SAINT JOHN BOSCO

TEACHINGS ON SPIRITUAL LIFE

An anthology

Introduction and notes by Aldo Giraudo
Introduction

Aldo Giraudo, sdb

Which of his writings best portray Saint John Bosco as a teacher of inner life and give us, if not all of his “spiritual doctrine”, at least the most characteristic features of his spirituality, that fertile flow of good fruits we think of as a “school of holiness valid for every state of life”? The question is pertinent since not only did Don Bosco, like St Alphonsus, not leave behind pages revealing the intimacy of his being; he also did not consider bringing together a systematic picture of a spirituality, as we would call it today, or an **ascetica**, as he would have called it in his era: a harmonious set of spiritual reflections. Certainly he gave us splendid testimonies, few and modest as they were, of the spiritual life of others. He saw them in action and was himself a concomitant factor for them: Louis Comollo, Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, Francis Besucco. Though in narrative form and written to edify, these documents do highlight inner experiences and essential features of Christian spirituality as proposed for young people.

A study of these biographical sketches, the inner pursuits of their youthful characters, and the general atmosphere of growth and development in the educational setting, in the community which was the context in which their spiritual adventure unfolded, allows us to garner the essential features of a model of youthful holiness, and the salient principles of a **vade-mecum** of ascetics comparable with the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by St Francis de Sales. Not so much because they offer, like the *Introduction* did, an articulated directory of inner life, but because they outline the basic attitudes of a holistic Christian existence in a concrete state of life (the time of growing up) and in a process that fully expresses the threefold way: purgation, illumination, union. Behind the simple anecdotal style the attentive reader can discover an essential and complete spiritual journey. It begins with the initial opening of the heart to the action of grace under the delicate guidance of parents and attentive educators (who are also passionate witnesses of Christian life), then becomes a process of interiorisation and appropriation, arriving finally at unconditional gift of self to God and generously undertaking one’s baptismal commitments. All of this is expressed in absolute obedience to the Holy Spirit given every occasion offered by daily existence. This work of cooperation with sanctifying grace which the lad willingly puts into effect step by step in his concrete state of life, in the spontaneity of his being, gives rise to profound resources and generates tranquil, fascinating and strong human and spiritual personalities.

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1 An expression used in the years following Don Bosco’s canonisation to systematically describe what we term “spirituality” (cf P. Scotti, *La dottrina spirituale di Don Bosco*, Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1939).


3 [G. Bosco,] Cenni sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù, scritti da un collega, Torino; Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero 1844 (more significant is the second edition for the additions Don Bosco included with the idea of offering a spiritual model to young people at the Oratory: G. Bosco, *Cenni sulla vita del giovane Luigi Comollo…*, Torino, Tipografia P. De-Agostini 1854); G. Bosco, *Vite di giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besucco*, Roma, LAS 2012.
All these paths are sketched out in an essential but clear-cut way. In the three 'Lives' we find a journey of prayer proceeding from the humble recitation of the prayers of the good Christian and simple devout practices, moving gradually to fervent intimacy of a more moving prayerfulness. It becomes a spirit of prayer, which then results in a state of permanent loving union with God. We see the demanding path of purification and perfection through daily examination of conscience, thanks to which the lad is led to a gradual self-awareness, and awareness of his moral activity, and is educated to contrition and good resolutions and guided towards the regular and fruitful practice of the sacrament of penance. Here, under the fatherly and balanced guidance of the director, he learns creaturely detachment and how to focus on God, how to rectify his intentions, discipline his senses and affections through 'natural' mortification – fulfilment of duty and putting up with the small adversities of daily life, accepted out of love of God – and through the practical exercise of little virtues by happily doing his duty according to his state of life and in relationships with others. And it is especially translated into a life permeated by charity, enlightened by sanctifying grace, making progress in perfection, and becoming a mature and very solid virtuous being. And finally, we find a well-defined vocational journey through community service in humble little matters and charity which is the generous gift of self and the offering up of one's life to the divine will, which is a salvific will.

The Memoirs of the Oratory too, re-reading them from the faith perspective of a personal story and an oratorian vocation, highlight spiritual attitudes and virtuous habits, indicate inner movements essential for those called to dedicate themselves to the salvation of the young, especially by stripping away selfishness and faithfully entrusting oneself to Providence in order to give oneself unconditionally to God's will.

Along with these masterpieces of narrative spirituality, we find other material by Don Bosco conceived as practical aids for the Christian upbringing of the young and the people, and from these we can gain useful pointers for reconstructing his spiritual approach: the Companion of Youth above all, perhaps his most beloved and carefully edited item; The Exercise of Devotion to God’s Mercy; The Key to Paradise; The Month of May; The Catholic Companion. Together with the Regulations (of the Oratory, the Houses, the Sodalities), his correspondence and the vast array of bits and pieces of documentation offer us his daily pastoral activity (preaching, brief evening talks, conferences, stories). They are texts which allow us to identify characteristic points of the Saint's spiritual magisterium or authoritative teaching, and his specially favoured topics.

The most pointed documentation from a spiritual point of view is certainly that produced by Don Bosco as the founder of religious congregations, and as a formator and leader of communities of apostolic and consecrated life. These were years when his horizons were broadening in an impressive way. This priest from Valdocco, concerned with saving and safeguarding poor and abandoned youth on the outskirts of Turin, offering “a short and easy, but adequate way of living” leading to their being “the consolation of your families, an honour to your country, good citizens here on earth and then one day the fortunate inhabitants of heaven”[^4], now is led by God to a vast field, and is invested with a charism that makes him the father and teacher of a movement of consecrated educators and apostles extending through space and time. His spiritual

[^4]: [G. Bosco], Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de’ suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà per la recita dell’ufficio della beata Vergine e de’ principali vesprì dell’anno coll’aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre ecc., Torino, Tipografia Paravia e Comp. 1847, p. 6 (OE II, 186).
teaching widens and deepens, his proposal becomes more radical, all-embracing. But it is precisely in this broadening and deepening that he accentuates the absolute primacy of God and the demands of the *sequela Christi* to the point of conforming oneself to the Christ who is offered up, immolated, that the real substance of this “easy” way emerges as an essential spiritual proposal offered to young people at the primitive Oratory. In fact the core is the same, even though expressed in the simplicity of unadorned, everyday language: fervent charity expressed in the unconditional offering of self which becomes an active and unifying strength.

This anthology – which is but a specimen, a selection of the vast quantity of material of the kind, all of it meaningful – aims to put the reader in touch with that atmosphere, allow him or her to enter into Don Bosco's horizons, become familiar with his language and vision. It is not a systematic presentation of his "spirituality", but an account of his “teachings” on how to live as good Christians and good Salesians in a sound way. This is spiritual life in the sense which St Francis de Sales intended the “devout life” to be.

This book has four parts: 1. *Don Bosco as a spiritual guide for the young*; 2. *Indications for a consistent, active Christian life*; 3. *Consecrated to God for His glory and the salvation of the young*; 4. *A father's final recommendations, and a founder's concerns*.

1. Don Bosco as a spiritual guide for the young

The first part contains a selection of texts drawn from printed works like the *Companion of Youth*, the *Regulations* for Salesian educational settings and the *Epistolario*, (Collected Letters), but also from archival documents, especially the *cronachette* (diaries or written notes), where Don Bosco’s spoken interventions were often written down (instructions, Good Nights, accounts of his dreams) which give us his praxis as a formator, his system and the stimulating, fervent and industrious setting that he provided for his boys. We have here an essential panorama of Don Bosco’s spiritual proposal to the young, as part of a joyful and dynamic view of Christian life.

The discourse is clear, concrete. In the background there is the dominant radiant view of God as Creator, tender and provident Father, stretching out to us in love, calling us to communion and intimacy with himself. Don Bosco presents God as being especially attentive to young people: he prefers them for their simplicity, humility, innocence, “and because they have not yet become the unfortunate prey of the infernal enemy”, and are positively open to good. We respond to his love with love: “We were created to love and serve God our creator, and all the knowledge and riches of the world would serve for nothing without the fear of God”. The Saint urges young people to listen to the divine invitation and reciprocate, by “giving themselves” to Him, embracing a virtuous life and putting themselves enthusiastically and joyfully at his service, doing “everything that could please him, avoiding what would displease him”. Thus they can taste the beauty and wonder of Christian life.

This 'giving of oneself' to God is focused in a movement of affective and effective charity that focuses all one's attention on a baptismal process of detachment of the heart from sin, loving commitment to virtue. It is a unifying force that does not draw the lad

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5 Ibid., p. 11 (OE II, 191).
away from his world but immerses him in daily life, duties, human relationships: all this is seen from the point of view of divine love, a heart freed from the sin which disfigures, saddens and mortifies it, and the power of virtue which frees, perfects it and fully satisfies it.

Don Bosco insists on the “ease” of his spiritual approach and illustrates ways of maintaining this positive and fruitful force which “perseverance” and good will make so effective. Meditation, listening to God's word, daily prayer, devotion to Mary, prayerful little phrases, brief visits to the Blessed Sacrament and a correct and fervent sacramental practice nurture charity and are the source of grace. Sincerity and quiet confidence in superiors guarantees happiness. Faithfulness to duty, keeping positively occupied, exercising virtues of relationship and the service of charity are to be nurtured as a fertile field. Custody of the senses, modesty, mortification in little things, fleeing idleness, bad companions and dangerous occasions are everyday struggles.

It should not be forgotten that the context for this discourse is a community made up of: educators who are affectionate and available, young people who are open and cooperative, all within the perspective of Christian education to all-round growth to perfection and the full realisation of one's calling now and in eternity. In such an approach the fundamental spiritual attitude for a young person is “ready, respectful and cheerful” obedience which Don Bosco offers as the active and loving cooperation with his suggestions for growing up and overcoming selfishness.

Don Bosco's vision is a profoundly optimistic one: a youngster's involvement, practical fervour is made fruitful by sanctifying grace; the struggle against evil, tackled with determination, leads to certain victory by the power of faith, and through Mary's motherly protection; wounds, including serious ones sustained in the struggle against evil are healed through the saving power of Christ's blood; holiness and virtue easily flourish in the hearts of young people who give themselves generously to God's love and entrust themselves to their educators.

2. Indications for a consistent, active Christian life.

The second part features a selection of texts addressed to the people, committed Catholics, Salesian Cooperators and diocesan clergy, where we see the spirit which, according to Don Bosco must animate the good Christian immersed in the world but consistent with his faith, active in the Church, and actively engaged in charitable work in society at large.

Devout Catholicism in the 19th Century had a particular spiritual and practical fervour about it, joined to a lively sense of one's calling in the Church and in society, which urges one to Gospel witness, militancy and works of charity. It was a fruitful field which gave birth to an impressive series of pastoral, educational and social initiatives, lay associations, religious foundations, missionary works that went well into the 20th century, thanks to the spiritual leadership of culturally prepared clergy who were generously dedicated to their mission, enterprising and creative, all-embracing in their correspondence with their vocation.

Don Bosco's works were broadly supportive of this entire setting. A band of zealous clergy and and generous lay people belonging to every social class, focused by the

8 G. Bosco, Regolamento per le case, p. 76 (OE XXIX, 172).
Saint's charity, generously lent their efforts at the beginnings of the Oratory, without ever abandoning it, to the point where they became an integral and irreplaceable part of his Family. Their awareness of their mission made them desirous of a more fervent inner life so they could give a much more than casual contribution to the Salesian mission.

Don Bosco never stopped nurturing this spirit of active charity on behalf of mission and salvation, not just by animation and organised cooperation, but also through spiritual care. The texts here show us his involvement in fostering a holistic, devout and active view of Christian life: a response of keen faith, boundless hope, ardent charity and industrious imitation of Christ and conformation to him, to God's merciful and tender love, his boundless charity. Sustained by the grace of the sacraments, united with God in prayer “through holy and devout thoughts and sentiments”\(^9\), detached from the illusions of the world and aiming at holiness in the exercise of virtue, trusting in Providence and the support of Mary Help of Christians, Christians are called to a more conscious and cultivated inner life, to evangelical witness in their daily life, to “exercising charity by working for the salvation of souls”, to helping “one another do good and warding off evil”\(^10\).

This strong and active view also emerges through his correspondence, the advice he gave to lay friends and priests. According to Don Bosco the Catholic is a leaven in society in the warp and woof of daily existence: he is a witness to faith, active in charity, gives himself generously and fearlessly, fosters piety, lavishes effort on the Christian education of the young, spreads good press, looks after vocations, supports missionary activity.

3. Consecrated to God for His glory and the salvation of the young

The third part contains texts essential for understanding Don Bosco's view of Salesian consecration. From his _Ai soci salesiani_ (to Salesian confreres), the most “bosconian” part of which is included here, to the central chapters of the very early _Constitutions_ and the selection of circulars, correspondence, conferences and “dreams”, the reader can understand the spiritual, moral and religious mettle that Don Bosco wanted people to have; the robust, demanding and all-embracing idea he had of consecration and the spirit that should give life to the Salesian vocation. The concrete impact of his personal and community outlook is such as to shape a model that was so radical and austere that it leaves us quite astonished: unlimited, exceedingly generous obedience; an essential, ascetic, though joyful lifestyle; an impressive degree of hard work in a community mission; boundless charity; loving and tender, affectionate relationships, along with a chastity that was rigorously and vigilantly defended; constant presence to God in loving dialogue with him; absolute fidelity to the smallest prescriptions of the Rule, especially in the practices of piety; an ability to adapt to anything to the point of extreme sacrifice; a very determined apostolic impetus.

Don Bosco can only think of his consecrated Salesians in terms of the absolute primacy of God and from the evangelical perspective of radical detachment, giving of oneself

\(^9\) G. BOSCO, _Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi_, Torino, Tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868, p. 1 (OE XIX, 9).

without second thought, following the obedient, poor and chaste Christ in divine service and for the salvation of souls.

