkway in front of the canapiera reservoir, where they would be killed, into a choral act of entrustment, holding the Breviary open in his hand for as long as he could (then, it is said, a German violently struck his hands and the Breviary fell into the reservoir) and

above all singing the Litanies. When the fire was opened, Don Elia Comini saved a man because he shielded him with his own body and shouted "Pity." Father Martino instead invoked "Forgiveness," struggling to rise in the reservoir, among the dead or dying companions, and tracing the sign of the Cross just moments before dying himself, due to a huge wound. The SS wanted to ensure that no one survived by throwing some hand grenades. In the following days, given the impossibility of recovering the bodies immersed in water and mud due to heavy rains (the women tried, but even Don Fornasini could not succeed), a man opened the gates and the impetuous current of the Reno River carried everything away. Nothing was ever found of them: consummatum est!

They had shown themselves willing "even to martyrdom, even if in the eyes of men it seems foolish to **refuse one's own salvation to give a miserable relief to those already destined for death.**" Mons. Benito Cocchi in September 1977 in Salvaro said: "Well, here before the Lord we say that our preference goes to these gestures, to these people, to those who **pay personally**: to those who at a time when only weapons, strength, and violence mattered, when a house, the life of a child, an entire family were valued as nothing, knew how to perform gestures that have no voice in the war accounts, but which are true treasures of humanity, resistance, and an alternative to violence; to those who in this way were laying **roots for a more humane society and coexistence.**"

In this sense, "The martyrdom of the priests constitutes the fruit of their conscious choice to share the fate of the flock until the ultimate sacrifice, when the efforts of mediation between the population and the occupiers, long pursued, lose all possibility of success."

Don Elia Comini had been clear about his fate, saying – already in the early stages of detention –: "To do good we find ourselves in so much suffering"; "It was Don Elia who, pointing to the sky, greeted with tear-filled eyes." "Elia leaned out and said to me: 'Go to Bologna, to the

Cardinal, and tell him where we are.' I replied: 'How can I go to Bologna?' [...] Meanwhile, the soldiers were pushing me with the rifle barrel. Don Elia greeted me saying: 'We will see each other in paradise!' I shouted: 'No, no, don't say that.' He replied, sad and resigned: 'We will see each other in Paradise.'"

With Don Bosco...: "[I] await you all in Paradise"!

It was the evening of October 1, the beginning of the month dedicated to the Rosary and Missions.

In the years of his early youth, Elia Comini had said to God: "Lord, **prepare me to be the least unworthy to be an acceptable victim**" ("Diary" 1929); "Lord, [...] **receive me as a victim of atonement**" (1929); "**I would like to be a victim of holocaust**" (1931). "[To Jesus] I asked for death rather than failing in my priestly vocation and in my **heroic love for souls**" (1935).

Educating the body and its 5 senses with Saint Francis de Sales

A good number of ancient Christian ascetics often considered the body as an enemy, whose decay had to be confronted, in fact, as if it were an object of contempt and given no consideration. Numerous spiritual men of the Middle Ages did not care for the body except to inflict penances upon it. In most schools of the time, nothing was provided to allow "brother donkey" to rest.

For Calvino, human nature that was totally corrupted by original sin, could only be an "outhouse." On the opposite front, numerous Renaissance writers and artists

exalted the body to the point of paying it cult, in which sensuality played a significant role. Rabelais, for his part, glorified the bodies of his giants and took pleasure in showcasing even their less noble organic functions.

Salesian realism

Between the divinisation of the body and its contempt, Francis de Sales offers a realistic view of human nature. At the end of the first meditation on the theme of the creation of man, "the first being of the visible world," the author of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* puts on the lips of Philothea this statement that seems to summarise his thought: "I want to feel honoured for the being that he has given me." Certainly, the body is destined for death. With stark realism, the author describes the soul's farewell to the body, which it will leave "pale, livid, disfigured, horrid, and foul-smelling," but this does not constitute a reason to neglect and unjustly denigrate it while one is alive. Saint Bernard was wrong when he announced to those who wanted to follow him "that they should abandon their bodies and go to him only in spirit." Physical evils should not lead to hating the body: moral evil is far worse.

We surely do not find any oblivion or overshadowing of bodily phenomena in Francis de Sales, as when he speaks of various forms of diseases or when he evokes the manifestations of human love. In a chapter of the *Treatise on the Love of God* titled: "That love tends to union," he writes, for example, that "one mouth is applied to another in kissing to testify that we would desire to pour out one soul into the other, to unite them reciprocally in a perfect union." This attitude of Francis de Sales towards the body already provoked scandalised reactions in his time. When Philothea appeared, an Avignonese religious publicly criticised this "little book," tearing it apart and accusing its author of being a "corrupted and corrupting doctor." An enemy of excessive modesty, Francis de Sales was not yet aware of the reserve and fears that would emerge in later times. Do medieval customs survive in him or

is it simply a manifestation of his “biblical” taste? In any case, there is nothing in him comparable to the trivialities of the “infamous” Rabelais.

The most esteemed natural gifts are beauty, strength, and health. Regarding beauty, Francis de Sales expressed himself while speaking of Saint Brigid: “She was born in Scotland; she was a very beautiful girl, since the Scots are naturally beautiful, and in that country, one finds the most beautiful creatures that exist.” Let us also think of the repertoire of images regarding the physical perfections of the bridegroom and the bride, taken from the *Song of Solomon*. Although the representations are sublimated and transferred to a spiritual register, they remain indicative of an atmosphere in which the natural beauty of man and woman is exalted. There were attempts to have him suppress the chapter of *Theotimus* on kissing, in which he demonstrates that “love tends to union,” but he always refused to do so. In any case, external beauty is not the most important: the beauty of the daughter of Zion is internal.

The close connection between body and soul

First of all, Francis de Sales affirms that the body is “a part of our person.” With a hint of tenderness, a personified soul can also say: “This flesh is my dear half, it is my sister, it is my companion, born with me, nourished with me.”

