

# Don Bosco and his daily crosses

Don Bosco's life had much suffering but he bore it all with heroic humility and patience. Instead, we would like to talk here about daily crosses, more the passing kind but no less heavy. These are thorns he encountered along the way at every turn, actually thorns that stung his upright conscience and sensitive heart, which could have discouraged anyone less patient than him. We will give just a few examples of annoyances of a mainly financial nature that he had to endure through the fault of others.

Writing a letter from Rome to Fr Michael Rua on 25 April 1876, he said among other things: *"How many things, how many carrozzini completed and still under way. They seem like fairy tales!"* The term *"carrozzini"* is a Piedmontese term Don Bosco employed to indicate the problems caused by others that brought him serious and unexpected burdens, of which he was not the cause but the victim.

## Three significant cases

The owner of a steam pasta factory, a certain Luigi Succi from Turin, a man well known for his charitable works, one day asked Don Bosco to lend him his signature in a bank transaction to withdraw 40,000 lira. Since he was a rich man from whom he had received many benefits, Don Bosco gave in. But three days later Succi died, the promissory note expired and Don Bosco sent word to his heirs of their deceased's commitment.

Card. G. Cagliero: "We were at dinner when Fr Rua came in and told Don Bosco that the heirs neither knew nor wanted to know about promissory notes. I was sitting at Don Bosco's side. He was eating his soup and I saw that between one spoonful and another (note that it was the month of January and the refectory had no heating), drops of sweat were falling from

his forehead onto his plate, but he showed no concern and did not interrupt his modest meal.

There was no way of making the heirs see reason, and Don Bosco had to pay for it. It was only after about ten years that he got almost the entire sum secured by his signature back.

Another work of charity also cost him dearly for the harassment it caused him. A certain Giuseppe Rua, from Turin, had invented a device with which to raise the monstrance above the tabernacle in church and then lower it back down onto the altar table, at the same time lowering and then raising the cross. This would have avoided the risks the priest ran when climbing up the ladder to carry out this function. That really seemed a simpler and safer means of exposing the Blessed Sacrament. To encourage him Don Bosco sent the designs to the Sacred Congregation of Rites, recommending the initiative. But the Congregation did not approve the invention and did not even want to return the drawings, on the grounds that such was the practice in such cases. Finally, an exception was made for him to free him from more serious harassment. But Mr Rua, seeing the not inconsiderable loss of his industry, blamed Don Bosco for it, took him to court and demanded that the court oblige him to pay a large indemnity. Fortunately, the magistrate later turned out to be of a very different opinion. But in the meantime, during the long course of the litigation, Don Bosco's suffering was no small matter.

A third harassment originated from Don Bosco's charity. He had devised a special collection of funds in the winter of 1872-1873. That winter was particularly hard given the already serious public financial difficulties. In order to procure means of subsistence for his work in Valdocco, which at the time had about 800 young boarders, Don Bosco wrote a circular letter sent in a sealed envelope to potential contributors, inviting them to buy tickets of ten liras each as alms and raffling off a valuable reproduction of Raphael's Madonna di Foligno.



## Crosses adorning the Pinardi chapel

The public authorities saw a violation of the law in this initiative. The law prohibited public lotteries so Don Bosco was sued. When questioned, he protested that the lottery was not gambling but consisted of a simple appeal to civic charity, accompanied by a small token of appreciation. The case dragged on for a long time and only ended in 1875 with the sentence of the Court of Appeal condemning "the priest Sir Don Giovanni Bosco" to a heavy fine for contravening the lottery law. Although there was no doubt that the end, he had set himself was praiseworthy, his good faith could not exempt him from the penalty, the material fact being sufficient to establish the contravention also because "it could have gone well beyond the end he intended"!

This warning drove Don Bosco to a final attempt. He appealed to King Victor Emmanuel II, begging by virtue of a sovereign pardon in favour of his young men on whom the consequences of the sentence would fall. And the Sovereign graciously accepted, granting the pardon. The granting of the pardon fell at a time when Don Bosco was, among other things, fully immersed in expenses for his first expedition of Salesian missionaries to America. But in the meantime, how much trepidation!

