 Reading time: 12 min.

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 blesseds 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 “*Ecclesiam suam*” (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 "*Mulieris dignitatem*" (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	*Verbi revelati 'accommodata praedicatio' lex omnis evangelizationis"* (GS n.44)	Historical-theological reflections on inculturation
33	1992	Angeli e demoni Il dramma della storia tra il bene e il male	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 *Secunda Clementis*	Initial considerations
38	1993	Lettera cristologica dei primi concili ecumenici	
39	1994	Trinità in contesto	

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	*Tertio millennio adveniente*: Lettera apostolica di Giovanni Paolo II	Text and pastoral theological commentary
42	1996	*Vita consecrata*. Una prima lettura teologica	
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	La catechesi al traguardo. Studi sul Catechismo della Chiesa cattolica	(Co-author)
46	1997	*Super fundamentum Apostolorum*	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	Il Vangelo del Padre	
50	1998	Una lettura cristologica della "*Secunda Clementis*"	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	*Dominus Iesus*: 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	Maria Madre della speranza	For an inculturation of hope and mercy. [Component part of a monograph]
64	2005	La Madre del Dio vivo a servizio della vita	Proceedings of the 12th International Mariological Colloquium, Santuario del Colle, Lenola (Latina), 30 May – 1 June 2002 (co-author)
65	2005	Lo sguardo di Maria sul mondo contemporaneo	Proceedings of the 17th International Mariological Colloquium, Rovigo, 10–12 September 2004
66	2005	Maria, sintesi di valori	Cultural history of Mariology (co-author)
67	2007	Sui sentieri di Clotilde Micheli fondatrice delle Suore degli Angeli adoratrici della SS. Trinità	Spirituality and human promotion (co-author)
68	2007	San Francesco Antonio Fasani apostolo francescano e culture dell’Immacolata	
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 *Dominus Iesus* 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 "*Spe salvi*" (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	I santi nella Chiesa	
78	2010	Il celibato di Cristo nelle trattazioni cristologiche contemporanee	A critical-systematic review
79	2010	Il celibato di Gesù	
80	2010	Il santo di Dio. Cristologia e santità	
81	2011	Dialogo interreligioso Significato e valore	
82	2011	I santi si specchiano in Cristo	
83	2011	Istruzione "*Sanctorum mater*"	Presentation
84	2011	Le cause dei santi	Aid for the "Studium"
85	2011	Maria la *Theotokos*. Conoscenza ed esperienza	
86	2012	I santi testimoni della fede	

87	2012	Santa Ildegarda di Bingen	
88	2012	Santi e beati. Come procede la Chiesa	
89	2012	Testi mariani del secondo millennio	(Co-author)
90	2013	I santi evangelizzano	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.
91	2013	Il Paradiso: di che si tratta?	
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	San Joseph Vaz	
102	2015	I Santi apostoli di Cristo risorto	
103	2016	I santi: messaggeri di misericordia	
104	2016	Misericordiosi come il Padre	Experiences of mercy in the lived holiness
105	2017	I santi, ministri della carità	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	I santi e la Madre di Dio	
108	2019	Perseguitati per la fede	The victims of National Socialism in Central and Eastern Europe
109	2019	*Sufficit gratia mea*”	Miscellany of studies offered to His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Amato on the occasion of his 80th birthday celebration (genetliaco)
110	2019	Un’inedita Sicilia. Eventi e personaggi da riscoprire	
111	2020	Il segreto di Tiffany Grant	
112	2021	*Iesus Christus heri et hodie, ipse et in saecula*	Collection of contributions promoted by the Pontifical Salesian University for Cardinal Angelo Amato on the occasion of his 80th birthday celebration (genetliaco)
113	2021	Dici l’anticu… La cultura popolare nel paese del Gattopardo. Proverbi di Palma di Montechiaro	
114	2023	Una Sicilia ancora da scoprire. Eventi e personaggi inediti	