4. A father's final recommendations, and a founder's concerns

The fourth part contains the core of what is called the “Spiritual testament” in Salesian tradition. This is an original notebook entitled “Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel sac. Gio. Bosco a’ suoi figliuoli Salesiani” (Memoirs from 1841 to 1884-5-6, by Fr John Bosco, to his Salesian sons),11 in which the Saint, in a very different era, in the final years of his life, wrote down exhortations and reminders for his disciples, friends, benefactors and Cooperators. It is a spiritual document of huge interest because it expresses a kind of synthesis of his view of the Salesian vocation and mission, along with indications of aspects he considered relevant for being dynamically faithful to it: 1) the resolve to remain firm in one's vocation until death; 2) the importance of an exact observance of the Constitutions; 3) fleeing from triumphalism, recalling that any success comes from trust in Providence and from prayer; 4) the inseparable connection between Salesian mission and Marian devotion and the duty of nurturing and spreading such devotion; 5) special care for vocations by forming young people to the desire “to consecrate themselves to the Lord in their youth” and to detachment from the world and its blandishments;12 6) the fundamental role of the Salesian Rector as model and life of every work and his main function as formator; 7) care of fraternal charity; 8) fleeing “ease” and “comfort” as a mortal danger to the survival of the Congregation; 9) special attention to “the poorest children, those most at risk in society”; 10) wise administration of houses and goods; 11) pride of place given to work for the salvation of souls; 12) recognition for benefactors, Cooperators and collaborators: without their charity we could do nothing, while with their cooperation and support Salesian work can safely continue into the future.

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In conclusion, what can we draw from this selection of Don Bosco's writings, alongside the best known works like the Memoirs of the Oratory and the Lives of Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and Francis Besucco? Firstly it seems evident that Don Bosco is not a spiritual “author” like Teresa of Avila or Francis de Sales: he is a pastor, guide, one who formed young lives and was concerned with saving, instructing, involving and guiding them towards Christian practice and a virtuous life. We can also identify his preferred spiritual writers, the books he drew from, the spirituality trends he was nurtured by. Just the same, beyond the actual contents and substance of his teachings, beyond the exhortations and religious frames of reference, we can clearly perceive an idea running through all these writings, which is Don Bosco’s specific spiritual sensitivity, his very personal view of things, his quite peculiar spirit. This unmistakeable voice confers a specific and unique feature on his magisterium or teaching authority; it makes him a true “master” of spiritual life as one who formed saints and began a spiritual tradition, a true school of holiness for the young, for lay people actively involved in the Salesian mission, for consecrated persons radically commuted along with him to the sequela Christi.

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Editorial criteria

[Translator's note: most of these criteria apply to the Italian original text only. Some of the works cited are now becoming available in English either in printed edition or in some instances can be found in SDL, the Salesian Digital Library, http://www.sdl.org, in the English collection].

In selecting the material we have preferred to use critical editions of Don Bosco's writings where they exist, original printed texts (reprinted in their original form in G. BOSCO, Opere edite. Prima serie: Libri e opuscoli, 37 vol., Roma, LAS 1876-1877 = OE). For the conferences, "Good Nights" and accounts of dreams we have used manuscripts signed by Don Bosco or notes from his listeners that have been preserved in the ASC, with a note as to from which archival collection and any reference to the Biographical Memoirs.

In transcribing the documents, considering the purpose and addresses of this publication (which is not a critical edition), we have adopted the following criteria:

a) punctuation and accentuation follows today's usage;
b) uniform use of initial capitalisation for common nouns;
c) we have done away with the shortened forms of by now obsolete prepositional forms in the masculine plural (relevant only for the Italian edition, obviously) (a’: ai; co’: con i; da’: dai; de’: dei; ne’: nei; pe’: per i; que’: quei; tra’: tra i); as also pel: per il; nol: non lo;
d) we have dropped many abbreviations and acronyms and written them in full (G. C.: Gesù Cristo; B. V.: Beata Vergine; M. SS.: Maria santissima; S.S.: santissimo sacramento; etc.);
e) proper nouns, common nouns and verbs in their 19th century form in the original now follow today's usage;\textsuperscript{13}
f) we have left untouched the truncated finals, 19th century terms and sayings which are a feature of Don Bosco's writing, verbs in their imperfect indicative form with pronominal suffixes;
g) words in the singular with the final diphthong 'io', and double final in the plural –ii follow ancient usage (testimonii; desiderii; proprii; principii; studii…).

Acronyms

\begin{itemize}
\item ASC = Archivio Salesiano Centrale or Salesian Central Archives (Rome)
\item E(c) = Epistolario (the Collected Letters...) di S. Giovanni Bosco, edited by Eugene Ceria, vol. 3-4 [1876-1888], Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1958-1959.
\item E(m) = G. BOSCO, Epistolario. Introduzione, testi critici e note a cura di Francesco
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{13} Aggiungere for aggiugnere; coprire for cuoprire; devotola for divotola; domanda/demandare for dimanda/demandare; Dio for Iddio; ecc. for etc.; edificio for edifizio; Giovanni for Gioanni; i for li; incoraggiare for incoraggire; interamente for interamente; meraviglia/maravigliare; offrire for offerire; parvoli for parvoli; parrocchia/parroco for parochial/parroco; quotidiano for cotidiano; sabato for sabbato; scorpire for iscoprire; sacrificio for sacrificio; sebbene for sibbene; soggiugnere for soggiugnere; ufficio for uffizio.
SOURCES

Documents from Salesian Central Archives (Rome) [ASC]

ASC A0000205: Cronachetta [1877-1878], Quad. V, ms di Giulio Barberis.
—, A0000301: Conferenze e sogni [1876], Quad. I, ms di Giacomo Gresino.
—, A0000302: Discorsetti di D. Bosco [1876], Quad. II, ms di Emanuele Dompé.
—, A0000309: Piccole locuzioni del molto R.do don Giovanni Bosco [1876], Quad. IX, ms di Francesco Ghiglottot.
—, A0000310: Discorsetti di D. Bosco 1876/1877, Quad. X, ms di Giacomo Gresino.
—, A0000408: Conferenze e prediche di D. Bosco 1875/1876, Quad. XIX, ms di Giulio Barberis.
—, A0000409: Prediche D. Bosco - Esercizi Lanzo 1876, Quad. XX, ms di Giulio Barberis.
—, A000303: Conferenze [1877-1878], Quad. III, ms di Giacomo Gresino.
—, A0040601: Memoria di alcuni fatti 1858-1861, ms di Giovanni Bonetti.
—, A0040604: Annali III [1862/1863], ms di Giovanni Bonetti.
—, A0040605: Cronaca dell’anno 1864. Prediche, ms di Giovanni Bonetti.
—, A0080302: Cronaca dell’Oratorio 1862, ms di Francesco Provera.
—, A0250202: Conferenza di D. Bosco [1873], ms anonimo.
—, A2300201: Compagnia di S. Luigi. Regolamento [1847], ms allografo con correzioni autografe di don Bosco.
—, A2300202: Compagnia del SS. Sacramento [1857], ms di Giovanni Bosco.
—, A452: Compagnia dell’Immacolata [1856], ms di Giuseppe Bongioanni con annotazioni autografe di don Bosco.

St John Bosco’s printed materials

BOSCO G., Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de’ suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà per la recita dell’ufficio della beata Vergine e de’ principali vespri dell’anno coll’aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre ecc., Torino, Tipografia Paravia e Comp. 1847 (OE II, 183-532).
—, Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo, Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia e Compagnia 1858 (OE X, 295-486).
— Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi, Torino, Tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868 (OE XIX, 1-777).
— Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare. Scopo del medesimo … con appendice sul sistema preventivo della educazione della gioventù, Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1877 (OE XXVIII, 380-448).
— Regolamento dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni, Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1877 (OE XXIX, 33-93);
— Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1877 (OE XXIX, 97-196).
— Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874, Torino, Tipografia dell’Oratorio 1877 (OE XXIX, 201-288).
— Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de’ suoi doveri negli esercizi di cristiana pietà…, Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1880, pp. 75-77 (Istruzione sulla scelta dello stato).

Critical editions of St John Bosco's writings


Other sources

Lettere circolari di D. Bosco e di D. Rua ed altri loro scritti ai Salesiani, Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1896.
PART I

DON BOSCO AS SPIRITUAL GUIDE FOR THE YOUNG

The first part is subdivided into six sections:

1. Spiritual outlook of The Companion of Youth (pp. 00-00).
2. Rules for Christian living for the young (pp. 00-00).
3. Groups and spiritual friendships (pp. 00-00).
4. Practical guidelines in letters to young people (pp. 00-00).
5. Preaching and Good Nights (pp. 00-00).
6. Spiritual teaching in his dream accounts (pp. 00-00).
1. Spiritual outlook of *The Companion of Youth*

The *Companion of Youth* is one of St John Bosco’s best known works. *First published in 1847*, when the Oratory, finally settled at Valdocco in the Pinardi house, began to develop its character as a full-time educational and pastoral work, it ran to more than a hundred editions during the saint’s lifetime and continued to be reprinted and translated until halfway through the twentieth century. It is not just a simple handbook of prayers and devout practices. It aims at offering young people “a cheerful and happy way of living as a Christian”, a proposal for spiritual life and youthful holiness. In short, we find in it all the characteristic content of the model in place at the Oratory for growing up, a system which was successfully practised and remained substantially unchanged over successive decades “because the religious experience it proposed was linked with the entire system and life style which, according to Don Bosco, young people were immersed in every day at the Oratory and in similar educational settings”.

*We reproduce here some of the instructions that furnish the essential outline of this spirituality. It is characterised by total and joyful giving of self to the Lord, moved by affection for him, in the ordinariness of the everyday.*

To the young

There are two main snares by which the devil usually tempts young people away from the practice of virtue. The first is to convince them that the service of the Lord consists in living a life of melancholy, devoid of all pleasure and enjoyment. This is not the case, my dear friends. I would like to teach you a kind of Christian life that will make you happy and contented. I want to show you what true enjoyment and pleasure is, so that you may follow the advice of the holy prophet David: *Serve the Lord with gladness: servite Domino in laetitia.*

This, then, is the purpose of the present book: to teach you how to serve God and to be always happy.

The second snare is the hope of a long life, with the expectation of conversion in old age or when death threatens. Be careful, my dear boys, because many have been deceived in this manner. What assurance have we got that we shall ever reach old age? We cannot expect death to await our convenience at old age, since life and death are in God’s hands, and he apportions them as he sees fit. If God, however, grants you a long life, listen to the serious warning that he has uttered: A young man according to his way—even when he is old, he will not depart from it. *Adolescens iuxta viam suam etiam cum senuerit non recedet ab ea.* In other words, if we lead a good life when we are young, we shall be good when we are old, and our death will be happy, the beginning of eternal bliss. On the other hand, if vice takes hold of us in youth, it will gradually grow

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14 [G. Bosco], *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de’ suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà per la recita dell’ufficio della beata Vergine e de’ principali vesprì dell’anno col’aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre ecc.*, Torino, Tipografia Paravia e Comp. 1847 (OE II, 183-532).


16 [Bosco G.], *Il giovane provveduto...* (1847), pp. 5-8 (OE II, 185-188).

17 Ps 100: 2.

18 A young man according to his way—even when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov 22:6).
in the course of the different stages of our life until death, which will be the terrible herald of a most unhappy eternity. That this misfortune may not befall you, I have drawn up a scheme of life, brief and easy enough, which will enable you to be a joy to your parents, and a glory to your country, making you good citizens upon earth, and one day blessed inhabitants of Heaven. …

My friends, I love you with all my heart, and your being young is reason enough for me to love you very much. You will certainly find books written by persons much more virtuous and much more learned than myself; but, I assure you, you would be hard put to find anyone who loves you more than I do in Jesus Christ, or who care more about your true happiness than I do. May God be always with you, and grant that by the practice of these few suggestions you may save your souls, and thereby increase His glory. That is the sole purpose of the writer of these pages.

Live happily and may the Lord be with you.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ
Fr John Bosco

Things needed for a young person to become virtuous

An understanding of God.

Look around you, my dear children, and see the wonders in the heavens and upon earth. The sun, moon, stars, air, water and fire are things that at one time did not exist. They could not have come into existence of themselves. God in his omnipotence made them out of nothing; hence he is called the “Creator”. When God, who always was and ever will be, had created what we see in this world of ours, he gave existence to man, who of all visible creation is the most perfect. Therefore our eyes, ears, tongue, hands, and feet are all gifts of God.

Man is distinguished from all other animals in a special manner, for he is endowed with a soul that thinks and reasons, and desires what is good, and judges what is good or what is evil. The soul, since it is a spirit, cannot die with the body; for when the body has been carried to the grave, the soul enters on another life that will never cease. If during its time on earth it has done good, it will be ever happy with God in Paradise, where it will enjoy happiness for all eternity. But if it has done evil, it will be punished with terrible pain in Hell, where it will undergo the torments of fire and loss forever.

Bear in mind, my dear children, that we were created for Heaven. God, who is our loving Father, will condemn to Hell only those who deserve it on account of their sins. Oh! How much God loves us! How much God desires that we perform good works, so that we may share in that great joy which he has prepared for all of us in the eternity of Heaven.

God loves the young exceedingly.

Since we are persuaded, my dear children, that we are created for Heaven, we should direct all our actions to this great end. The reward that God promises, and the punishment with which He threatens us should move us to act accordingly. Though He loves all people, since they are the work of His hands, still He has a particular love for the young, and tells us that He finds pleasure in their company: \textit{Deliciae meae esse cum}

\footnote{\textit{Il giovane provveduto...} (1847), pp. 9-19 (OE II, 189-199).}
filii hominum. So then you are the delight and the love of the God who created you. God loves you, and He expects many good works of you; He loves you, because you are natural, humble and innocent; in a word, because you have not yet fallen a victim to the snares of the devil.

Our Divine Saviour also shows a special kindliness towards you. He assures us that he considers all favours done to you as done to him. He threatens terribly those who give you scandal. Here are his own words: “But he that shall scandalise one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea.” He wished children to follow him: he called them to himself, he embraced them and gave them his blessing.

Since Our Lord loves you so much as the young people you are, you should form the sincere resolution to act in response to his love by doing whatever pleases him, and by avoiding whatever might offend him.