Although Don Bosco, for the sake of peace, always tried to avoid litigation in court, he still had to endure it, only sometimes obtaining complete absolution. "*Summum jus summa iniuria*", said Cicero, meaning that too much rigour in judging is often a great injustice.

## The Saint's advice

Don Bosco was so adverse to litigation and quarrels that he wrote in his Spiritual Testament:

"With outsiders it is necessary to tolerate a great deal, and even endure harm rather than come to arguments.

With the civil and ecclesiastical authorities put up with as

much as you can honestly, but never end up in the secular court. Since in spite of sacrifices and all good will one must sometimes have to endure legal suits and disputes, I advise and recommend that the dispute be referred to one or two arbitrators with full powers, and that the dispute be referred to any opinion of theirs.

In this way consciences are saved and affairs which are ordinarily very long and costly and in which it is difficult to maintain peace and Christian charity are brought to an end."

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## **Rector Major's Message. That young man said to me: "My passion is Christ"**

It had been many years since I had last heard that expression from a young man in such a light-hearted context, in the presence of all his companions crowding around us.

Dear friends of the Salesian Bulletin, we have 'rounded the cape' of the year, as they say in seafaring parlance, and are facing up to the New Year. Every beginning possesses something magical, and the new always has its own special charm. The year 2023 seemed like a distant time, and yet here it is. The New Year is each time a promise that some good news will come for us too. The New Year springs from the light and enthusiasm given to us at Christmas.

'There is a time to be born' says Qohelet in the Bible. It is never too late to begin again. God always begins anew with us, filling us with his blessing.

One lesson I have learnt from these last few years: to be

prepared for surprises and the unexpected. As St Paul says in a letter, that no human heart: 'has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Cor 2:9). The content of Christian hope is to live by surrendering oneself into the arms of God. Today, many ways of living, of expressing oneself, of communicating have changed. But the human heart, especially the hearts of young people, is always the same, like a bud in spring, full of life ready to burst forth. Young people 'are' walking hope. What I am telling you now seems to me very appropriate for this greeting from the Salesian Bulletin for January, the 'month of Don Bosco'.

A few weeks ago, I visited Salesian presences in the United States of America (USA), and one day, early in the morning, I arrived at St Dominic Savio Middle and High School in Los Angeles. I spent several hours with hundreds of students, followed by a panel discussion with forty-five young people from the high school. We talked about their personal plans and dreams. It was a very pleasant and enriching few hours.

At the end of the morning, I shared a sandwich with the young people in the courtyard. I was sitting at a wooden table in the courtyard with my sandwich and a bottle of water. Four other Salesians were with me at the time; I had greeted many young people, some sitting at tables, others standing. It was a cheerful lunch. At my table there were two empty seats, and at one point two young men approached and sat down with us. Naturally I started talking to them. After a couple of minutes, one of the young men said to me: "I want to ask you a question" to which I replied, "Of course, ask me."

The young man said: "What do I have to do to become Pope? I want to be Pope."

I looked surprised, but I smiled. I replied that I had never been asked such a question and that I was surprised by his clarity and determination. It came to me spontaneously to explain to him that among so many millions of Catholics there is a lot of competition and it is not so easy to be elected Pope.



*Rector Major in the Salesian Family Youth Centre located in Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, USA, Nov. 2022*

I suggested: "Listen, you could start by becoming a Salesian." The young man smiled and said: "Well, I'm not saying no" and added, very seriously: "because what is certain is that my passion is Christ'." I must say that I was impressed and pleasantly surprised. I think it had been many years since I had heard that expression from a young man in such a light-hearted context, in the presence of all his companions, who were now crowding around us.

The young man had a genuine smile on his face and I told him that I liked his answer very much, because I understood that it was absolutely sincere. I added that, if he agreed, I would like to recount our conversation at another time and place, and so I did.

But already at that moment my thoughts had flown to Don Bosco. Surely Don Bosco would have appreciated a conversation with a young man like this. There is no doubt that in many conversations he had with Savio, Besucco, Magone, Rua, Cagliero, Francesia and many others there was much of this, the desire of those young men to do something beautiful with their lives.

And I thought how important it is today, 163 years after the beginning of the Salesian Congregation, to continue to believe deeply that young people are good, that they have so many seeds of goodness in their hearts, that they have dreams and projects that often carry within them so much generosity and gift of self.