The bishop was very attentive to the existing bond between body and soul, between the health of the body and that of the soul. Thus, he writes of a person under his care, who was in poor health, that the health of her body “depends a lot on that of the soul, and that of the soul depends on spiritual consolations.” “Your heart has not weakened – he wrote to a sick woman – rather your body, and, given the very close ties that unite them, your heart has the impression of experiencing the pain of your body.” Everyone can see that bodily infirmities “end up creating discomfort even to the spirit, due to the close bonds between the one and the other.”

Conversely, the spirit acts on the body to the point that "the body perceives the affections that stir in the heart," as occurred with Jesus, who sat by Jacob's well, tired from His heavy commitment to the service of the Kingdom of God.

However, since "the body and spirit often proceed in opposite directions, and as one weakens, the other strengthens," and since "the spirit must reign," "we must support and strengthen it so that it always remains its strongest." So, if I take care of the body, it is "so that it may serve the spirit."

In the meantime, we should be fair towards the body. In case of malaise or mistakes, it often happens that the soul accuses the body and mistreats it, as Balaam did with his donkey: "O poor soul! If your flesh could speak, it would say to you, as Balaam's donkey: why do you beat me, miserable one? It is against you, my soul, that God arms His vengeance; you are the criminal." When a person reforms their inner self, the conversion will also manifest externally: in all attitudes, in the mouth, in the hands, and "even in the hair." The practice of virtue makes a person beautiful internally and also externally. Conversely, an external change, a behaviour of the body can favour an inner change. An act of external devotion during meditation can awaken inner devotion. What is said here about spiritual life can easily be applied to education in general.

Love and dominance of the body

Speaking of the attitude one should have towards the body and physical realities, it is not surprising to see Francis de Sales that recommends Philothea, first of all, gratitude for the physical graces that God has given her.

We must love our body for several reasons: because it is necessary for us to perform good works, because it is a part of our person, and because it is destined to participate in eternal happiness. Christians must love their bodies as a living image of that of the incarnate Saviour, as coming from

Him by kinship and consanguinity. Especially after we have renewed the covenant, truly receiving the body of the Redeemer in the adorable Sacrament of the Eucharist, and, with Baptism, Confirmation, and the other sacraments, we have dedicated and consecrated ourselves to supreme goodness.

Loving one's own body is part of the love owed to oneself. In truth, the most convincing reason to honour and wisely use the body lies in a vision of faith, which the bishop of Geneva explained to the mother of Chantal after she recovered from an illness: "Take care of this body, for it is of God, my dearest Mother." The Virgin Mary is presented at this point as a model: "With what devotion she must have loved her virginal body! Not only because it was a sweet, humble, pure body, obedient to holy love and totally imbued with a thousand sacred perfumes, but also because it was the living source of that of the Saviour and belonged to Him very closely, with a bond that has no comparison."

The love of the body is indeed recommended, but the body must remain subject to the spirit, as the servant to his master. To control appetite, I must "command my hands not to provide the mouth with food and drink, except in the right measure." To govern sexuality, "one must remove or give to the reproductive faculty the subjects, objects, and foods that excite it, according to the dictates of reason." To the young man who is about to "set sail in the vast sea," the bishop recommends: "I also wish you a vigorous heart that prevents you from pampering your body with excessive delicacies in eating, sleeping, or other things. It is known, in fact, that a generous heart always feels a bit of contempt for bodily delicacies and delights."

In order for the body to remain subject to the law of the spirit, it is advisable to avoid excesses: neither mistreat it nor pamper it. In everything, moderation is necessary. The spirit of charity must prevail over all things. This leads him to write: "If the work you do is necessary for you or is very useful for the glory of God, I would prefer

that you endure the pains of work rather than those of fasting." Hence the conclusion: "In general, it is better to have more strength in the body than is needed, rather than ruin it beyond what is necessary; because it is always possible to ruin it whenever one wants, but to recover it is not always enough to just want it."

What must be avoided is this "tenderness one feels for oneself." With fine irony but in a ruthless manner, he takes it out on an imperfection that is not only "characteristic of children, and, if I may dare to say, of women," but also of cowardly men, of whom he gives this interesting characteristic representation: "There are others who are compassionate towards themselves, and who do nothing but complain, coddle, pamper and look at themselves."

In any case, the bishop of Geneva took care of his body, as was his duty, and obeyed his doctor and the "nurses." He also took care of the health of others, giving advice on appropriate measures. He would write, for example, to the mother of a young student at the college of Annecy: "It is necessary to have Charles examined by doctors, so that his abdominal swelling does not worsen."

Hygiene is at the service of health. Francis de Sales desired that both the heart and the body be clean. He recommended decorum, very different from statements like that of Saint Hilary, according to which "one should not seek cleanliness in our bodies, which are nothing but pestilential carcasses and only full of infection." He was rather of the opinion of Saint Augustine and the ancient people who bathed "to keep their bodies clean from the dirt produced by heat and sweat, and also for health, which is certainly greatly aided by cleanliness."

In order to work and fulfil the duties of one's office, everyone should take care of their body regarding nutrition and rest: "To eat little, work a lot and with much agitation, and deny the body the necessary rest, is like demanding much from a horse that is exhausted without giving it time to chew a bit of fodder." The body needs to rest. This

is quite evident. Long evening vigils are “harmful to the head and stomach,” while, on the other hand, getting up early in the morning is “useful for both health and holiness.”

Educating our senses, especially the eyes and ears

Our senses are wonderful gifts from the Creator. They connect us to the world and open us to all sensitive realities, to nature, to the cosmos. The senses are the door to the spirit, which they provide, so to speak, with the raw material; indeed, as the scholastic tradition says, “nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses.”

When Francis de Sales speaks of the senses, his interest leads him particularly to the educational and moral levels, and his teaching on this matter is connected to what he has presented about the body in general: admiration and vigilance. On the one hand, he says that God gives us “eyes to see the wonders of His works, a tongue to praise Him, and so for all the other faculties,” without ever omitting, and on the other, the recommendation to “set up sentinels for the eyes, the mouth, the ears, the hands, and the sense of smell.”