The salvation of the soul depends greatly upon the time of our youth

Two places have been prepared for us in our future life. Hell for the wicked where they will suffer every pain. Heaven for the good where they will enjoy all sorts of good things. Our Lord also wants you to know that if you practise virtue in your youth, you will be confirmed in it for the remainder of your days, which will be followed by an eternity of glory. On the other hand, if you begin badly in your youth, you will surely continue so until death, and inevitably secure hell for yourself. Therefore, when you see people addicted to the vices of drunkenness, gambling or swearing, you can be sure that these vices began in their youth: Adolescens juxta viam suam, etiam cum senuerit non recedet ab ea (Pr 22, 6). Ah! “Remember your Creator,” we are admonished, “in the days of your youth”;

Indeed, elsewhere he declares that the man who began to observe the commandments from his youth is a happy man”.

This truth was well known to the saints, especially to St Rosa of Lima and St Aloysius Gonzaga, who very early on began to serve the Lord fervently, and later found no satisfaction save in what pertained to him, and thereby became great saints. The same can be said of the son of Tobias, who from the earliest days of his childhood was always obedient and submissive to his parents. When they died, he continued to live most virtuously until his death.

But some of you may object: if we begin to serve God now, we shall become sad and depressed. This is not true. He who serves the devil is miserable, even if he pretends to be happy, because in his heart he never ceases to hear the reproach: You are unhappy because you are the enemy of God. Who was more affable or more cheerful than St Aloysius Gonzaga? Who was more happy and joyful than St Philip Neri? And yet we know that their lives were entirely spent in the practice of every virtue. Courage then, my dear friends; employ your time virtuously, and I assure you that your heart will

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20 My delights were to be with the children of men (Ps 8: 31). Don Bosco interprets “children of men” – in Hebrew it means “mankind” – in its specific sense of “children”.
21 Cf Mt 18:5.
22 Mt 18:6.
23 Cf Mk 10:13-16.
24 The young man, once he has set out on life, will not waver even when he is old.
25 Qo. 12:1.
26 Cf Lm 3:27.
always be happy and contented. As a consequence you will experience how sweet and pleasing it is to serve the Lord.

**The first virtue of youth is obedience to parents and superiors.**

A tender plant, though planted in good soil in the garden, will put down weak roots and finally wither away unless cultivated carefully until it gains strength. So you, my dear children, will surely yield to evil if you do not allow yourselves to be guided by those who have responsibility for guiding you. This guidance is the responsibility of your parents and those who take their place; to them you owe willing obedience.

“Honour your father and your mother,” says Our Lord, “that you may have long life upon the land.”\(^{28}\) But in what does this honour consist? It consists in obeying, respecting, and assisting them. As for obedience, when they give a command you should carry it out promptly, without any show of opposition. Do not act like those who murmur, shrug their shoulders, shake their heads, or worse still answer back insolently. Such children give great offence to their parents and to God himself, for the Will of God is expressed through the commands of our parents. Our Saviour, although all-powerful, submitted himself to the Blessed Virgin and to St Joseph, the humble carpenter,\(^{29}\) becoming obedient to his Heavenly Father unto death, even to the death of the cross.\(^{30}\)

You should likewise show great respect to your father and mother, and never undertake anything without their permission. Never show impatience in their presence, and never reveal their faults. St Aloysius always first sought his parents’ permission, or, if they were absent, he even asked leave of the servants. Young Louis Comollo was obliged one day to stay away from home longer than his parents had allowed, but when he returned he humbly and sorrowfully asked pardon for his involuntary disobedience.

You must also be ready to wait on your parents, and assist them when they are in need, both for the domestic services you are capable of doing but even more by giving them any money, gift, clothing you might receive and other such ways that are open to you. Pray to God for them morning and evening, asking him to grant them every spiritual and temporal good.

What I have said to you about obedience and respect for parents, you should also practise towards your superiors, be they ecclesiastics or lay. Likewise you should obey your teachers with respectful humility and willingly accept instruction, counsel and correction. Be assured that whatever they do is to improve you. Be convinced also that obedience shown to your superiors is, as if it were, shown to Jesus Christ himself and to Mary most holy and to St Aloysius.

I recommend two things to you with all my heart. The first is that you be sincere with your elders, not covering up your failings by pretending, much less denying them. Always tell the truth frankly; as well as offending God, lies make you a child of the devil, prince of lies, and when the truth will out you will then have a reputation as a liar and will not be trusted either by superiors or friends. Secondly, let the advice and warnings of your superiors be your rule of life and work. Blessed are you if you do this; your days will be happy; everything you do will be properly ordered and will edify everyone. So let me conclude by saying to you: give me an obedient child and he will be a saint. Otherwise he will be lacking in every virtue.

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\(^{28}\) Ex 20:12.

\(^{29}\) Cf Lk 2:51.

\(^{30}\) Cf Ph 2:8.
As well as the usual morning and evening prayers I also urge you to spend some time reading some books dealing with spiritual matters, like the *Imitation of Christ*, the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales, the *Preparation for Death* by St Alphonsus, *Jesus at the Heart of the Young.*

If you read some parts of these books indicated above you will find they are of great advantage to your souls. You will have twice the merit before God if you recount what you have read to others, or you read it in their presence, especially if someone cannot read.

A body without food gets sick and dies, and the same thing happens to our soul if we do not give it its food. The Word of God is food, nourishment for the soul, meaning sermons, explanations of the Gospel, and the catechism. So make every effort to be in church when you should be, pay close attention while there and then try to apply the things they offer you to your state in life. It is very important that you attend catechism lessons; it is no good your saying: I have already been promoted for holy communion, because even then the soul needs food just like the body needs food; and if you deny the soul this food you put yourselves at risk of very serious harm.

I recommend that you make every possible effort to go to your parishes and fulfil these duties of yours. God has given your parish priest the special task of looking after your souls. Be careful too of the snares of the devil when he suggests to you: he is doing this for my friend Peter, or yes, that would be good for Paul. No, my dear friends, the preacher is speaking to you. All the truths he is telling you are intended for you to apply to yourselves. And on the other hand what is not helpful for correcting you will help to keep you away from certain sins.

When you listen to a sermon, try to remember it throughout the day, and in the evening, especially before going to bed, pause a moment to reflect on what you have heard. If you do this it will be of great advantage to your soul.

**Devotion to Mary**

Devotion to Mary is a great help for you my children. Listen to how she invites you: *Si quis est parvulus veniat ad me.* Let whoever is a child come to me. She assures you that if you are devoted to her, you will be filled with blessings on earth and Heavens yours in the life to come. *Qui elucidant me vitam aeternam habebunt.* So, be fully convinced that all the graces you ask of this good mother will be granted to you so long as you do not ask for things that will harm you.

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31 The *Imitation of Christ*, the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by Saint Francis de Sales and the *Preparation for Death* by St Alphonsus Maria de Liguori were commonly known in Don Bosco's day and are even still published today (especially the first two); *Jesus at the Heart of the Young* was a small book by Canon Giuseppe Zama Mellini (1788-1838), written in terms of an affectionate conversation between Jesus and the reader.


33 Pr 9:4.

34 Those who honour me will have eternal life. Quoted from the Latin Vulgate (Qo 24:31; Ws 24: 22), a verse that current versions of the Bible do not include.
You should insistently ask for three graces. Everyone has absolute need of these, but especially you who are young. The first is *never to commit mortal sin during your life*. I want you to implore this grace through Mary's intercession at any cost, because without this one any other grace would be of little avail.

Do you know what it means to fall into mortal sin? It means refusing to be children of God and becoming children of Satan. It means losing the beauty that makes us as the angels in God's eyes, and taking on the deformities of the devils in his sight. It means losing all the merits you have already gained for eternal life; it means dangling above the jaws of hell, being held there only by a slender thread; and it means reviling his infinite goodness, which is the greatest evil imaginable. If Mary obtained many graces for you but not that of ever falling into mortal sin, she would have obtained very little. You must implore this grace morning and evening and in all your exercise of piety.

The second grace that you should ask for is to *preserve the holy and precious virtue of purity*. If you keep guard over such a beautiful virtue you will be very like the angels in Heaven, and your guardian angel will regard you as his brother since he will enjoy your company so much. …

And from this comes the need for the third grace that will also be of very great help to you in preserving the virtue of purity. It is the grace of *running away from bad companions*. How happy you will be, my dear boys, if you flee the company of the wicked! By doing this you will be sure of taking the road to paradise; otherwise you run the grave risk of being lost for eternity. Therefore, when you hear your friends swearing, blaspheming, or putting down religion, or trying to draw you away from the Church, or worse still speaking in language that is contrary to the virtue of modesty, keep away from them like the plague, and be sure that the purer is your gaze, your speech, the more pleased Mary will be with you and the more graces she will obtain for you from her Son and our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

These are the three graces that are needed more than any other, at your age, and they are enough to keep you on the right path from your youth. They will ensure that you will be men of honour in old age, and are a sure pledge of the eternal glory that Mary undoubtedly procures for those who are devoted to her. What should you do for Mary to obtain the graces indicated above? Very little is needed. If you can, say the Rosary, but at least never forget to say three *Hail Marys* and three *Glory be's* each day, adding: Dear Mother Mary, ever Virgin, help me to save my soul.

**Practical ways of worthily preparing for the Sacrament of Confession**

Dear boys, if you do not learn how to confess well when you are young, you run the risk of never learning how to do so again during your lifetime, and as a result, of never going to Confession as you should, which will be harmful to you and could even put your eternal salvation at risk. But firstly I would like you to be convinced that anything you may have on your conscience will be forgiven in Confession, so long as you approach it with the correct dispositions.

The first of these is the examination of conscience, meaning that you go back over what you have done to find out what was good and what was sinful. Begin by asking *the Lord to enlighten you*, saying: — My Lord Jesus Christ, my Redeemer, I put myself at your feet and beg you to have pity and mercy on me. Enlighten me with your grace so

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35 [BOSCO G., *Il giovane provveduto...* (1847), pp. 93-98 (OE II, 273-278)].
that I may recognise my sins as I would if I were to present myself to you at the time of judgement. My God, may I detest them with true sorrow and may I be forgiven through the infinite merits of the most precious blood of Jesus Christ, shed for me on the cross. Most Holy Virgin, St Aloysius Gonzaga, pray for me that I may make a good Confession.

Examine yourself to see whether you have spoken badly of religious matters; or if you have blasphemed, taken the Lord's name in vain. Did you attend Mass on Sundays or holy days? Have you performed works of mercy on those days or did you work instead, as is forbidden? Examine whether you have been disobedient at home, or to your superiors or teachers, or if you have answered them back. Have you acted badly in church or outside, especially through bad talk or by giving bad advice? Have you stolen anything at home or outside? Note that 'stealing' also includes the misuse of time that should be spent on things you have been asked to do. Have you thought of, listened to, done or allowed others to do or even just considered things that are dishonest? I must tell you that this examination is not only about discovering what sins, but you should also say the number of times you committed this or that other sin. For example: it is not enough to say: I disobeyed my parents, but you should add, I disobeyed them two or three times, that is give a precise or an approximate number of times your were disobedient. Do the same with other sins.

These are the main things you should examine your conscience about. But again, it is not enough just to make a good Confession. You must also be truly sorry and seriously consider that sin is a real evil. Sin opens up hell beneath your feet. What an evil; how terrible this is! It locks you out of Heaven: what a terrible loss this is! It makes you God's enemy and slaves of the devil. Every one of your sins is the cause of acute pain to the loving heart of Jesus, who was whipped for you, crowned with thorns, and shed his blood on the cross; and you treated him this way, looked down on him, did these things. Sin is an offence against the God who is so good to you and so loving by nature. He created you and sustains you in life. Holiness, the air you breathe, the bread you eat are all gifts that God gives you. He has preserved you from constant misfortune and from hell itself which you have so often deserved. And your response to his goodness has so often been monstrous ingratitude by committing these sins and offending him.

In view of the great evil you do by sinning, you should be very sorry for whenever you have offended God because it is worse than any other terrible thing that might have happened to you, or than any punishment you might have received from your parents or others. Your sorrow should lead you to a good resolution, a promise never to offend God again in future. For example: you have said bad words, or were disobedient, so if your confession is to be real you should promise the Lord that you will never commit these sins again even at the cost of suffering.

After these reflections, make an act of contrition and then humbly approach your confessor, and if you need to wait, don't waste time talking or smiling or looking around, but recollect yourself and wait until it is your turn. I must warn you never to remain silent about some sins in confession. Before you sinned, the devil was telling you that doing such and such was not a bad thing; afterwards he does what he can to make you feel ashamed so you will keep quiet about it and make a sacrilegious confession. So never be afraid of what your confessor may think. He will be happy knowing that you confide in him about what you have done. You can also be certain that the priest can never tell anyone what you have confessed, nor can he make use of anything you have said even if it means his avoiding death. So courage then, and first confess the sin that weighs upon you most.

Once you have entered the confessional make the sign of the cross and say: “Bless
me Father, for I have sinned”. Then tell him how long it is since you last confessed and tell him the state of your conscience, giving him the number and kind of your sins. When you have finished, listen to what he tells you, and while he is giving you absolution, consider that this is precisely the moment when the blood of Jesus Christ is being shed for you. Then make a sincere act of contrition. When you have finished your confession, remain by yourself and thank the Lord for the good things he has done for you.

After Confession. Heartily renew the act of sorrow you made in Confession, promising the Lord that you want to do everything suggested by the confessor to avoid falling into sin again and make these three resolutions: 1. To behave very well in church; 2. To be readily obedient to your parents and your other superiors; 3. To be ready to do all of your duties according to your state in life and that you want to work for the glory of God and the salvation of your soul. Devoutly say this prayer — Oh my God, how grateful I should be for the mercy you have shown me in forgiving all my sins! You love me and may you love me even more if I am faithful in serving you. Oh! I really do want to make amends. I promise to avoid all occasions of sin. I will never forget that you are everywhere, and that you see and know everything I do and think. Help me and may I die rather than offend you again. Mary, my dearest mother, never let me offend my good Jesus again through sin. My guardian angel, all the saints, help me and watch over me always.

Preparing for Holy Communion

Before presenting yourself to receive the adorable body of Jesus Christ you should consider whether you have the correct disposition of heart. Know then that the child who does not want to make amends after sinning, meaning that he want to offend the Lord again, is not worthy of being enriched by grace; instead he becomes even more guilty and worthy of greater punishment.

On the other hand if you do correct your ways, go and receive the food of the angels and you will give Jesus Christ much pleasure. When he was on this earth he invited people to follow him, but showed special kindness to good and innocent children, saying: “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them”; and he blessed them. So heed his loving invitation and go not only to receive his blessing, but to him in person.