How important it is to continue to believe that it is God who acts in the heart of each of us, each of his sons and daughters.

It seems to me that today, in our time, we are in danger of becoming so practical and efficient in looking at everything

that happens to us and what we experience that we risk losing the ability to surprise ourselves and others and, more worryingly, not letting ourselves be “surprised by God”.

Hope is like a volcano within us, like a secret spring gushing in our hearts, like a spring bursting forth in the depths of our souls: it involves us like a divine whirlpool into which we are inserted, by the grace of God. I think that like yesterday with Don Bosco, today there are thousands and thousands of young people who want to see Jesus, who need to experience friendship with him, who are looking for someone to accompany them on this beautiful journey.

I invite you to join them, dear friends of the Bulletin, and I wish you time to be amazed and time to trust, time to look at the stars, time to grow and mature, time to hope again and to love. I wish you time to live each day, each hour as a gift. I also wish you time to forgive, time to give to others and plenty of time to pray, dream and be happy.

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## **The invisible other Don Boscós**

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

While this ‘journey’ is already known history, the

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

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

### **The other Don Boscoss**

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

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

Bishops, priests, nuns, lay Salesians, members of the Salesian Family: all figures, men and women, who without being saints – in our research we excluded saints and those already on their way to the altars – have fully realised Don Bosco’s educational mission in different spheres and roles: as



educators and priests, as professors and teachers, animators of oratories and youth centres, founders and directors of educational works, formators of vocations and new religious institutes, as writers and musicians, architects and builders of churches and colleges, artists of wood and painting, missionaries *ad gentes*, witnesses of the faith in prison, simple Salesians and simple Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Among them, not a few have often lived a life of hard sacrifices, overcoming obstacles of all kinds, learning very difficult languages, often risking death for lack of acceptable sanitary conditions, impossible climatic conditions, hostile and persecutory political regimes, even actual attacks. The latest of these happened just as I was leaving for Nairobi: Spanish Salesian, [Fr Cesare Fernández](#), murdered in cold blood on 15 February 2018 at the border between Togo and Burkina Faso. One of the most recent Salesians 'martyrs', we could call him, knowing the individual as I did.

## A story to learn about



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

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

Those who, like me and my colleagues from ACSSA, were able in

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

Are these presented to us as "next door saints"? Some certainly, even considering their personal limitations, their characters, their whims, and, why not, their sins (which only God knows). All, however, were endowed with immense faith, great hope, strong charity and generosity, much love for Don Bosco and souls. Some of them – think of the pioneer missionaries in Patagonia – one might be tempted to call real "madmen", madmen for God and for souls of course.

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

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

Let us briefly introduce these new faces of Don Bosco.

1	Antonio COJAZZI, Fr.	1880-1953	brilliant educator	Educators in the field	EU
2	Domenico MORETTI, Fr.	1900-1989	experience in Salesian oratories with the poorest young people	Educators in the field	EU
3	Samuele VOSTI, Fr.	1874-1939	creator and promoter of a renewed festive oratory in Valdocco	Educators in the field	EU
4	Karl ZIEGLER, Fr.	1914-1990	nature lover and scout	Educators in the field	EU
5	Alfonsina FINCO, Sr.	1869-1934	dedication to abandoned children	Educators in the field	EU
6	Margherita MARIANI, Sr.	1858-1939	Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Rome	Educators in the field	EU
7	Sisto COLOMBO, Fr.	1878-1938	man of culture and mystical soul	Educators in the field	EU
8	Franc WALLAND, Fr.	1887-1975	theologian and provincial	Educators in the field	EU
9	Maria ZUCCHI, Sr.	1875-1949	made Salesian mark on the Don Bosco Institute in Messina	Educators in the field	EU
10	Clotilde MORANO, Sr.	1885-1963	the teaching of women's physical education	Educators in the field	EU