It is necessary to start with sight, because “among all the external parts of the human body, there is none, in terms of structure and activity, more noble than the eye.” The eye is made for light. This is demonstrated by the fact that the more beautiful, pleasant to the sight, and properly illuminated things are, the more the eye gazes at them with eagerness and liveliness. “From the eyes and words, one knows what the soul and spirit of a man are, for the eyes serve the soul as the dial serves the clock.” It is well known that among lovers, the eyes speak more than the tongue.

We must be vigilant over the eyes, for through them temptation and sin can enter, as happened to Eve, who was enchanted by the beauty of the forbidden fruit, or to David, who fixed his gaze on Uriah’s wife. In certain cases, one must proceed as one does with a bird of prey: to make it return, it is necessary to show it the lure; to calm it, one must cover it with a hood; similarly, to avoid bad looks, “one must turn

the eyes away, cover them with the natural hood, and close them."

Granted that visual images are largely dominant in the works of Francis de Sales, it must be recognised that auditory images are also quite noteworthy. This highlights the importance he attributed to hearing for both aesthetic and moral reasons. "A sublime melody listened to with great concentration" produces such a magical effect as to "enchant the ears." But be careful not to exceed auditory capacities: music, however beautiful, if loud and too close, bothers us and offends the ear.

Besides, it must be known that "the heart and the ears converse with each other," for it is through the ear that the heart "listens to the thoughts of others." It is also through the ear that suspicious, insulting, lying, or malevolent words enter into the depths of the soul, from which one must be very careful. For souls are poisoned through the ear, just as the body is through the mouth. The honest woman will cover her ears so as not to hear the voice of the enchanter who wants to cunningly seduce her. Remaining in the symbolic realm, Francis de Sales declares that the right ear is the organ through which we hear spiritual messages, good inspirations, and motions, while the left serves to hear worldly and vain discourses. To guard the heart, we must therefore protect the ears with great care.

The best service we can ask of the ears is to hear the word of God, the object of preaching, which requires attentive listeners eager to let it penetrate their hearts so that it may bear fruit. Philothea is invited to "let it drip" into the ear, first of one and then of the other, and to pray to God in the depths of her soul, that He may enjoy letting that holy dew penetrate the hearts of those who listen.

The other senses

Also, as regards the sense of smell, the abundance of olfactory images has been noted. The perfumes are as diverse as the fragrant substances, such as milk, wine, balm,

oil, myrrh, incense, aromatic wood, spikenard, ointment, rose, onion, lily, violet, pansy, mandrake, cinnamon... It is even more astonishing to observe the results produced by the making of scented water:

Basil, rosemary, marjoram, hyssop, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, lemons, and musk, mixed together and crushed, do indeed give off a very pleasant fragrance from the mixture of their odours. However, it is not even comparable to that of the water distilled from them, in which the aromas of all these ingredients, isolated from their cores, blend more perfectly, giving rise to an exquisite fragrance that penetrates the sense of smell much more than would happen if the material parts were present along with the water.

There are numerous olfactory images drawn from the Song of Solomon, an oriental poem where perfumes occupy a prominent place and where one of the biblical verses most commented on by Francis de Sales is the heartfelt cry of the bride: "Draw me to you, we will walk and run together in the wake of your perfumes." And how refined is this note: "The sweet fragrance of the rose is made more subtle by the proximity of the garlic planted near the rose bushes!".

However, let us not confuse the sacred balm with the perfumes of this world. There is indeed a spiritual sense of smell, which we should cultivate in our interest. It allows us to perceive the spiritual presence of the beloved subject, and also ensures that we do not let ourselves be distracted by the bad odours of others. The model is the father who welcomes the prodigal son returning to him "semi-nude, dirty, filthy, and stinking of filth from long association with pigs." Another realistic image appears in reference to certain worldly criticisms. Let us not be surprised, Francis de Sales advises Giovanna di Chantal, it is necessary "that the little ointment we have seems stinking to the nostrils of the world."

Regarding taste, certain observations by the bishop of Geneva might lead us to think that he was a born

gourmand, indeed an educator of taste: "Who does not know that the sweetness of honey increasingly unites our sense of taste with a continuous progression of flavour, when, keeping it in the mouth for a long time instead of swallowing it immediately, its flavour penetrates more deeply into our sense of taste?" Granted the sweetness of honey, however, it is necessary to appreciate salt more, for the fact that it is more commonly used. In the name of sobriety and temperance, Francis de Sales recommended knowing how to renounce personal taste, eating what is "put before us."

Finally, regarding touch, Francis de Sales speaks of it especially in a spiritual and mystical sense. Thus, he recommends touching Our Lord crucified: the head, the holy hands, the precious body, the heart. To the young man about to set sail into the vast sea of the world, he requires that he govern himself vigorously and to despise softness, bodily delights, and daintiness: "I would like you to sometimes treat your body harshly to make it experience some harshness and toughness, despising delicacies and things pleasant to the senses; for it is necessary that sometimes reason exercises its superiority and the authority it has to regulate sensual appetites."

The body and spiritual life

The body is also called to participate in the spiritual life that is expressed primarily in prayer: "It is true, the essence of prayer is in the soul, but the voice, gestures, and other external signs, through which the innermost part of hearts is revealed, are noble appurtenances and very useful properties of prayer. They are effects and operations. The soul is not satisfied with praying if man does not pray in his entirety; it prays together with the eyes, the hands, the knees."

He adds that "the soul prostrated before God easily makes the entire body bend over itself; it raises the eyes where it elevates the heart, lifts the hands there, from where it awaits help." Francis de Sales also explains that "to

pray in spirit and truth is to pray willingly and affectionately, without pretence or hypocrisy, and engaging the whole person, soul and body, so that what God has joined is not separated." "The whole person must pray," he repeats to the visiting sisters. But the best prayer is that of Philothea, when she decides to consecrate to God not only her soul, spirit, and heart, but also her "body with all its senses". This is how she will truly love and serve Him with all her being.