Prayers before Communion

My Lord Jesus Christ, I keenly believe that you are really present in the Blessed Sacrament in your body and blood, soul and divinity. Lord, I adore you in this Sacrament and I acknowledge that you are my creator, redeemer, sovereign, master, my highest and only good.

Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed. Lord I detest all my sins. They make me unworthy of receiving you into my heart but with your grace I resolve not to commit them in future, to avoid the occasions of sin and to do penance for them.

Lord I hope that by giving yourself totally to me in this divine Sacrament you will show mercy on me and grant me all the graces I need for my eternal salvation. Lord, you are infinitely lovable, you are my Father, my Redeemer and my God, therefore I

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36 [BOSCO G.,] Il giovane provveduto... (1847), pp. 98-103 (OE II, 278-283).
37 Mk 10:14.
love you with all my heart above all things and because of your love I love my
neighbour as myself and heartily forgive anyone who has offended me.

Lord, I earnestly want you to come into my heart, so that I may never be separated
from you and that you may always remain with me through your divine grace.

Immaculate Virgin, through the love you showed to your child Jesus, make me
always worthy of receiving him; and when I approach the altar to receive the sacred
host, I will consider that I am receiving him from your very hands accompanied by the
choirs of angels who praise and bless him in Heaven. My Guardian Angel, St Aloysius
Gonzaga, my special protectors, pray to the Lord for me and obtain for me the grace of
making a holy Communion. Omnes sancti et sanctae Dei, intercedite pro nobis.38

Then pause for a while to consider who you are to receive him. This is Jesus Christ,
God so great and of infinite majesty. God of kindness and mercy who comes to you,
poor miserable creature, poor sinner that you are; and he comes to be your father,
brother, friend and spouse of your soul. He wants to heal you, to be your teacher and
your food. Oh how good he is! Oh such love! Oh such infinite mercy!

After Communion

My God, creator and redeemer of my soul, I adore you with profound respect and
deepest reverence. Oh how great is your kindness! Such pure majesty, so holy and
infinite but you come in person to visit such a miserable creature, a handful of dust, an
ungrateful sinner. My dear and good Jesus, I thank you for such a great favour, I praise
you and bless you within me. All the power of my being, all the sentiments of my body,
exult in the presence of your God. One heart, o my good Jesus, is too little to love you,
praise you and thank you for so many benefits and especially for having given me as
food for my soul you body, blood, soul and divinity.

If only I had the heart of the Seraphim in Heaven, so that my heart could burn
forever with the love of my God who has deigned to choose my poor soul for his
dwelling, for his delight! Ah, dear Jesus, how sweet and precious is this visit of yours,
this time spent with me, this union with you!

I am not worthy of such great favour, nor do I know what to offer as thanksgiving but
relying on your infinite merits I offer you these very same merits. I thank you with all
my heart and I claim that in the future you will always be my hope, my comfort, my
only wealth, my pleasure, rest for my soul. You are my only good, my possession, and
my heart's treasure. I would like to be able to give you all the praise and glory the Saints
give you in Heaven; but since I cannot do everything I offer you my entire self; I offer
you my will so that it may want nothing other than what pleases you; I offer you my
hands, my feet, my eyes, my tongue, my mouth, my mind, my heart: I offer them all to
you. watch over all my feelings so that every thought and action may have no other aim
than to do what is to your greatest glory and to the spiritual advantage of my soul.

Most holy Virgin, dear mother of my Jesus, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, my Guardian
Angel, obtain this grace for me, my family, my companions, friends and enemies, and
especially for the people who are here in church today.

O Virgin Mary, believing that I am yours I consecrate all of my life to you, my eyes,
ears, tongue, heart and all my being. I want to be all yours; defend me as your own.
Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my soul with all my heart. Jesus, Mary and Joseph
assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may my soul expire in peace with
you.

38 All you Saints of God, pray for us.
The young person choosing his state in life\textsuperscript{39}

In His eternal decrees, God has destined each one of us to a state of life with its corresponding graces. Accordingly, as in every other case, so also in this all-important matter, the good Catholic should seek to discover the will of God following the example of Jesus Christ who said in fact that his sole purpose in coming down to us was to comply with the will of his eternal Father. It is then most important, dear children, that you choose your vocation wisely, so that you may enter the career for which the Lord has destined you.

Some souls, whom God wishes to favour particularly, receive a clear indication of the state to which he calls them. You cannot expect so much, but you have the consoling guarantee that God will direct you in the right way, provided you do not neglect the right means for making a prudent choice.

One of these means is to spend your childhood and youth without offending God, or else to atone by sincere penance for the time misspent in sin. Another means is humble and persevering prayer. Often repeat with St Paul: \textit{Lord, what is it that you wish me to do?}\textsuperscript{40} Or with Samuel: \textit{Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.}\textsuperscript{41} or with the Psalmist: \textit{Teach me to do your will, for you are my God.}\textsuperscript{42} or use some other aspiration of love.

When the time has arrived for a decision, have recourse to God in frequent and very fervent prayer. Pray for guidance during the Holy Mass at which you assist, and offer up each Communion for the same purpose. You could also make a novena or a triduum, perform some act of mortification, or go on a pilgrimage to some noted shrine. Pray to the Blessed Virgin, who is the Mother of Good Counsel, ask the help of St. Joseph, her spouse, who faithfully kept the divine commandments; pray to your Guardian Angel and to your Patron Saints. It would be well also to prepare for your decision in such an important matter by making a retreat or a day of recollection.

Resolve to follow God's will whatever happens, and despite the disapproval of those who might give you more secular advice.

Should your parents or other individuals begin to oppose what you perceive to be the will of God in your regard, remember that this is the occasion to put into practice the great advice to obey God and not human beings. Conduct yourselves towards your parents respectfully and honourably; answer and treat them submissively and humbly, but without putting at risk the supreme welfare of your soul. Seek good advice on what to do, and then confide in him who can do all things. Consult experienced and God-fearing persons, and especially your confessor, to whom you should confide your vocation \textsuperscript{ and your dispositions.}

\textsuperscript{39} G. BOSCO, \textit{Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri negli esercizi di cristiana pietà…}, Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1880, pp. 75-77; \textit{this instruction on the choice of one's state in life is only found in this edition of Giovane provveduto (The Companion of Youth).}

\textsuperscript{40} Cf. the Vulgate: \textit{“Domine, quid me vis facere?” (Ac 9:6).}

\textsuperscript{41} 1 Sam 3:10.

\textsuperscript{42} Ps. 143:10.
2. Rules for Christian living for the young

Don Bosco’s Memoirs hint at his drawing up a set of Regulations for the Oratory from the first year the work settled at Valdocco.\(^{41}\) Archival documents show us that the work was refined in the years that followed. Beginning with 1854, with the transformation of the “home attached” into a boarding house for students and young trade school students, with schools and workshops then located internally, a second set of Regulations was added, adapted to the specific nature and mission of these educational communities. The refinements and enriching of the text continued, especially after new works were opened outside Turin. The two sets of regulations were finally printed in 1877.\(^{44}\) From reading the text it seems evident that it is not only a question of a set of rules to ensure the works run smoothly, defining roles and duties. Right at the heart of these documents Don Bosco puts some substantial pointers revealing the prevalently formative purpose of his works, shaping them as true “educational and pastoral projects”. Here we offer you the chapters from which emerge the spiritual nature of the Christian life programme he is offering the young.

From the *Regulations of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales for non-residents*

**Behaviour outside the Oratory\(^{45}\)**

1. Remember, boys, that keeping holy Sundays and other Feasts brings you the Lord’s blessing on everything you do during the week; but there are still things you need to do, other things you need to avoid, especially outside the Oratory.

2. Try not to leave out your morning and evening prayers every day, spend some time in meditation or at least a little bit of spiritual reading, attend Mass if your work allows you to. Do not pass a church, cross or holy image without doffing your hat.

3. Avoid any immodest talk, or things against religion, because St Paul tells us that immodest talk ruins noble people.\(^{46}\)

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\(^{46}\) Cf 1 Co 15:33.
4. You should all keep well away from day or night shows, avoid cafes, gambling, and other dangerous places like that.
5. Do not make friends with boys who have been sent away from the Oratory and who speak badly of their superiors or try to keep you from doing your duty; keep away especially from people who tell you to steal from home or anywhere else. …

**Confession and Communion**

1. Be convinced, my young friends, that the two best ways of being upright and on the road to Heaven are the Sacraments of Confession and Communion. Therefore consider as a great enemy of your soul anyone who tries to dissuade you from these two practices of our holy religion.
2. Nobody amongst us is obliged to frequent these holy Sacraments and this is to allow everyone to go freely out of love and not out of fear. This has been to our great advantage, since we see many going every fortnight or weekly, and some amidst their daily occupations also give great example by going daily. Christians in early times used to go to Communion daily; at the Council of Trent the Catholic Church encouraged every Christian who went to Mass to go to holy Communion.
3. Just the same I advise all the boys at the Oratory to do what the diocesan catechism says, viz., it is good to go to Confession fortnightly or once a month. St. Philip Neri, that great friend of the young, advised his spiritual children to go to Confession weekly and more often to Communion, following the confessor's advice.
4. Everyone, and especially the older boys are advised to make use of the Sacraments in the church at the Oratory to give good example to their companions; a young man who goes to Confession and Communion in a truly devout and recollected manner makes a greater impression on others than any long sermon would.
5. The ordinary confessors are the director of the Oratory, the spiritual director and the prefect. Other confessors from the general public are invited for solemnities.
6. Although it is not a sin to change confessor, just the same I advise you to choose a stable one, because it is the same with the soul as it would be for a gardener looking after a plant, or a doctor a sick person. At times of (spiritual) sickness the ordinary confessor knows the state of our souls much better.
7. On the day you have chosen to approach the holy Sacraments, when you arrive at the Oratory don't go to the courtyard for recreation, but go straight to the chapel, prepare yourself following the advice given in instructions and in *The Companion of Youth* and other books on piety. If you have to wait, do so patiently and as a penance for your sins. Never try to stop others going before you or get ahead of others.
8. The confessor is the friend of your soul and therefore I recommend that you have full confidence in him. Tell your confessor every secret of your heart and be convinced that he can never reveal the least thing heard in confession. He cannot even think about

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them. In matters of grave importance, such as your choice of state in life, always consult your confessor. The Lord tells us that whoever listens to the voice of the confessor listens to God himself. *Qui vos audit me audit.*

9. When you have finished your confession, remain on your own, and make your thanksgiving in the same state of recollection. If you have the consent of your confessor, prepare to go to holy Communion.

10. After Communion spend at least a quarter of an hour making your thanksgiving; it would be a serious lack of reverence if, after just a few minutes after receiving the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ you were to leave the church or begin laughing and chatting, spitting or looking around the church.

11. Between one confession and another, remember the advice your confessor has given you, and try to put it into practice.

12. Another thing regarding Communion is this: once you have made your thanksgiving, always ask the Lord for the grace to be ready to receive Holy Viaticum before you die.

From the *Regulations for the Houses of the Salesian Society*

On Piety

1. Remember, boys, that we were created to love and serve God our creator, and that no knowledge or wealth in the world is of any use to us without the fear of the God. All our temporal and eternal good depends on this holy fear.

2. Prayer, the Sacraments and God's Word help us to remain in this fear of God.

3. We should pray often and fervently but never with bad will nor should we disturb our friends; it would be better not to pray than to pray badly. First thing in the morning as soon as you awake make the sign of the cross and raise your mind to God with some short prayers.

4. Choose a stable confessor, and open every secret of your heart to him every week or fortnight or at least once a month, as the Roman Catechism tells us; once a month let everyone make the Exercise for a Happy Death, and prepare yourself by listening to a sermon or some other practice of piety.

5. Assist devoutly at Mass and never forget to do some spiritual reading each day or to listen to some spiritual reading.

6. Pay attention to sermons and other moral instructions. See that you don't sleep,

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48 Anyone who listens to you listens to me (Lk 10:16).
49 G. BOSCO, *Regolamento per le case*, pp. 63-64 (OE XXIX, 159-160).
50 Cf Pr. 15:16.
cough or make any other noise during them. Never leave a sermon without taking away some good thought to put into practice during your daily occupations and give much importance to the study of religion and the catechism.

7. Practise virtue when you are young, because waiting until you are old to give yourself to God means putting yourself in grave danger of eternal perdition. The most beautiful virtues adorning the young Christian are: modesty, humility, obedience and charity.

8. Have special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the Blessed Virgin, St Francis de Sales, St Aloysius Gonzaga, St Joseph, who are the special protectors of every house.

9. Never take up any new devotion without the consent of your confessor and remember what St. Philip Neri told his children: Never take on too many devotions but persevere with the ones you have.

**On Work**

1. Man, my good boys, was born to work. Adam was put on an earthly paradise to cultivate it. The Apostle Paul says: do not let anyone have food if he refuses to work; *Si quis non vult operari non manducet.*

2. By work we mean doing our duty according to our state, be it study, arts or trade.

3. Work will make you well-appreciated by society and religion, and will do your soul good, especially if you offer everything you do each day to God.

4. Amongst all your daily occupations always prefer those asked of you by your superiors or which you should do out of obedience, being sure never to omit any of your obligations by tackling things you have not been asked to do.

5. If you have learned something then give glory to God who is the author of everything that is good, but never become proud since pride is a worm that gnaws away and makes you lose all the merit of your good works.

6. Remember that you are in the spring of life at your age. Anyone not accustomed to working at a young age, will be lazy when he grows old, a disgrace to his town and family and will possibly do irreparable harm to his soul.

7. Anyone obliged to work who does not do so is stealing from God and his superiors. People who are idle will feel great remorse at the end of their life for the time they have wasted.

8. Always begin work, study and school with the *Actiones,* and a Hail Mary, and

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52 Cf Gn 2:15.
53 2 Th 3:10.
54 *Actiones:* the beginning of a prayer that comes from the *Gregorian Sacramentary:* “Actiones nostras, quaesumus Domine, aspirando praeveni et adiuvando proseque, ut cuncta nostra operatio a te semper incipiatur et per te coepit finiatur” (Inspire all our actions O Lord, and accompany them with your aid, so that our every work may find its beginning and completion in you.