11	Annetta URI, Sr.	1903-1989	from the desk to building sites: the courage to build the future of the school	Educators in the field	EU
12	Frances PEDRICK, Sr.	1887-1981	the first Daughter of Mary Help of Christians to graduate from Oxford University	Educators in the field	EU
13	Giuseppe CACCIA, Bro.	1881-1963	a life dedicated to Salesian publishing	Educators in the field	EU
14	Rufillo UGUCCIONI, Fr.	1891-1966	writer for children, evangeliser and disseminator of Salesian values	Educators in the field	EU
15	Flora FORNARA, Sr.	1902-1971	a life for educational theatre	Educators in the field	EU
16	Gaspar MESTRE, Bro.	1888-1962	the Salesian school of carving, sculpture and decoration in Sarriá (Barcelona)	Educators in the field	EU
17	Wictor GRABELSKI, Fr.	1857-1902	a forerunner of Salesian work in Poland	Educators in the field	EU
18	Antoni HLOND, Fr.	1884-1963	musician, composer, founder of a school for organists	Initiators	EU

19	Carlo TORELLLO, Fr.	1886-1967	popular devotion and civic memory in Latina	Initiators	EU
20	Jan KAJZER Bro.	1892-1976	engineer co-author of the Polish “art deco” style and moderniser of the Salesian vocational school in Oświęcim	Initiators	EU
21	Antonio CAVOLI, Fr.	1888-1972	founder of religious congregation in Japan inspired by the Salesian charism	Initiators	EU
22	Iside MALGRATI, Sr.	1904-1992	innovative Salesian in printing, school and vocational training	Initiators	EU
23	Anna JUZEK, Sr.	1879-1957	contribution to the establishment of the works of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Poland	Initiators	EU
24	Mária ČERNÁ, Sr.	1928-2011	basis for the rebirth of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Slovakia	Initiators	EU

25	Antonio SALA, Fr.	1836-1895	economer at Valdocco and earliest Economer General	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU
26	Francesco SCALONI, Fr.	1861-1926	an extraordinary figure of a Salesian superior	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU
27	Luigi TERRONE, Fr.	1875-1968	novice master and rector	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU

28	Marcelino OLAECHEA, Bishop	1889-1972	promoter of housing for workers	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU
29	Stefano TROCHTA, Cardinal	1905-1974	martyr under Nazis and Communists	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU
30	Alba DEAMBROSIS, Sr.	1887-1964	builder of female Salesian work in the German-speaking area	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU

31	Virginia FERRARO ORTÍ, Sr.	1894-1963	from trade unionist to Salesian superior	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	EU
32	Raffaele PIPERNI, Fr.	1842-1930	parish priest, 'mediator' in the integration of Italian immigrants into the San Francisco mainstream	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
33	Remigio RIZZARDI, Fr.	1863-1912	the father of beekeeping in Colombia	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
34	Carlos PANE, Fr.	1856-1923	pioneer of the Salesian presence in Spain and Peru	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
35	Florencio José MARTÍNEZ EMBODAS, Fr.	1894-1971	a Salesian way of building	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
36	Martina PETRINI PRADO, Sr.	1874-1965	Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; origins in fast- developing Uruguay	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF



37	Anna María COPPA, Sr.	1891-1973	foundress and face of the first Catholic school in Ecuador	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
38	Rose MOORE, Sr.	1911-1996	pioneer in the rehabilitation of blind Thai youth	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
39	Mirta MONDIN, Sr.	1922-1977	the origins of the first Catholic girls' school in Gwangju (Korea)	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
40	Terezija MEDVEŠEK, Sr.	1906-2001	valiant missionary in North-East India	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
41	Nancy PEREIRA, Sr.	1923-2010	tireless dedication to the poor	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
42	Jeanne VINCENT, Sr.	1915-1997	one of the first missionaries in Port-Gentil, Gabon	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
43	Maria Gertrudes DA ROCHA, Sr.	1933-2017	missionary and economer in Mozambique	Pioneers in mission	AM, AS, AF
44	Pietro GIACOMINI, Bishop	1904-1982	obedience blossoms	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	AM, AS, AF

45	José Luis CARREÑO ECHANDIA, Fr.	1905-1986	a multifaceted missionary with a preferential option for the poor	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	AM, AS, AF
46	Catherine MANIA, Sr.	1903-1983	first provincial in North-East India	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	AM, AS, AF
47	William Richard AINSWORTH, Fr.	1908-2005	an essay on modern Salesian leadership	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	AM, AS, AF

48	Blandine ROCHE, Sr.	1906-1999	the Salesian presence in the difficult years of post-independence Tunisia	Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in leadership roles	AM, AS, AF
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