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 Tibiroso, 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).

The name

In the Faculty of Medicine at a major university, the professor of anatomy distributed a questionnaire to all students as a final exam.

One student who had prepared meticulously answered all the questions promptly until he came to the last one.

The question was: "What is the first name of the cleaning lady?"

The student handed in the test, leaving the last answer blank. Before handing in the paper, he asked the professor if the last question on the test would count towards the grade.

"It is clear!" replied the professor. "In your career you will meet many people. They all have their own degree of importance. They deserve your attention, even with a small smile or a simple hello."

The student never forgot the lesson and learned that the cleaning lady's first name was Marianne.

A disciple asked Confucius, "If the king asked you to rule the country, what would be your first action?"

"I would like to learn the names of all my collaborators."

"What nonsense! It is certainly not a matter of primary concern for a prime minister."

"A man cannot hope to receive help from what he does not know," replied Confucius. "If he does not know nature, he will not know God. Similarly, if he does not know who he has by his side, he will have no friends. Without friends, he will not be able to devise a plan. Without a plan, he will not be able to direct anyone's actions. Without direction, the country will plunge into darkness and even the dancers will no longer know how to put one foot next to the other. Thus a seemingly trivial action, learning the name of the person next to you,

can make a huge difference.

The incorrigible sin of our time is that everyone wants to put things right immediately and forgets that they need others to do this."

The handkerchief of purity (1861)

On June 16, Don Bosco gave the boys the spiritual nosegay to pray for the grace of repentance for those with the big ape on their shoulders – boys so few in number that he could hardly speak of them in the plural. Then, at the "2 Good Night" on June 18, he told the following little story, or dream of sorts, as he called it on another occasion. His style of narration, however, was always such as to prompt Ruffino to apply to Don Bosco what Baruch had said of Jeremiah: "[He] dictated all these words to me as if he were reading them, and I wrote them down with ink in the book." [Jer. 36, 18] Don Bosco spoke thus:

On the night of June 14 I had no sooner fallen asleep than I was startled by a heavy blow on the bedstead, as if someone had struck it with a board. I jumped up and immediately thought that it was lightning.

I looked about but found nothing unusual. Convinced that I had most likely been dreaming, I again tried to sleep. Hardly had I begun to doze when a second blow startled me again. This time I got out of bed and searched everywhere – under the bed, under the desk, and in the corners of the room – but I found nothing amiss. Commending myself to God's safekeeping, I blessed myself with holy water and slipped into bed. It was then that my mind began to wander and I saw what I am going to

tell you.

I seemed to be in our church pulpit, about to start a sermon. All the boys were seated at their usual places, looking up and waiting, but I had no idea what to preach about. My mind was a complete blank. For a while I stood there dumbfounded and dismayed. Never had anything like this happened to me in all my years of ministry. Then suddenly the walls and boys disappeared, and the church turned into an immense valley. I was beside myself and could not believe my eyes.

"What's this?" I questioned. "A moment ago I was in the pulpit in church and now I am in a valley? Am I dreaming? What's happening to me?"

I decided then to get going, hoping to meet someone and find out where I was. After a while, I came to a stately palace. Its many balconies and broad terraces beautifully harmonized with the building and landscape. In front of the palace there was a large plaza. In a corner, at the right, a large number of boys were crowding around a lady who was handing out handkerchiefs, one to each boy. On taking theirs, the boys walked up to the terrace and ranged themselves along the parapet. Drawing close to the lady, I heard her say to each lad as she gave him a handkerchief, "Do not unfold it when it's windy, but if you are surprised by a wind, turn at once to the right, never to the left."

I keep looking at those boys, but then and there I did not recognize any of them. When all the handkerchiefs had been distributed, the boys were all lined up on the terrace in complete silence. As I watched, one boy took out his handkerchief and unfolded it. Others followed his example and soon all had them out. The handkerchiefs were very large and exquisitely embroidered in gold. On each, lengthwise, there was written in gold: *Regina virtutum* [Queen of virtues].

Suddenly a soft breeze came out of the north – that is, from the left; gradually it grew stronger, then it became a wind. Immediately some boys folded their handkerchiefs and hid them, while others turned quickly to the right. Others, instead, left them exposed and flapping in the wind. Meanwhile the

disturbance gained force while ominous clouds gathered overhead and darkened the sky. Lightning flashed as thunderous, frightening rumbles rolled across the heavens, followed by hail, rain, and snow. Unbelievably, many boys still kept their handkerchiefs flapping in the storm. The hail, rain, and snow battered them mercilessly.

In no time they were riddled with holes, torn beyond recognition.

I was stunned, not knowing what to make of it. However, I was in for a still greater shock. As I got closer to those boys for a better look, I recognized every one of them. They were my own Oratory boys. I hurried up to one and asked, "What in the world are you doing here? Aren't you so-and-so?"

"Yes," he replied, "I am." And then, pointing to several others, he added, "So-and-so and so-and-so are here too!"

I then went over to the lady who had distributed the handkerchiefs.

Several men were around her.

"What does all this mean?" I asked them.

The lady herself [hearing my question] turned to me. "Didn't you see the inscription on those handkerchiefs?" she asked.

"Why yes, my lady," I replied. "*Regina virtutum.*"

"Do you understand now?"

"Yes, I do!"

All those boys exposed their purity to the wind of temptation. Some, on realizing the danger, immediately fled. Those are the boys who folded and hid their handkerchiefs. Others, taken by surprise and unable to fold their handkerchiefs, turned to the right. These are the boys who promptly have recourse to prayer when in danger and turn their backs upon the enemy. Others, instead, kept their handkerchiefs open to the full blast of temptation and fell into sin.

Saddened by this sight and the realization that so very few of my boys had kept themselves pure, I nearly lost heart and burst into tears.