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conclude with the *Agimus*. Say these little prayers well so the Lord can be your guide in your work and study, and so you may gain the indulgences granted by the pontiffs to whoever does these acts of piety.

9. In the morning before starting work, at midday and in the evening, after work, say the *Angelus Domini*, and in the evening add the *De profundis* for the faithful departed. Say it kneeling except on Saturday evening and on Sunday, when you remain standing. The *Regina coeli* is said standing, at Easter time.

**Behaviour with superiors**

1. The foundation of all virtues in a young person is obedience to superiors. Obedience gives rise to and preserves all other virtues, and while this is necessary for everyone, it is especially so for the young. So if you wish to acquire virtue, begin by being obedient to your superiors, submitting to them, as you would to God, without complaining.

2. Listen to St Paul's words on obedience; obey those who have been put over you to guide and direct you and submit to them, since they have to render account to God for your souls. Obey willingly, not through force, so that your superiors can do their duty happily and not with tears and sighs.

3. Be sure that your superiors know the grave obligation they are under to promote things to your advantage as best as possible, and that in advising, commanding and correcting you they only have in mind what is good for you.

4. Those who never let the superiors see them, and indeed hide from them or run away, are acting badly. Remember the example of the chickens. Those who snuggle up close to the mother hen will always get some special treat from her. And so those who keep close to their superiors always receive some special advice or counsel.

5. Also, show them some external signs of reverence which they deserve, greeting them respectfully when you meet them, taking your cap off in their presence.

6. Let your obedience be prompt, respectful and cheerful in whatever they command

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55 *Agimus*: the beginning of a prayer at the end of a day's work or after meals: “*Agimus tibi gratias, omnipotens Deus, pro universis beneficiis tuis. Qui vivis et regnas in saecula saeculorum*” (We give you thanks, almighty God, for all your benefits Who live and reign forever and ever. Amen).

56 *Angelus Domini*: the beginning of a prayer to Mary which in the Catholic tradition is recited three times a day: at dawn, noon and sunset. *Regina coeli*: an antiphon to Mary which takes the place of the *Angelus* at Easter time: “*Regina coeli, laetare, alleluia | Quia, quem meruisti portare, alleluia | Resurrexit, sicut dixit, alleluia | Ora pro nobis Deum, alleluia*” (Queen of Heavenrejoice, alleluia; he whom you merited to bear [in your womb], alleluia; he has risen has he said, alleluia; pray for us to the Lord our God, alleluia”). *De profundis* (from the depths): Beginning of Psalm 129, in the Vulgate, used mainly to pray for the dead.


you to do, and do not make excuses to avoid doing what they ask. Obey, even when what has been asked of you is not to your liking.

7. Open you heart to them freely. Think of them as you would a father who eagerly desires your happiness.

8. Accept their corrections gratefully and if necessary humbly receive punishment for your faults, showing neither hatred nor disrespect to them.

9. Flee the company of those who complain about your superiors, who work so hard for you; this would be a sign of the greatest ingratitude.

10. When a superior asks you about the behaviour of some of your friends, answer according to what you know, especially if it is a case of preventing or remedying some evil. Remaining silent in these circumstances might bring harm to your friend or might offend God.

**Behaviour with your friends**

1. Honour and love your friends as brothers and try to edify one another with good example.

2. Love one another, as the Lord says, but be careful of giving scandal. Anyone who gives scandal through words, talk, actions, is no friend but a murderer of your soul.

3. If you can offer some service and give some good advice, do so willingly. At recreation, welcome any of your companions into your conversation without any kind of distinction and be nice to them by letting them join your games. Take care never to talk about your friends' faults, unless you are being asked by your superiors. And in that case do not exaggerate in what you say.

4. We should recognise that everything good and also the not so good things come from God, therefore don't laugh at your companions for their physical or spiritual defects. What you laugh at in others today, the Lord may let happen to you tomorrow.

5. True charity asks us to put up with the defects of others patiently and to be quick to forgive them when they offend us, but we should never attack others, especially ones inferior to us.

6. Flee pride especially. Pride is hateful to God and man.

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60 Jn 13:34.
61 Cf Rm 14:13.
62 Cf 1 Co 13:4-7.
63 Cf Si. 10:7.
On Modesty

1. By modesty we mean a decent and controlled way of speaking, moving and walking. This virtue, boys, is one of the most beautiful adornments of your age, and ought to be evident in your every action, in everything you say.

2. Your body and clothing should be clean, your demeanour serene and cheerful, without moving your shoulders or body about, unless honestly necessary.

3. I recommend modesty of eyes, the windows through which the devil brings sin into the heart. Walk in a moderate way, not in too much of a hurry unless there is a need to do otherwise; when your hands are not busy keep them down and at night cross them upon your breast inasmuch as you can.

4. Never lay your hands on others and never play with your hands on someone else nor walk hand in hand or put your arms around your friend's shoulders, as people sometimes do in the square.

5. Be modest when you speak, never using expressions that offend against charity or decency: in your state and at your age it is better to be quiet and modest than to foster boisterous and talkative discussion.

6. Do not criticise the actions of others or boast of your merits or virtues. Accept blame and praise equally, and be humble before God when you have been chided over something.

7. Avoid every action, movement or word of a boorish nature, and do your best to overcome faults of temperament, and try to develop a meek and constantly controlled approach following the principles of Christian modesty.

8. Your way of behaving at table is also part of modesty, given that food is given to us, not as if to animals just to satisfy hunger, but to keep the body healthy and vigorous as a material means of achieving happiness of soul.

9. Say grace before and after meals and while you are eating also try to feed the spirit by listening in silence to the little bit of reading that is done.

10. You should eat or drink only the things that are provided by the establishment. Anyone who receives fruit, eatables or drinks of any kind should give them to the superior who will see that they are made available in a moderate way.

11. It is warmly recommended that you never waste even the smallest amount of soup, bread or the second course. Let us not forget the example of our Saviour who commanded his apostles to pick up the leftover pieces of bread so they would not be wasted. *Colligite fragmenta ne pereant.* Anyone who wastes any kind of food is punished severely and should fear that the Lord will have him die of hunger. …

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65 Gather up what is left over so that it is not wasted. Broadly quoted from the Vulgate: “Colligite quae superaverunt fragmenta, ne pereant” (Jn 6:12).
Three evils to be avoided at all cost\textsuperscript{66}

Although everyone should avoid any kind of sin, nevertheless there are three evils that you must especially avoid since they are particularly harmful for the young. They are: 1. blasphemy, and taking the holy name of God in vain, 2. dishonesty, 3. stealing. Believe me, my children, just one of these sins is enough to draw down Heaven's displeasure on the house. On the other hand, by keeping these evils far from us we have well-founded reasons for hoping for Heaven's blessings upon us and our entire community.

Whoever observes these rules will be blessed by the Lord. Every Sunday evening or on another day of the week, the prefect or whoever takes his place will read some of the articles of this rule with a brief moral reflection on them.

\textsuperscript{66} G. BOSCO, Regolamento per le case, p. 89 (OE XXIX, 185).
3. Associations and spiritual friendships

The Christian education of the young, in popular works that are clearly missionary in nature, like the festive oratories on the outskirts of Turin, needed gradual approaches, ones which fitted each individual’s pace. The Companion of Youth offers something complete but adaptable to everyone. In this matter, Don Bosco, using the Sacrament of Penance, the personal chat and by suggesting freely chosen devotional practices, sets out more demanding personalised regimes for boys who are more capable of greater commitment. Besides, aware of the fruitful experiences he had had as a young person, like the Cheerful Society, he encourages the organisation of religious sodalities and free associations of friends, amongst boys in the festive Oratory and in pupils in the houses. These are more clearly aimed at formation and apostolate, which encourage a holistic Christian style of living which encourages virtue and aims at acting as a leaven in their youthful community. The best Salesian vocations were forged in these spiritual circles. The St Aloysius Gonzaga Sodality, founded at the Oratory at Valdocco (12 April 1847) is witness to the transition to a more systematic approach to formation for “poor and abandoned” boys, aimed at “encouraging piety through something stable and uniform”, inviting members “to give good example in church and out of church, avoid bad talk and frequent the holy sacraments.”

The Immaculate Conception Sodality, which came about through the initiative of Dominic Savio and his friends in June 1856, is a further development of Don Bosco’s spiritual programme aimed at offering young students ways to youthful holiness and nurturing vocations to apostolic and religious life. An ever clearer awareness of the centrality of the Eucharist would lead to setting up the Blessed Sacrament Sodality (1858). Other associations would come into being later like the St Joseph Sodality (1859), aimed at nurturing the spiritual life of young trade students and young workers and fostering lay Salesian vocations.

St Aloysius Sodality (12 April 1847)  

The aim of this sodality is to engage young people in practising the main virtues that stood out most in this Saint. Therefore before joining, each one will have a month’s trial to carefully think about the requirements and will not go ahead unless he feels he can fulfil them.

Requirements

1. St Aloysius was a model of exemplary conduct; therefore, all who want to become

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67 G. BOSCO, Memorie dell’Oratorio, p. 170.
69 ASC A2300201: Compagnia di S. Aloysius. Regolamento, original ms with original corrections by Don Bosco (cf MB III, 216-220).
members of his sodality must follow his example. They must behave in such a manner as not only to avoid giving any kind of scandal, but also to strive constantly to set a good example everywhere but especially in church. When St Aloysius went to church, people flocked to see his modest demeanour and his recollection.

2. Endeavour to go to confession and communion every two weeks or even more frequently, especially on solemn feast days. These Sacraments are the weapons by which we triumph over the devil. As a young boy, St Aloysius received them every week, and as he grew older, more often. Any member unable to fulfil this obligation may substitute some other act of devotion, with his superior’s advice.

3. Flee from bad companions as from a plague, and be very careful to avoid improper conversation. St Aloysius not only shunned such talk, but showed such modesty that no one even dared to utter an unseemly word in his presence.

4. Practice the greatest charity toward your companions, readily forgiving any offence. St Aloysius repaid insults with friendship.

5. Be very committed to keeping good order at the Oratory. Urge others to practise virtue and join this sodality. St Aloysius, out of love for others, volunteered to nurse the victims of a plague, and thereby sacrificed his own life.

6. When a sodality member falls sick, all the others should pray for him and also give him material assistance according to their means.

7. Be very diligent in your work and in the fulfilment of your other duties. Promptly obey your parents and superiors.

Immaculate Conception Sodality (9 June 1856)

We, Joseph Rocchietti, Louis Marcellino, John Bonetti, Francis Vaschetti, Celestine Durando, Joseph Momo, Dominic Savio, Joseph Bongioanni, Michael Rua, John Cagliero, after receiving the sacraments of Confession and Communion, this day, June 8th, give ourselves completely to Mary Immaculate and promise to work unceasingly for her and with her: to help ourselves to do this and to maintain our love for her we, here before her altar, solemnly promise, in agreement with our spiritual director, to follow in Louis Comollo's footsteps to the best of our ability. Here we bind ourselves as follows:

1. To carry out with the greatest exactness the rules of the house;
2. To help and encourage our companions: helping them by pointing out in a friendly way whatever needs correcting; encouraging them to do good through our words but especially through our good example;
3. To always be busy, making strict use of our time.

To make it possible to be faithful to these obligations and to help us to persevere in

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70 ASC A452: Compagnia dell’Immacolata, ms by Giuseppe Bongioanni with original notes by Don Bosco (cf MB V, 479-483).
them, we submit the following rules to our spiritual director for his approval.

Charity makes us perfect, but only by obedience and chastity can we acquire this state that brings us close to God.

1. Our first rule therefore is to be perfectly obedient to our superiors and submit ourselves to them with boundless confidence.

2. The carrying out of our duties will be our first and special concern, and this will be preferred to those religious practices which we are not obliged to observe.

3. A true spirit of charity will unite the members of the group in genuine friendship among us and also with our fellow members. We will not hesitate to correct anyone when so doing in a friendly way would help.

4. We will meet each week for half an hour and after a prayer to the Holy Spirit and a short spiritual reading we will consider how the sodality is getting on in its work of devotion and virtue. We will help each other with doubts and to get rid of any faults or wrong habits which we have. This we will do privately except when someone has displayed quite blameworthy indifference and diminished his zeal for obedience and fervour.

5. Separately, however, we will admonish each other even while acknowledging that there are faults which we must correct in ourselves.

6. We will try hard to be even-tempered and good-humoured, being patient with each other, and trying to help each other.

7. There are no special prayers to be said; whatever time is left over after having carried out our own duties should be devoted to whatever will be most useful for our souls and this out of fear that there being too many of these, we not prevent fulfilment of those that each one has taken on himself for want of time. especially since true devotion does not consist in long vocal prayers, but rather in purity of heart and the total sacrifice of our will. However, we do take upon ourselves these few practices: We will go as often as possible to the Sacraments when we have been granted permission to. We trust that the greater use we make of such a means of salvation, so much the more will we feel encouraged to persevere in our enterprise and so much greater will be the strength we will have to overcome obstacles.

8. We will receive Holy Communion every Sunday, holy days of obligation, days dedicated to the Oratory's patron saints and all Solemnities of Our Lady.

9. We will also receive Holy Communion on Thursdays, unless we are prevented by some necessary obligation.

10. We will add the Rosary to frequenting the Sacraments. We keenly recommend it be said, but without saying that it is a daily obligation.

11. We will recommend our society to Mary each day, asking her to obtain for us the grace of perseverance, and the virtues necessary for an exact observance of these rules and to win her patronage.

12. Every Saturday we will try to practise some mortification or prayer or other practice in Mary's honour.

13. We will try our best to edify our neighbour. We will be very well behaved during
prayer, reading, services in church, study and at school. We will jealously treasure the Word of God and will go over the truths we have meditated on. We will carefully avoid any wasting of time to safeguard ourselves from the temptations which come so easily and so strongly at times of idleness:

14. Therefore whatever time remains after the discharge of our own duties will be spent in useful and good reading or in prayer.

15. Recreation is tolerated and indeed is desirable after meals, and when the mind is tired from studying it cannot help but be a relief, except when the company of superiors or just good manners might hold us back in order not to be rude.

16. We will make known to our superiors whatever will help our spiritual progress, guaranteeing that our actions will be submitted to their judgement.