When I was able to control myself again, I asked, "Why did even raindrops and snowflakes riddle the handkerchiefs? Aren't

they symbols of venial sins?"

One of the men replied: "Don't you know that where purity is concerned *non datur parvitas materiae* [there is no matter that is not considered to be grave]? Nevertheless, don't be downhearted. Come and see."

He moved to the balcony and, signaling to the boys with his hand, shouted, "Right about face!" Nearly all obeyed, but a few did not budge.

Their handkerchiefs were torn to shreds. I noticed, too, that the handkerchiefs of those who had turned to the right had shrunk and were covered with patches. They had no holes but were pitifully shapeless.

"These boys," the lady explained, "had the misfortune of losing purity, but they regained God's grace through confession. Those few who did not stir are those who persist in sin and perhaps will go to perdition." Finally, she said to me: "*Nemini dicito, sed tantum admone.*"

[Tell no one in particular, but give only a general warning.]
(*BM VI*, 582-584)

In Memoriam. Cardinal Angelo Amato, SDB

The universal Church and the Salesian Family bid farewell for the last time on December 31, 2024, to Cardinal Angelo Amato, S.D.B., emeritus Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Born in Molfetta (in the province of Bari, Italy) on 8 June 1938, he served the Holy See for many years and became a point of reference in theology, academic research, and the promotion of holiness within the Church. The funeral rites, presided over on 2 January 2025 by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, Dean of the College of Cardinals, were held at the Altar

of the Chair in St. Peter's Basilica. At the conclusion, His Holiness Francis presided over the rite of the "Ultima Commendatio" and the "Valedictio," paying his homage to this illustrious son of St. John Bosco.

Below is a biographical profile retracing his life, the most significant stages of his formation, his academic and pastoral experiences, up to his mission as Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

The Origins and the Salesian Choice

Angelo Amato was born in Molfetta on 8 June 1938, the eldest of four children in a family of shipbuilders. Growing up in an environment that fostered a spirit of commitment and responsibility, he completed his early studies at elementary schools run by the Alcantarine Sisters and the Salesian Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Molfetta. Later, he continued with middle school and, foreseeing a possible future in a maritime career, enrolled at the Nautical Institute in Bari, in the section for long-course captains. It was during his third year of studies, in October 1953, that he decided to pursue the priesthood: he left the Nautical Institute and entered the Salesian aspirantate in Torre Annunziata.

Thus, his religious vocation was intertwined from the beginning with the Salesian Family. After a probationary period, he completed his novitiate at Portici Bellavista from 1955 to 1956. On 16 August 1956—the day that Salesian tradition reserves for the first profession of the novices—he made his religious vows, becoming a Salesian of Don Bosco. From that moment on, his life would be profoundly linked to the Salesian charism, with particular attention to youth and education.

After the novitiate, Angelo Amato attended the philosophical seminary in San Gregorio in Catania, where he obtained his classical high school diploma (in 1959) and, subsequently, a degree in Philosophy at the then Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum in Rome (today the Pontifical University of the Salesian Order). In 1962 he made his perpetual profession, definitively

consolidating his belonging to the Salesian Congregation. In those same years, he also undertook a practical internship at the Salesian College in Cisternino (Brindisi), teaching literature at the middle school level—an experience that immediately brought him into contact with youth apostolate and teaching, two dimensions that would mark his entire mission.

Ordination and Theological Studies

The next step in Angelo Amato's journey was studying Theology at the Theological Faculty of the Salesian University, also in Rome, where he earned his licentiate in Theology. Ordained a priest on 22 December 1967, he decided to further specialize and enrolled at the Pontifical Gregorian University. In 1974, he obtained his doctorate in Theology there, thus joining the ranks of the university teaching staff. The field of theology fascinated him deeply, a passion that would be reflected in the great number of publications and essays he authored over the course of his academic career.

The Experience in Greece and the Research on the Orthodox World

A decisive phase in Father Angelo Amato's formation was his stay in Greece, beginning in 1977, promoted by the then Secretariat for Christian Unity (today the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity). Initially, he spent four months at the Jesuit residence in Athens, where he devoted himself to the study of modern Greek—both written and spoken—in preparation for enrolling at the University of Thessaloniki. Once admitted to the courses, he obtained a scholarship from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which allowed him to reside at Monì Vlatadon (Vlatadon Monastery), home to an institute for patristic studies (Idrima ton Paterikon Meleton) and a rich library specializing in Orthodox theology, enhanced by microfilms of the manuscripts of Mount Athos.

At the University of Thessaloniki, he attended courses in the history of dogmas with Professor Jannis Kaloghirou and systematic dogmatics with Jannis Romanidis. Simultaneously, he

carried out an important study on the sacrament of penance in Greek Orthodox theology from the 16th to the 20th century: this research, supported by the well-known Greek patrologist Konstantinos Christou, was published in 1982 in the series *Análekta Vlatádon*. This period of ecumenical exchange and in-depth acquaintance with the Eastern Christian world greatly enriched Amato's formation, making him an expert in Orthodox theology and the dynamics of dialogue between East and West.

Return to Rome and Academic Commitment at the Pontifical Salesian University

Back in Rome, Angelo Amato assumed the role of professor of Christology in the Theological Faculty of the Pontifical Salesian University. His scholarly abilities and clarity of exposition did not go unnoticed: he was appointed Dean of the same Theological Faculty for two terms (1981–1987 and 1994–1999). Furthermore, between 1997 and 2000, he served as Vice-Rector of the University.

During those years, he also gained further international experience: in 1988, he was sent to Washington to deepen his knowledge of the theology of religions and to complete his manual on Christology. Alongside his academic work, he held advisory roles for several bodies of the Holy See: he was a consultor for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and for the Pontifical Councils for Promoting Christian Unity and Interreligious Dialogue. He also served as an advisor to the Pontifical International Marian Academy, underlining his interest in Mariology—a field typical of the Salesian spirituality centered on Mary Help of Christians.

In 1999, he was appointed Prelate Secretary of the restructured Pontifical Academy of Theology and Director of the newly founded theological journal *Path*. Moreover, between 1996 and 2000, he was part of the theological-historical commission for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, thus contributing significantly to the organization of the jubilee celebrations.

Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Episcopal Ministry

On 19 December 2002, a very significant appointment came: Pope John Paul II designated him Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, concurrently elevating him to the rank of Archbishop and assigning him the titular see of Sila, with the personal title of Archbishop. He received episcopal ordination on 6 January 2003 in the Vatican Basilica, from none other than John Paul II himself (now Saint John Paul II). In this role, Monsignor Angelo Amato collaborated with the then Prefect, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (the future Benedict XVI). The Dicastery's task was, and remains, to promote and safeguard the Catholic doctrine throughout the world. During his mandate, the new Archbishop continued to maintain an academic approach, combining his specialized expertise in theology with ecclesial service aimed at upholding the orthodoxy of the faith.

Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and the Cardinalate

A further step forward in his ecclesiastical career came on 9 July 2008: Pope Benedict XVI appointed him Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, succeeding Cardinal José Saraiva Martins. In this dicastery, Monsignor Amato was responsible for overseeing the processes of beatification and canonization of the Servants of God, discerning heroic virtues, miracles, and the testimony of those who, throughout history, have become saints and blessed in the Catholic Church.

At the Consistory of 20 November 2010, Benedict XVI created him a Cardinal, assigning him the deaconry of Santa Maria in Aquiro. With his new red hat, he was able to participate in the conclave of March 2013, which elected Pope Francis. During Francis's pontificate, Cardinal Amato was confirmed "*donec aliter provideatur*" as Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (on 19 December 2013), continuing in this role until 31 August 2018, when he resigned upon reaching the

age limits, leaving a lasting legacy through the number of beatifications and canonizations examined during those years.

Commitment to the Local Church: The Example of Don Tonino Bello

A particular testimony to Cardinal Amato's bond with his homeland occurred in November 2013, when he traveled to the Cathedral of Molfetta for the closure of the diocesan phase of the beatification and canonization process of Don Tonino Bello (1935–1993). The latter, Bishop of Molfetta from 1982 to 1986, was dearly loved for his commitment to peace and the poor. On that occasion, Cardinal Amato emphasized that holiness is not the privilege of a select few but a universal vocation: all believers, inspired by the person and message of Christ, are called to live their faith deeply, with hope and charity.

Final Years and Death

After stepping down from the leadership of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Cardinal Angelo Amato continued to serve the Church by participating in events and ceremonies, always making his deep theological knowledge available. His commitment was always marked by a refined human touch, evident respect for his interlocutors, and a humility that often moved all who met him.

On 3 May 2021, his deaconry of Santa Maria in Aquiro was elevated *pro hac vice* to a presbyteral title, further honoring his long and faithful dedication to ecclesiastical ministry.

The death of the Cardinal, which occurred on 31 December 2024 at the age of 86, has left a void in the Salesian Family and in the College of Cardinals, now composed of 252 cardinals, of whom 139 are electors and 113 are non-electors. The announcement of his passing elicited reactions of sorrow and gratitude throughout the ecclesial world: the Pontifical Salesian University, in particular, recalled his many years of teaching as a professor of Christology, his two mandates as Dean of the Theological Faculty, and the period during which he served as Vice-Rector of the institution.

A Legacy of Fidelity and the Pursuit of Holiness

In reflecting on the figure of Cardinal Angelo Amato, certain traits emerge that characterized both his ministry and his testimony. First and foremost, his profile as a Salesian religious: his fidelity to his vows, his deep bond with the charism of St. John Bosco, and his attention to youth, as well as intellectual and spiritual formation, represent a constant guiding line throughout his life. Secondly, his vast theological production—particularly in the areas of Christology and Mariology—and his contribution to dialogue with the Orthodox world, of which he was a passionate scholar. Undoubtedly, his service to the Holy See as Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, and as a Cardinal, underlines the importance of his role in promoting and safeguarding the Catholic doctrine, as well as in valuing the witnesses of holiness. Cardinal Amato was a privileged witness to the spiritual richness that the universal Church has expressed over the centuries, and he played an active role in the recognition of figures who serve as beacons for God's people.

Moreover, his participation in a conclave (that of 2013), his closeness to great Pontiffs such as John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, and his collaboration with numerous dicasteries testify to a service given in every possible dimension—a fusion of academic insight and pastoral governance within the Church.

The death of Cardinal Angelo Amato leaves behind a legacy of doctrine, ecumenical sensitivity, and love for the Church. The Diocese of Molfetta, which had already experienced his participation in the beatification process of Don Tonino Bello, remembers him as a man of faith and tireless pastor, capable of uniting the demands of theological discipline with those of pastoral charity. The Salesian Family, in particular, recognizes in him the fruit of a well-lived charism, imbued with that “educational charity” that, since Don Bosco, has accompanied the journey of countless consecrated individuals

and priests around the world, always in service to the young and the needy.

Today, the Church entrusts him to the mercy of the Lord, in the certainty that, as the Pontiff himself affirmed, Cardinal Amato, a “good and vigilant servant,” may now behold the face of God in the glory of the saints he helped to recognize. His testimony, made concrete by a life devoted to service and by profound theological preparation, remains as a sign and encouragement to all who wish to serve the Church with fidelity, meekness, and dedication, until the end of their earthly pilgrimage.

In this way, the message of hope and holiness that animated every action of his finds its fulfillment: whoever sows in the field of obedience, truth, and charity reaps a fruit that becomes a common good, an inspiration, and a light for future generations. And this, ultimately, is the most beautiful legacy that Cardinal Angelo Amato leaves to his religious family, to the Diocese of Molfetta, and to the entire Church.

And We Must Not Overlook the Scriptural Legacy Left by Cardinal Angelo Amato.