17. We will not abuse the goodness of those over us by constantly asking for those permissions which in their goodness they are willing to give. The exact observance of the school rules to which we have pledged ourselves should help us to avoid this abuse of too many exceptions.

18. We will observe strict silence while studying, putting aside any pretext for speaking, making noise, or going outside. We recommend the greatest caution and patience in this rule.

19. We will accept from our superiors whatever is spent on food, and not try to be any different from our companions nor accept (anything special) that might be offered us, unless that is a cause of harm to someone.

20. We will not complain about our food and we will try to dissuade others from doing so, whatever it tastes like.

21. Whoever wants to be part of this society should first of all purge his conscience at the tribunal of Confession and then eat from the Eucharistic table; he should then do a week of novitiate; he should read these rules carefully and promise God, Mary Immaculate and his spiritual director that he will observe them in detail.

22. On the day he is admitted, his fellow members will go to Communion (approach the table of the angels), and ask the divine Majesty to give the neophyte the virtue of perseverance and obedience, love of God and Mary our mother.

23. The society is placed under the aegis of the Immaculate Conception, from whence it draws its name and whose medal we will devoutly carry. A sincere, filial and limitless confidence in Mary, a constant devotion and loving affection for her, will make us overcome all obstacles, clinging tenaciously to our resolutions, be firm with ourselves, gentle and kindly towards others, exact in everything. The members are urged to write the holy names of Jesus and Mary first of all in their hearts and minds and then on their books and other objects that might come to mind. …

And you, O Mary, bless our efforts, since the idea of the sodality is all yours. Smile on our hopes, accept our promises, and thus under your mantle and made strong by your loving care, we will come safely through the storm-tossed sea of this world and be victorious over the temptations of the devil. So too will we be able to help our companions by what we do, give joy to those over us, and in all things be your loving
sons.

And if God gives us the grace of becoming priests, we promise you to give all our energies and powers to this work, distrusting ourselves, trusting completely in God; and so after our exile on this earth we trust that, consoled by Mary at our side, we shall safely receive the eternal reward that God reserves for those who serve him in spirit and truth.

**Blessed Sacrament Sodality (1857)**

Here are the main articles in the regulations for this sodality:

1. The principal aim of this sodality is to foster adoration of the Blessed Eucharist and make reparation to Jesus Christ for the insults he receives in this most august Sacrament from infidels, heretics and bad Christians.

2. For this purpose members will try to share their times for going to Communion so that someone receives Communion every day. Each member, with the permission of his confessor, will go to Communion on Sundays and once during the week.

3. A member will be especially ready to attend all functions directly concerned with the worship of the Blessed Eucharist like serving at Mass, assisting at Benediction, accompanying Viaticum when it is brought to the sick, visiting the Blessed Sacrament during the 40 Hours exposition.

4. Each member will try to learn how to serve Mass well carrying out all the ceremonies properly and devoutly and distinctly repeating the words that belong to this sublime ministry.

5. There will be one spiritual conference a week, which everyone will be keen to attend, and invite others to come and to be punctual.

6. The conferences will deal with matters directly concerning the worship of the Blessed Sacrament, such as encouraging going to Communion with much recollection, instructing and helping those making their First Communion, helping those who need it to make their preparation and thanksgiving, disseminating books, holy pictures, information sheets dealing this matter.

7. After the conference each one will choose some small sacrifice to put into practice during the week.

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4. Practical guidelines in letters to young people

Don Bosco’s abundant correspondence mirrors the range of different activities of a man of action. We do not find letters of spiritual direction along the style of St Francis de Sales in this correspondence. Don Bosco is concrete and to the point, even when hinting at spiritual issues. He preferred to deal with these more extensively in personal conversation. Despite his conciseness, when he needed to, he knew how to focus precisely on the main points of practical Christian living. Amongst the many letters, we have chosen a few addressed to boys and young men which seem to best represent the spiritual proposal he is making.

To Stefano Rossetti

S. Ignazio presso Lanzo, 25 July 1860

My beloved son,

The letter you wrote me truly gave me pleasure. You have really shown by this that you have understood how I feel about you. Yes, my good friend, I love you with all my heart, and this love urges me to do whatever I can to help you progress in your studies and in piety and guide you on the way to Heaven. Call to mind the advice I have given you at various times; be cheerful, but let this cheerfulness be truly that of a conscience free from sin. Try to become wealthy - but in terms of virtue, and the greatest wealth is a holy fear of God. Keep away from bad boys and be friends with good ones; place yourself in the hands of your parish priest (arch priest) and follow his advice, and all will go well.

Greet your parents on my behalf; pray for me, and while God is keeping you some distance from me, I pray that he will always keep for as one of his own until you return to us. Meanwhile, I am yours in fatherly affection.

Yours,
Fr John Bosco.

To Giovanni Garino

Calliano, 10 October 1860

My dear Garino,

I received your letter with much pleasure and I am delighted that you want so much to be good so you can become an excellent ecclesiastic. I will do everything I can for my part; but I also need you to do something. What is it? Unlimited confidence in

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72 E(m) I, pp. 500-501.
73 E(m) I, p. 144.
everything regarding the good of your soul. I need you to go out and catch souls, but afraid that you might instead be caught by others I suggest that you simply make yourself a model for your companions in doing good. Moreover you will be greatly fortunate if you can do some good or prevent some wrong amongst your companions.

Love me as I love you in the Lord, and pray for me, since I am yours with all my heart.

Yours,
Fr John Bosco.

To Emanuele Fassati

Turin, 8 September 1861

Dear Emanuele,

While you are enjoying the countryside with good Stanislas, I am arriving along with your maman (mum) to visit you by means of this note that I should write to you. My idea is to put a plan to you; so listen up. Your age and your preparation would seem to be adequate enough for you to be admitted to Holy Communion. So I would like next Easter to be the great day for your First Holy Communion. What do you say about that, dear Emanuele? Try to talk to your parents about it and hear what they have to say. But I would like you to start now to prepare yourself and therefore be especially exemplary in the following:

1. Exact obedience to your parents and your superiors, not complaining about anything they ask you to do.
2. Fulfilment of all your duties, especially at school, without complaining about them.
3. Have great regard for your devotions. So make the sign of the cross well, kneel up straight and pray, and be exemplary at church.

I would be very happy to hear your answer regarding these proposals. Please greet Azeglia and Stanislas for me. Always be happy in the Lord. may God bless you all; pray for me, especially you, dear Emanuele, and honour me by your good behaviour. I am always your

in Jesus Christ,
Fr John Bosco

To Annetta Pelazza

Turin, 20 July [1864]

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74 E(m) I, pp. 459-460.
75 E(m) II, p. 60.
My precious young Pelazza Annetta,

1. Obedience is your sure path to Heaven.
2. To carry out the idea you sometimes are thinking about (you have not told me but I seem to see it in your mind: to become a Sister) put yourself entirely into the hands of your good superiors.
3. When you need something go and ask Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Immaculate, and you will be heard.

May God bless you and grant that you all may progress along the way that leads to the salvation of your souls.

Pray for me. your humble servant in Jesus Christ

Fr John Bosco

To Gregorio Cavalchini Garofoli

Turin, 1 June 1866

My dear Gregorio Garofoli,

I was very pleased to receive your letter and I gave your news to the boys who were part of the caravan at Tortona. They were delighted and gave me the pleasant task of thanking you and greeting you. I would certainly like to speak with you at some length, but the things I would like to tell you cannot be entrusted to a letter. If you would like to you can visit me next holidays and I will tell you what I would like to be writing.

As a friend of your soul, I can but give you certain basic reminders. There are three of them, three ‘f’s. They are:
1. Flee from idleness.
2. Flee companions who indulge in immoral conversations or give you bad advice.
3. Fervent and frequent Confession and Communion.

Please greet your two brothers for me, Emanuele Callori and other Piedmontese there whom you have made known to me. May God bless you and keep you in his holy grace.

Pray for me.

I am yours affectionately in the Lord

Fr. John Bosco.

To the trade school students at Valdocco

Rome, 20 January 1874

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76 E(m) II, p. 252.
77 E(m) IV, p. 208.
My dear Fr Lazzero and dear boys,

Although I have written a letter to all my beloved children at the Oratory, because the trade students are the apple of my eye, and since I have asked the Holy Father for a special blessing for them, I would like to please you and satisfy my own heart by writing to you.

There is no need to tell you how much affection I have for you. I have given you clear proof of that. Nor do I need you to tell me of your love for me, because you have shown that so often. But what is our mutual affections based on? On money? Not mine, because I spend it on you; not yours because (and don't be offended) you have none. So my affection is based on the desire I have to save your souls. You were all redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and you love me because I try to lead you along the path to eternal salvation. So the good of our souls is the basis of our affection.

But, my dear children, does each of us really behave in a way that leads to saving our souls, or rather to losing them?

If our Divine Saviour would call each of us at this moment to his divine tribunal to be judged would he find us all ready? Resolutions made and never kept; scandals committed and not amended for; conversations which teach bad things to others are all things we should fear reproach for.

However while Jesus Christ could rightly reproach us for these, I am convinced that many will present with a clean conscience and with their state of soul well-adjusted, and this is my consolation. At any rate my dear friends, take courage; I will not cease praying for you, working for you, thinking of you. Help me with your good will.

Put into practice St Paul's words which I translate here for you: persuade the younger men to be moderate,\(^78\) never forget that it has been established that all must die and that after death we must all present ourselves before the law court of Jesus.\(^79\) Whoever does not suffer with Jesus Christ on earth cannot be crowned with glory with him in Heaven.\(^80\) Flee sin as your greatest enemy, and flee the source of sin, the immoral talk which is the ruin of good behaviour.\(^81\) in what you do and say,\(^82\) etc. etc.

Fr Lazzero can tell you the rest. Meanwhile my dear friends, I recommend myself to your charity. Pray for me especially, and for members of the St Joseph Sodality. May the most fervent amongst you make a holy Communion for my intentions.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always and help us persevere in doing good until death. Amen.

Your affectionate friend,
Fr J. Bosco

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\(^78\) Cf 1 Tt 2:6.
\(^79\) Cf 2 Co 5:10.
\(^80\) Cf 2 Tm 2:5.
\(^81\) Cf 1 Co 15:33.
\(^82\) Cf 1 Th 5:11.
To seminarian Antonio Massara

Turin, 26 September 1878

My dear friend in Jesus Christ,

Your neat writing shows your good will and invites me to speak to you with confidence. God is great, God is merciful. We sometimes do not think about him, but he thinks about us and when he sees us running away he places his hands on our shoulders and stops us to bring us back to him. Is that not true? May the Lord be blessed in everything and his decrees adored. When your health allows you to take up your studies again, I will not be far from advising you to push on ahead as far as priesthood. If you would like a life in common and would like to come with me, I will list you amongst my dear and beloved sons.

Meanwhile prayer, work, mortification, frequent confession and communion, will help you conquer the old enemy of your soul. Other matters cannot be entrusted to a letter. Goodbye my dear friend and may God bless you. Pray for me, your ever affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

To pupils in 4th and 5th Class of high school at Borgo San Martino

Turin, 17 June 1879

My dear sons,

I would have liked to have replied before now to some of the letters written by your dear teacher and some of you. Not being able to do so for each one in particular, I am writing a letter to you all, reserving the opportunity to speak to each one privately on the coming feast of St Aloysius.

You know then that men in this world must walk on the path to Heaven in one of two states: ecclesiastical or secular. For the secular state each one must choose the studies, employment, profession that allows him to fulfil his duties as a good Christian and which will also please his parents. For the ecclesiastical state we have to follow the rules established by our Divine Saviour: renouncing comfort, worldly glory, earthly enjoyment to give oneself to God's service, and so assure oneself of the everlasting joys of Heaven.

In making this choice each one should listen to the opinion of his confessor and then without worrying either about superiors or inferiors, parents or friends, resolve to do what will facilitate the way to salvation and console you most at the moment of your death. The young man who enters the ecclesiastical state with this intention, has the

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83 E(c) III, p. 390.
84 E(c) III, pp. 476-477.
moral certainty of doing great good to his own soul and the soul of his neighbour.

In the ecclesiastical state there are many branches which spread out from one point and tend to the same centre, who is God. Secular priest, religious priest, priest in the foreign missions are three fields in which labourers of the Gospel are called to work and promote the glory of God. One must choose what one has most at heart, most adapted to one's physical and moral strength, accepting advice from pious, learned and prudent people.

At this point I should deal with the many difficulties that refer to the world that would like to have all young people at its service, while God would like them all for himself. Nevertheless I will try to respond verbally or better explain the difficulties which each one could face in making one of these very important decisions.

The basis of a happy life for a young man is frequent communion and reading the prayer to Mary Most Holy every Saturday, for his state in life, as described in *The Companion of Youth*.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you and grant you the precious gift of persevering in doing good. I recommend you to the Lord every day. Please pray for me. I am affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco
5. Sermons and Good Nights

Preaching plays an important role in Don Bosco’s educational system, be it tied to a liturgical context (the homily) or a catechetical one (Sunday afternoon instructions), or the informal and familiar kind found in those talks he gave the boys before they went off to bed (the ‘Good Nights’). The texts here are taken from notes written up as the saintly educator was speaking. They are not what Don Bosco said literally, word for word, but they certainly contain the substance of his talks. The material preserved in the archives is very extensive: we have chosen some items that offer us an idea of Don Bosco’s preferred topics and his way of expressing himself. The Biographical Memoirs consider this material of great value, correcting the language and, when they exist, combining various versions. Here you will find the text as it is found in the notes of people who were present.

Instructions on the beautiful virtue\footnote{ASC A0040601: Memoria di alcuni fatti 1858-1861, ms by Giovanni Bonetti, pp. 1-7 (cf MB VI, 62-66).}

Sunday 17 October 1858

The Church largely dedicates October to Our Blessed Lady. The first Sunday of this month is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary in memory of the many graces obtained, the wondrous miracles wrought through her intercession, to keep the keen memory alive in the hearts of the faithful of the many favours that Mary, invoked under that title, has shared with those who are devoted to her. On the second Sunday we celebrate the Virgin Mary’s motherhood reminding Christians that Mary is our mother, and that we are all her dear children. Today, the third Sunday, we celebrate her purity, the virtue that makes her so great in God’s eyes, and the virtue that made her the most beautiful creature that ever came from the Lord’s hands.

Given that you have heard me speak for the last two Sundays about the glories of the Virgin Mary, this evening instead of speaking to you about Mary Most Holy, I would like to speak of this beautiful virtue, showing you the esteem not just that the Gentiles had for it, since they greatly venerated those who preserved this virtue, but I would like to show you the esteem that God himself had for it. Oh how happy I would be if this
evening I could fill your tender hearts with love for this angelic virtue! So pay attention and I will begin.

What is the virtue of purity? Theologians tell us that by purity we mean a hatred, an abhorrence of everything against the sixth commandment. Any person, each in his own state, can preserve the virtue of purity. This purity is so pleasing to God that in every age he severely punished the vice that is contrary to it, and rewarded those who preserved it with wondrous deeds. From the earliest times in the world, when human beings, though not so numerous, had already descended into disorder, corruption, as the Scripture tells us: *omnis caro corruperat viam suam*, God had rewarded purity. Enoch who was the only one to have kept his soul pure for God, was believed by God to be unworthy of remaining amongst such a sinful people, so God sent two of his angels who took Enoch away from the company of men, carried him to another place where he was then brought to Heaven by Jesus Christ after his death.

Let’s move on. Once mankind had multiplied on earth, they forgot about their Creator and gave themselves to carnal pleasures, the worst vices, the vice of dishonesty, impurity. God was so outraged by such iniquity that he promised to wipe out the human race with a flood all across the land. Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives were saved from this universal extermination. Why this preference for them? Because they had kept this beautiful and inestimable virtue of purity.

Let’s move further ahead. After the flood the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah gave themselves over to all sorts of foul deeds. God decided to eliminate them not with a flood of water this time, but with a flood of fire. But what did he do first? He cast his gaze on that unhappy city and saw that Lot and his wife had preserved their purity. He then immediately sent an angel to tell them to flee, because God wanted to incinerate all the people. As soon as thy had left the city a sea of fire, with terrible thunder and lightning rained down on that poor city and on all its inhabitants. Lot and his wife were saved from the fire, but his wife, out of curiosity, did not escape God's wrath. The angel had forbidden them to look back when God's punishment rained down on the inhabitants, but Lot's wife, hearing so much noise that it seemed that all of hell had been provoked, could not resist turning around; and at that very moment she was turned into a pillar of salt. So though God had saved her from the common slaughter for her purity, he nevertheless wanted to punish her for the immodesty of her eyes, to show us that we need to be modest with our eyes, not satisfy every curiosity, otherwise we will be its victim, not only in our body as was Sarah, but also in our soul since our eyes are the portals through which the devil enters.

Let’s move on yet again. Go back in your thoughts to Egypt, and there you will see a young man who, because he did not want to consent to an infamous and immodest

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86 For corrupt were the ways of all flesh on the earth (Gn 6:12).
87 Cf Gn 5:22. 24.
89 Cf Gn 19:12-26.
action his mistress wanted to force him into, suffered a thousand punishments and even prison. 90 Who was he? Would God even allow Joseph to perish? No, wait and you will see him come out of prison and in an instant ascend the throne of Egypt; you will see that he alone with his advice saves not only Egypt from death, but Judah, Syria, Mesopotamia and a thousand other nations. 91 But where does such glory come from you will ask me. From God, who wanted to reward Joseph's heroic deed in not heeding blandishments. he wanted to reward his love for the beautiful virtue of purity, wanted to reward his constancy in preserving his heart chaste and pure at the cost of persecution and prison itself.

I would never finish if I wanted to recall all the deeds of this kind, and of Judith, because of whose purity God saved Judith from an entire army, or the chaste Susannah lifted up to Heaven, and of Esther who saved the Hebrew nation. But why did God work so many wonders for them? For their purity. Yes, the virtue of purity is so beautiful, so pleasing to God who at all times and in all circumstances never left those who preserved it without protection.

But let's keep going, since this is not enough. The much awaited time had come, the one whom the people had waited so long for, the Saviour of the world. But who was she of whom the Son of God, Creator of the Universe wished to be born? God turned his gaze on all the daughters of Zion and found one with whom he fell in love. Who was she? Mary most holy. The Saviour of the world was born of her, not through the work of man but through the work of the Holy Spirit, since God wanted to accomplish a wonder never done before and that would never happen again. Why so many privileges? To reward Mary's purity. She was the purest, the most chaste of all creatures.

What do you believe would be the reason why our Divine Saviour loved to be with children so much, wanted to embrace them, if not because they had not yet lost the beautiful virtue of purity? The Apostles wanted to chase them away because of all their noisy chatter, but the Divine Saviour, calling them back, commanded them to let them come to him, sinite pueros venire ad me, 92 telling them they would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless they became simple pure and chaste like those children. 93 Our Divine Saviour raised up a young boy and girl, 94 but why? Because, so the Fathers interpret it for us, they had not lost their purity.

Why did Jesus Christ show so much predilection for St. John? Did he want to go up Mt Tabor for his transfiguration? He wanted St. John with him. 95 Did he want to go fishing with his apostles? Well then, he preferred to get into St. John's boat. He went to

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91 Cf Gn 41:39-57.
92 Let the little children come to me; a quotation adapted from the Vulgate: “Sinite parvulos venire ad me” (Mk 10:14).
93 Mt 18:3.
94 Mt 9:24-25; Lk 7:11-15.
95 Mt 17:1-2.
Gethsemane, to the garden, but he wanted John with him. 96 Hung upon the cross, he turned to John and said: “Son behold your mother; woman behold your son”. 97 But why did Jesus entrust John to his mother, the greatest creature that had ever left God's hands, and no greater would there ever be? Why such preference? Because, my dear boys, John more than all the other apostles had preserved the beautiful virtue of virginity, of purity. He allowed John to rest his head on his divine breast, 98 why? Because John had preserved and possessed the beautiful virtue of purity. If Jesus loved all of his apostles with a particular love, he loved John more than all; the others believed that John would not have to die because Jesus had told Peter: and if I want him to live until I come, what is that to you? 99 In fact St. John was the apostle who lived the longest. It was he whom Jesus Christ had see in spirit the glory enjoyed by those in Heaven who had preserved the beautiful virtue of purity in this life. He left it written in the Apocalypse that, entering the highest Heaven, he saw a crowd of souls dressed in white, with a girdle of gold and carrying a palm in their hands. 100 These souls made a crown for the Lamb and followed him wherever he went. They sang such a beautiful hymn, so sweet that he could not comprehend such beautiful harmony and was outside of himself, and turning to the angel accompanying him, said: “Who are those surrounding the Lamb singing such a beautiful song that all the other blessed do not know how to sing?” Then the angel told him: “They are the ones who have kept the beautiful virtue of purity, isti sunt qui cum mulieribus non sunt coniugati” 101.

O what fortunate souls are they who have not yet lost the beautiful virtue of purity! Redouble your efforts to preserve it. You have such a beautiful treasure, one so great that even the angels envy you. You are, as our Redeemer Jesus Christ says, like the angels.

And for those of you who have unfortunately lost it, do not lose courage, do everything possible to recover it. It is true, you will no longer be virgins, you will no longer have the good fortune of being in that group which has a place apart from all the others in Heaven; you will no longer be able to sing that hymn that only the virgins can sing, but that does not matter - there is still a beautiful place for you in Heaven, so majestic that the thrones of the richest emperors, the richest kings that have ever been or could be on this earth, pale by comparison. You will still be surrounded by so much glory that neither human nor angelic tongue could explain. You will still be able to enjoy the beautiful company of Jesus, Mary, that good mother of ours who anxiously awaits us; the company of all the saints and angels who are always ready to help us so long as we want with all our heart to preserve the beautiful virtue of purity.

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96 Mt 26:37.
97 Jn 19:26-27.
98 Jn 13:25.
99 Jn 21:22.
100 Cf Rv 7:9.
101 These are the ones who did not marry; broadly quoted from the Vulgate: “Hi sunt qui cum mulieribus non sunt coniugati” (Rv 14:4).
The storm in the sinner's heart\textsuperscript{102}

Tuesday 14 March 1876

I have visited various houses in Liguria and have seen that there is much to be done. Yes, there is much good to be done, and if all of you listening to me were ordained priests and were true labourers of the Gospel, you would all have good to do. …

Arriving on the coast, I was able to see how stormy the weather was. For about five days there had been a storm at sea, but especially in one part. I had already heard it spoken of, but had never seen it, but I can tell you that it made me wonder. The waves were as high as our house, running into each other, and they made such a powerful, terrible noise together as if four canons were going off. This collision of waves produced white foam that went so high that if there had been a building amongst all those waves it would have been tossed into the air so high that if people were in it, they would have died before they hit the water. But there was no building there of course. I found myself about thirty metres from the shore and often wanted to pull back further so I wouldn't get drenched. Observing this spectacle I admired God's power in it. When he wanted to he could make the sea peaceful and calm and could walk on it. And then with just one word he could make it turbulent again, making it terrible to witness. If parliamentarians and senators were to go and shout at the sea to stop, well, we'd see what they could do about it.

Looking at this sea I thought of the sinner who is constantly in a storm like that sea was then. His conscience is always gnawing away at him and he never has peace and tranquillity. Sometimes he has a bit of recreation, and then pulls aside, sad. His friends invite him to enjoy himself, but his shoulders slump and he has no will to do so, because his heart is reproaching him, telling him: “You are no friend of God's”. He goes to lunch and tries to be cheerful, trying to chase away all the thoughts gnawing at him, but meanwhile his heart tells him: “And if you should die now, while you are eating, you would be excluded from paradise and hell would be ready for you”. He goes to bed in the evening and tries to put aside the sad but just remorse of his conscience, telling himself: “I want to go quietly to sleep; at least I would be free of all these tormenting thoughts”. Indeed that evening he did not say his prayers in order to repress the remorse he felt. But all in vain because his heart tells him: “If you should die this evening you would go into eternity, disgraced before God”. So, he has no peace and tranquillity but is always caught up in a storm.

These thoughts went through my mind seeing such a stormy sea. Good night.

\textsuperscript{102} ASC A0000309: Piccole locuzioni del molto R.do don Giovanni Bosco, Quad. IX, 1876; ms by Francesco Ghigliotto, pp. 3-7 (cf MB XII, 131-132).
Sunday 19 March 1876

One day the Divine Saviour, walking through the countryside near the city of Samaria, looked around him at the plains and valleys, and saw that the harvest everywhere was abundant. he invited his apostles to also enjoy the view of this wonderful country scene, but they quickly became aware that despite the abundance of the harvest there was nobody to gather it up. So alluding to something higher, he turned to his apostles and told them: Messis quidem multa operarii autem pauci, the harvest is great, but you see how few workers there are. This is the agonising cry of the Church and the people over the ages: the harvest is great but the labourers are few.

Our Divine Saviour, and you understand it well enough, meant by the field or vineyards around him, to speak of the Church and everyone in the world; the harvest is the salvation of souls, since all souls must be gathered up and brought to the Lord's granary; oh how abundant is this harvest; how many millions of people there are on this earth! How much work there is to be done to see that everyone is saved; but operarii autem pauci, the labourers are few. By the labourers working in the vineyard of the Lord is meant all those who in some way work for the salvation of souls. And note well that labourers here does not only mean priests, preachers and confessors, as some believe, who certainly are put there to work and are directly involved in gathering the harvest, but they are not alone, they are not enough.

The labourers are those who in some way work for the salvation of souls; like those who work in the fields are not just the ones gathering the grain but all the others as well. Look around a field and see the variety of labourers. One is ploughing, another turning over the soil; others are using a hoe; someone has a rake or is breaking open the clods and flattening them; others are sowing seed, other still covering it over; somebody is weeding, pulling out darnel, grass, vetches; one is hoeing, another uprooting, another one cutting; others are watering just at the right moment and pressing the seeds in; others instead are reaping, making bundles of sheaves (covoni, borle), there are others loading the cart and pulling it; one is spreading out the wheat while another is beating it; one is separating wheat from chaff; others are cleaning, using a sieve, putting it into sacks, carrying it to the mill to make flour; one is sifting, another kneading, another

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103 ASC A0000408: Conferenze e prediche di D. Bosco 1875/1876, Quad. XIX, ms by Giulio Barberis, pp. 63-78 (MB XII, 625-631). Fr Barberis introduces the text with this note: “Conference by Don Bosco on St. Joseph’s evening, 19 March 1876, in the small church with all the professed, novices, aspirants and those who wanted to become aspirants at the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales. Anyone was publicly invited to the conference who either belonged to or wanted to belong to the Congregation. 203 adults were there and it had a great impact”.

104 Mt 9:37.


106 Burattare is an archaic word for sifting.
baking. So you can see, my friends, what a range of labourers are needed before the harvest can fulfil its purpose of giving us bread from Heaven.

As it is in the field, so it is with the Church; all kinds of labourers are needed, all kinds; No one can say: “Although my behaviour is irreproachable, I would be no good working for the greater glory of God”. No, nobody can say that; everyone can do something. The labourers are few. Oh if only there were so many priests to send everywhere around the world, to every city, town, village, countryside, and convert the world. But it is impossible to have so many priests; so others are needed. How could priests be free for their ministry if they did not have people to bake the bread and cook their meals; if they had nobody to make their shoes and clothes? The priest needs to be helped; and I believe I am not mistaken if I say that all of you here, priests and academic students and trade students, working boys and coadjutors, all of you can be true labourers for the Gospel and do good in the Lord's vineyard. How? In many way.

For example you can all pray. Certainly there is no one who cannot do this. Oh you see, you can all do the main part that the Divine Saviour spoke of there; after saying that the labourers are few, he added: “Pray then that the master of the harvest sends labourers into his harvest”, Rogate ergo dominum messis ut mittat operarios in messem suam.\textsuperscript{107} Prayer touches God's heart; God becomes obliged to send them. Let us pray to him for our towns, for far away towns; let us pray to him for the needs of our families and cities; and let us pray to him for those who are still caught up in the darkness of idolatry, superstition, heresy. Oh let us pray with all our hearts, pray much to the master of the harvest.