Below is a list – surely not complete – of his publications:

No.	Year	Title	Info
1	1974	I pronunciamenti tridentini sulla necessità della confessione sacramentale nei canoni 6-9 della sessione XIV (25 novembre 1551)	Essay on conciliar hermeneutics

2	1975	Problemi attuali di cristologia	Lectures of the Salesian Theological Faculty 1974–1975
3	1976	La Chiesa locale: prospettive teologiche e pastorali	Lectures of the Salesian Theological Faculty 1975–1976
4	1977	Cristologia metaecclesiale?	Considerations on E. Schillebeeckx's “metadogmatic” Christology
5	1977	Il Gesù storico	Problems and interpretations
6	1977	Temi teologico-pastorali	
7	1978	Annuncio cristiano e cultura contemporanea	
8	1978	Studi di cristologia patristica attuale	Concerning two recent publications by Alois Grillmeier

9	1979	Il sacramento della penitenza nelle "Risposte" del patriarca Geremia II ai teologi luterani di Tübingen (1576,1579,1581)	
10	1980	Annunciare Cristo ai giovani	(Co-author)
11	1980	Il Cristo biblico-ecclesiale	Proposal of a criteria-based synthesis on the essential contents of contemporary Christological proclamation
12	1980	Il Cristo biblico-ecclesiale latinoamericano	The "religious-popular" Christological module of Puebla
13	1980	La figura di Gesù Cristo nella cultura contemporanea	Christ in the conflict of interpretations
14	1980	Selezione orientativa sulle pubblicazioni cristologiche in Italia	

15	1980	L'enciclica del dialogo rivisitata	Concerning the International Study Conference on Paul VI's <i>"Ecclesiam suam"</i> (Rome, 24–26 October 1980)
16	1981	Il Salvatore e la Vergine-Madre: la maternità salvifica di Maria e le cristologie contemporanee	Proceedings of the 3rd International Mariological Symposium (Rome, October 1980)
17	1981	La risurrezione di Gesù nella teologia contemporanea	
18	1981	Mariologia in contesto	An example of inculturated theology: "The mestizo face of Our Lady of Guadalupe" (Puebla no. 446)
19	1982	Il sacramento della penitenza nella teologia greco-ortodossa	Historical-dogmatic studies, 16th–20th century
20	1983	Inculturazione-Contestualizzazione: teologia in contesto	Elements of selected bibliography

21	1983	La dimension "thérapeutique" du sacrement de la pénitence dans la théologie et la praxis de l'Église gréco-orthodoxe	
22	1984	Come conoscere oggi Maria	
23	1984	Inculturazione e formazione salesiana	Proceedings of the meeting in Rome, 12–17 September 1983 (co- author)
24	1984	Maria e lo Spirito Santo	Proceedings of the 4th International Mariological Symposium (Rome, October 1982)
25	1985	Come collaborare al progetto di Dio con Maria	Principles and proposals
26	1987	La Madre della misericordia	
27	1988	Gesù il Signore	Essay on Christology

28	1989	Essere donna	Studies on John Paul II's Apostolic Letter <i>"Mulieris dignitatem"</i> (co-author)
29	1990	Cristologia e religioni non cristiane	Problems and current issues: introductory considerations
30	1991	Come pregare con Maria	
31	1991	Studio dei Padri e teologia dogmatica	Reflections following the Instruction of the Congregation for Catholic Education of 10 November 1989 (=IPC)
32	1991	<i>Verbi revelati 'accommodata praedicatio' lex omnis evangelizationis"</i> (GS n.44)	Historical-theological reflections on inculturation
33	1992	<u>Angeli e demoni Il dramma della storia tra il bene e il male</u>	The drama of history between good and evil

34	1992	Dio Padre – Dio Madre	Preliminary reflections
35	1992	Il mistero di Maria e la morale cristiana	
36	1992	Il posto di Maria nella “Nuova evangelizzazione”	
37	1993	Cristologia della <i>Secunda Clementis</i>	Initial considerations
38	1993	Lettera cristologica dei primi concili ecumenici	
39	1994	<u>Trinità in contesto</u>	
40	1996	Maria presso la Croce, volto misericordioso di Dio per il nostro tempo	Marian Conference of the Servants of Mary Reparatrix, Rovigo, 12–15 September 1995
41	1996	<i>Tertio millennio adveniente:</i> Lettera apostolica di Giovanni Paolo II	Text and pastoral theological commentary

42	1996	<u>Vita consecrata. Una prima lettura teologica</u>	
43	1997	Alla ricerca del volto di Cristo: ... ma voi chi dite che io sia?	Proceedings of the 27th Diocesan Theological Week, Figline Valdarno, 2–5 September 1997
44	1997	Gesù Cristo verità di Dio e ricerca dell'uomo	Christology
45	1997	<u>La catechesi al traguardo. Studi sul Catechismo della Chiesa cattolica</u>	(Co-author)
46	1997	<u>Super fundamentum Apostolorum</u>	Studies in honor of His Eminence Cardinal A.M. Javierre Ortas (co-author)
47	1998	El Evangelio del Padre	
48	1998	Gesù Cristo morto e risorto per noi consegna lo Spirito	Theological meditations on the Paschal mystery (co- author)

49	1998	<u>Il Vangelo del Padre</u>	
50	1998	Una lettura cristologica della " <i>Secunda Clementis</i> "	On the existence of Pauline influences?
51	1999	Evangelización, catequesis, catequistas	A new stage for the Church of the third millennium
52	1999	La Vergine Maria dal Rinascimento a oggi	
53	1999	Missione della Chiesa e Chiesa in missione]. Gesù Cristo, Verbo del Padre	Field II
54	1999	La Chiesa santa, madre di figli peccatori	Ecclesiological approach and pastoral implications
55	2000	<i>Dominus Iesus</i> : l'unicità e l'universalità salvifica di Gesù Cristo e della Chiesa	Declaration
56	2000	Gesù Cristo e l'unicità della mediazione	(Co-author)

57	2000	Gesù Cristo, speranza del mondo	Miscellany in honor of Marcello Bordoni
58	2000	La Vierge dans la catéchèse, hier et aujourd'hui	Communications presented at the 55th Session of the French Society for Mariological Studies, Sanctuaire Notre-Dame-de- la-Salette, 1999 (co-author)
59	2000	Maria e la Trinità	Marian spirituality and Christian existence
60	2000	Maria nella catechesi ieri e oggi	A synthetic historical overview
61	2001	Crescere nella grazia e nella conoscenza di Gesù	
62	2002	Dichiarazione "Dominus Iesus" (6 agosto 2000)	Studies (co-author)

63	2003	<p>Maria Madre della speranza</p>	<p>For an inculturation of hope and mercy. [Component part of a monograph]</p>
64	2005	<p>La Madre del Dio vivo a servizio della vita</p>	<p>Proceedings of the 12th International Mariological Colloquium, Santuario del Colle, Lenola (Latina), 30 May – 1 June 2002 (co- author)</p>
65	2005	<p>Lo sguardo di Maria sul mondo contemporaneo</p>	<p>Proceedings of the 17th International Mariological Colloquium, Rovigo, 10–12 September 2004</p>
66	2005	<p>Maria, sintesi di valori</p>	<p>Cultural history of Mariology (co- author)</p>
67	2007	<p>Sui sentieri di Clotilde Micheli fondatrice delle Suore degli Angeli adoratrici della SS. Trinità</p>	<p>Spirituality and human promotion (co- author)</p>
68	2007	<p>San Francesco Antonio Fasani apostolo francescano e culture dell'Immacolata</p>	

69	2007	Il vescovo maestro della fede	Contemporary challenges to the magisterium of truth
70	2008	Gesù, identità del cristianesimo Conoscenza ed esperienza	Knowledge and experience
71	2008	La <i>Dominus Iesus</i> e le religioni	
72	2009	Catholicism and secularism in contemporary Europe	
73	2009	Futuro presente Contributi sull'enciclica "Spe salvi" di Benedetto XVI	Contributions on Benedict XVI's encyclical " <i>Spe salvi</i> " (co-author)
74	2009	La santità dei papi e di Benedetto XIII	
75	2009	Maria di Nazaret. Discepola e testimone della parola	
76	2009	Reflexiones sobre la cristología contemporánea	

77	2010	<u>I santi nella Chiesa</u>	
78	2010	Il celibato di Cristo nelle trattazioni cristologiche contemporanee	A critical-systematic review
79	2010	<u>Il celibato di Gesù</u>	
80	2010	<u>Il santo di Dio. Cristologia e santità</u>	
81	2011	<u>Dialogo interreligioso Significato e valore</u>	
82	2011	<u>I santi si specchiano in Cristo</u>	
83	2011	Istruzione "Sanctorum mater"	Presentation
84	2011	Le cause dei santi	Aid for the "Studium"
85	2011	<u>Maria la Theotokos. Conoscenza ed esperienza</u>	

86	2012	<u>I santi testimoni della fede</u>	
87	2012	<u>Santa Ildegarda di Bingen</u>	
88	2012	<u>Santi e beati. Come procede la Chiesa</u>	
89	2012	Testi mariani del secondo millennio	(Co-author)

90	2013	<p><u>I santi evangelizzano</u></p>	<p>Contribution to the Synod of Bishops of October 2012, which documents the indispensable evangelizing nature of the Saints, who, thanks to their exemplary Christian conduct, nourished by faith, hope, and charity, become points of reference for the Catholic Church and for the faithful of all nations and cultures, guiding them toward a life of holiness. The volume is divided into two parts: the first contains doctrinal reflections on the concept of Holiness and the causes of Saints, while the second gathers homilies, letters, and reports given throughout 2012, which describe the lives and work of Saints, Blesseds, Venerables, and Servants of God.</p>
91	2013	<p><u>Il Paradiso: di che si tratta?</u></p>	

92	2014	Accanto a Giovanni Paolo II	Friends and collaborators recount (co-author)
93	2014	I santi profeti di speranza	
94	2014	La Santissima Eucaristia nella fede e nel diritto della Chiesa	(Co-author)
95	2014	San Pietro Favre	
96	2014	Sant'Angela da Foligno	
97	2015	I santi: apostoli di Cristo risorto	
98	2015	Gregorio di Narek. Dottore della Chiesa	
99	2015	Beato Oscar Romero	
100	2015	Santa Maria dell'incarnazione	

101	2015	<u>San Joseph Vaz</u>	
102	2015	<u>I Santi apostoli di Cristo risorto</u>	
103	2016	<u>I santi: messaggeri di misericordia</u>	
104	2016	Misericordiosi come il Padre	Experiences of mercy in the lived holiness
105	2017	<u>I santi, ministri della carità</u>	Contains reflections on charity and a gallery of men and women (saints, blesseds, venerables, and servants of God) exemplary in the heroic exercise of this divine energy known as charity
106	2017	Il messaggio di Fatima tra carisma e profezia	Proceedings of the International Forum on Mariology (Rome, 7–9 May 2015)
107	2018	<u>I santi e la Madre di Dio</u>	

108	2019	Perseguitati per la fede	The victims of National Socialism in Central and Eastern Europe
109	2019	<i>Sufficit gratia mea"</i>	Miscellany of studies offered to His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Amato on the occasion of his 80th birthday celebration (genetliaco)
110	2019	<u>Un'inedita Sicilia. Eventi e personaggi da riscoprire</u>	
111	2020	<u>Il segreto di Tiffany Grant</u>	
112	2021	<i>Iesus Christus heri et hodie, ipse et in saecula</i>	Collection of contributions promoted by the Pontifical Salesian University for Cardinal Angelo Amato on the occasion of his 80th birthday celebration (genetliaco)
113	2021	<u>Dici l'anticu... La cultura popolare nel paese del Gattopardo. Proverbi di Palma di Montechiaro</u>	

114	2023	<p>Una Sicilia ancora da scoprire. Eventi e personaggi inediti</p>	
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