One thing everyone can also do, and it is of the greatest help and real work in the vineyard of the Lord, is to give good example. Oh how much good one can do this way; good example through encouraging words for others to do good, good advice, good counsel. There might be someone who has doubts about his vocation; or there is another who is about to make a decision that will bring him harm forever; if people like this are advised, comforted in doing good, how much advantage they can draw from it! Often just a word is enough to get someone to stay on or to take the right path. St. Paul told the faithful to try to be a lucerna lucens et ardens.\textsuperscript{108} If only we could see ourselves in this light! May everybody be edified by our words. But that is not enough: may there also be works. May we be inflamed by a charity that makes us disregard everything else so long as we do good to our brethren; if only there could be that perfect chastity that has us claim victory over all other vices; if only there could be that meekness that attracts the heart of others! Oh, I believe that the entire world would be drawn into our net.

Something else that we can all do is to be regular with our religious duties, practices of piety, taking part in things that can promote the greater glory of God and the

\textsuperscript{107} Mt 9:38.
\textsuperscript{108} A lamp alight and shining. John's Gospel (5:35) puts this expression on Jesus' lips to describe John the Baptist.
salvation of souls. Speaking well of the Church, ministers of religion, especially the Pope, and the arrangements of the Church. These are things that anyone from the oldest to the youngest can do; and amongst us here in the house, speaking well of superiors, the Congregation, the house, the things we do.

But even this is not enough. Something that everyone can do is to help pull out the weeds, rye grass, bermuda grass, the vetches and all the other weeds that only do harm; I am trying to say that when there is some sort of scandal, don't tolerate it; whoever in the house can get rid of it, do so, and do everything to stop it; if you can't don't ignore it, speak about it to someone who can and not just once, but two or three times; just so long as the scandal is avoided.

If you hear someone complaining of things at table, you can all correct him; someone might be intending to go out without permission or complaining because he can't go out, but you can all encourage him, and patiently advise him. One kind of weed you can all stamp out is scandalous talk. It often happens that there is something going wrong in the house and the superiors do not know about it and therefore cannot correct it; it is absolutely necessary for you to speak up about it, make them aware of what is wrong; you are in close contact with them while the superiors are somewhat distant.

Another way of rooting out weeds is fraternal correction. It happens while you are here or at home with your parents in your village that your friends might inadvertently, in your presence, talk about things that are not proper for a young Christian; they write letters with unchristian thoughts and expressions that can make us angry or give us bad thoughts. So? Answer them kindly: “Look, you say such and such, but you know, these words do not sound nice in the mouth of a young Christian. I know that you are my friend and that you write without thinking about it; but because you are my friend I believe you will not be offended if I correct you for one thing or another”. Or: “I'm sorry, but I can't accept what you are offering me because they do not measure up to how a young Christian should be living”. Often a friendly correction done like this produces better results than a sermon in the hearts of your friends and companions, and it can happen that they begin to serve God or love their religion more just because they found this courteous way of finding out about religious practice.

And unfortunately it often happens that one needs to practise this kind of charity with one's own parents, instructing, correcting, advising them. We need fortitude and we need this; be courageous about it, but always do so charitably, kindly, with the gentleness that St Francis of Sales would have used if he were in our house. All thes and a thousand others, are ways that each one, priest, cleric, lay of any age or status, can use to work in the Lord's vineyard. You see then that everyone can work in the evangelical harvest in many and various ways, so long as each one is zealous for God's honour and the salvation of souls.

Now someone might ask: “But Don Bosco, what are you alluding to? What are you trying to tell us? Why are you telling us this this evening?” Oh, my dear friends! That cry “operarii autem pauci” was not only heard in ancient times, in centuries gone by but we, we in our own times hear it more and more demandingly. The Salesian Congregation's harvest
is daily growing beyond proportion so that I can say that we no longer know where to begin or how to organise our work. It is for this reason that I would like to see you all be labourers in the Lord's vineyard, quickly! Requests for colleges [boarding schools], houses, missions are arriving in extraordinary numbers both from around Italy, or France, or foreign parts. From Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria in Africa, from Arabia, India, China and Japan in Asia; from Australia, the Argentine Republic, Paraguay, Gibraltar and one could say from all over America there are requests to open new houses because everywhere there is such a lack of labourers for the Gospel that it frightens anyone who observes the amount of good that could be done and that has to be left undone through lack of missionaries.

From the Argentine Republic we have particularly distressing news from Fr Cagliero. When they come to Confession, you mostly don't ask: how long since your last Confession, but: how many times have you been to Confession? And it is not an unusual occurrence for men and women not have been for thirty or forty years. It is not that they hate the Church or Confession, no. This happens because they haven't had the possibility. And just imagine how many, oh how many on the point of death who want to at least have a priest to confess their sins to and receive absolution, but not even that is granted them because they rarely find a priest to satisfy that need for them!

However my aim is not to invite you to go to such faraway places; some can do this but not everyone, partly because the need here is so urgent, and also because for various reasons not everyone who feels called to the Salesian Congregation would be ready to go such huge distances. But in view of so many needs, such a lack of labourers for the Gospel, noting that all of you here, in one way or another can work in the Lord's vineyard, could I just stay quiet and not manifest the secret desire of my heart? Oh how much I would like to see you encouraged to work like the apostles! All my thoughts turn to this, all my concerns, all my efforts. and that is why we get you through your studies, make everything possible for you to take up the clerical habit, set up special schools. Could I stay silent in view of such pressing needs? And while they are calling on us from everywhere and it would seem to be the voice of God manifested in so many mouths, could I just pull back? After the manifest signs from Divine Providence of the great things he wishes to achieve through the Salesians, could I remain quiet and not try to increase the number of evangelical apostles?

Now I have just one more thing to say and it is the most important. While I am inviting you all to remain constant and to join the Salesian Congregation, I would not like someone without a vocation to try to enter. I see the great good we can do; I point out to you how great the harvest is before our eyes, how we need many people to cultivate the Lord's vineyard if they hear an inner voice saying: in the Congregation you could more easily do good for the health of your soul and the soul of your neighbour; you know how things are and it is easy to join up. But I want all the others to follow their own vocation. What I want and what I insist on is this, that wherever you may be
you be, as we read in the Gospel, “lucerna lucens et ardens”.¹⁰⁹

I am not against a young man who wishes to go to the seminary and become a secular priest. What I want and what I insist on and will insist on while I have the breath and voice to do so is that whoever becomes a cleric, becomes a holy cleric; he who becomes a priest becomes a holy priest; that he who wants to be part of the Lord's inheritance by embracing the ecclesiastical state not get caught up in secular things, but aims only to save souls. I require everyone, but especially the ecclesiastic, to be a light which enlightens people around him and not darkness which is a snare for those who follow.

This light is not only manifested through words: it is to become deeds. Let each one try to adorn his heart with the charity which urges him to give his life to save souls; and this means not looking to any bodily interest when it is a case of doing good, and saying with St. Paul that worldly interests and things of this earth are filth by comparison with gaining souls for Jesus Christ "omnia arbitror ut stercora ut Christum lucrifaciam".¹¹⁰ That means not being dominated by gluttony, intemperance which unfortunately wreck so many young lives, and let us also say, the lives of many ecclesiastics. The one who wants to work with the fruit in the Lord's vineyard, in whatever state of life he chooses, must also know how to be moderate and practise mortification, especially with wine.

The true labourer of the Gospel, wherever he finds himself, is one who willingly takes part in religious practices, promotes them, and celebrates them solemnly. If there is a novena, they are happy about it; they also have some special practice and invite others to join them.

To be a true labourer for the Gospel one needs not to waste time, but to work: a bit here, a bit there; someone studying, another assisting and teaching; someone looking after material things, and others in the pulpits or confessionals; someone working in the offices or similar. But keep well in mind that time is precious and anyone who wastes it or does not keep busy, can never be a good labourer for the Gospel.

So, my dear sons, here are the things I wanted to tell you about being a good Gospel labourer. Oh if only we would do all these things in every detail! …

They will only be obtained at the price of great sacrifice, by suffering something. We never achieve great things without great efforts; and that is why we have to show we are ready for everything.

Yes, let everyone join the Salesian Congregation, but let him say: I want to take this path only to save souls; and this includes that while saving other souls I first want to save my own. And so this will require sacrifice? Well, I am ready to make any kind of sacrifice. I would like to follow Jesus Crucified; if he died on the cross suffering terrible pain, I who wish to follow him must show myself ready for any suffering, even dying on the cross with him.

¹⁰⁹ A lamp alight and shining (Jn 5:35).
¹¹⁰ I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ (Ph 3:8).
Besides, look! In the Gospel I find it written: blessed those who are troubled\(^{111}\) and never,: blessed those who are enjoying life. So, if I have to suffer? Blessed am I, this way I can more closely follow in the steps of the Divine Redeemer. Those who enjoy this world just enjoy the moment and their enjoyment will be small, indeed, nothing is worse than nothing, as far as eternity is concerned. Those who are troubled instead might suffer somewhat, but this does not last long and every suffering will be changed into a precious stone up there in Heaven and console them for eternity.

I finish with what St. Paul says, “\textit{Vos delectat magnitudo praemiorum; non vos deterreat magnitudo laborum}”: do you take delight in the great reward of paradise? Then do not be afraid if you have to suffer something on this earth.\(^{112}\)

\textbf{Spiritual fervour}\(^{113}\)

Friday 27 October 1876

The Novena for All Saints is in progress and I am hoping that someone will become a saint, or at least do miracles: maybe someone is already like this but I have not yet become aware of it. At the time of Dominic Savio, Besucco, Magone they made these novenas with more commitment; we could not have wanted anything better. I am not saying that you make them badly now, no, there are good boys; but there is no longer that commitment. I do not know why things are like this now. Perhaps it is me, for not speaking to my boys, not getting them to understand; or maybe it is them, not wanting to understand me; or it could be both. However, I don't see that general fervour any more like in the times I was telling you about where there were sixty or seventy boys and every morning sixty or seventy communions. But there is still time. I say this because, things being as they are, a match just takes a moment to light a fire in a

\(^{111}\) Cf Mt 5:4.

\(^{112}\) The text is not St Paul's, but from the XXXVII homily of St Gregory the Great on the Gospels: “Si delectat mentem magnitudo praemiorum, non deterreat certamen laborum” (If the mind is attracted by the greatness of the prize then it will not be afraid of the effort required).

\(^{113}\) ASC A0000310: Discorsetti di D. Bosco, Quad. X, 1876/1877; ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 4-6 (cf MB XII, 557).
haystack and we get a huge fire, a bonfire. Each of us can do this. Let each one think of Heaven; some have brothers, sisters, friends and companions, others their superiors or inferiors who are enjoying the rewards of their virtue. They were flesh and blood like us; and we are away from danger, can easily practise our religion, adjust matters on our conscience: so if they became saints, why not us? — But, you say, we need God's grace! I assure you the Lord gives us his grace. — So what is missing? A little bit of good will is missing, and if you do not have good will, if you cannot do it alone, ask the Lord, ask him insistently, and he will do it for you. And if your own prayers are not enough, turn to the saints who are ready to help us just at this time, and especially to Mary most holy: ask them to give you a burning divine love, constant love; and the Lord, if he does not grant it for you, cannot deny so many saints. Good night.

Grow up quickly and become apostles

Sunday 29 October 1876

Today we have had a group depart for Rome, not a decisive step yet to go to America, no, but to set up a small college/boarding school in in a town near Rome called Albano, where Alba la Lunga once lived. Then in three or four days time there will be another small group departing to set up another small college in Ariccia; then another to set up a small one in Trinità. In the meantime let's pray for those travelling tonight perhaps until two in the afternoon tomorrow. Now we are making the Novena to the Saints and we need to remind ourselves not to waste any of these days, pray for those who have to leave for America. Let the priests also remember them in their Masses. This time 24 will be leaving, I am not sure if all at once, but at most one or two weeks apart. We do not want the number in our army to decrease. Now that the older ones are leaving we need the other smaller ones to grow and take their place. So we need these little 'loaves' which we 'bake' here under the protection of Mary Help of Christians, to grow bit by bit, a metre long. We need you all to grow up into big boys! But let's trust in Divine Providence and I hope with the Lord's help, and a little bit at a time, we will make it. Meanwhile let me remind you that tomorrow evening, perhaps around five thirty, as I have already told you, there will be a conference for members of the Congregation, and I am telling you here publicly so you can all know about it. Meanwhile let's stay with the Lord who guides all our actions; and let's behave in such a way that he will not have to reproach us on judgement day when he comes to judge us. Good night.

ASC A0000302: Discorsetti di D. Bosco, Quad. II, 1876; ms by Emanuele Dompé, pp. 7-9 (cf MB XII, 557-558).
At the beginning of the school year\textsuperscript{115} Thursday 2 November 1876

The regular timetable begins tomorrow. Some were already complaining: too much recreation, too many outings, too little time for study. So at least tomorrow when the regular timetable starts, everyone will be happy. But the timetable alone is not enough; you also need to study; so starting from tomorrow put every effort into avoiding idleness. If only you knew how precious time is! The sages tell us that time is a treasure, so someone who loses a minute of time loses part of that treasure. So we need to begin right away, so that at the end of the year we won't regret time lost. True wisdom comes from the Lord alone: \textit{Initium sapientiae est timor Domini}.\textsuperscript{116} Therefore we must first of all adjust our consciences well. \textit{Sapientia non introit in animam malevolentem},\textsuperscript{117} this was written on a poster hung up in the study hall; I don't know if it is still there or not. Fr Durando can hang another one up there. And now I have the same advice that I usually offer at the beginning of the year: frequent Confession and frequent Communion.

As for frequent Confession, the Fathers recommend every week, fortnight or once a month. Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine say weekly. I haven't got special advice on that, just that you go to Confession when your conscience is worrying you about something. Some can go ten days without offending the Lord, others fifteen and others twenty. But some can only go three or four days then suddenly fall into sin; they should go more often, unless it's a case of little trifling things.

As for frequent Communion, I don't want to prescribe the time, but just remind you of a little something. Looking at my watch I see it is not too late: it is only eight minutes past nine. I can tell you this in five minutes. There was once a man who used go to Confession to St. Vincent de Paul. He did not like going to this confessor because he used to recommend frequent Communion. So he thought about changing advice and going to another confessor and told him: “I used to go to Father Vincent, but he asked me to go to Communion too often, so I have come to you to receive your advice”. This priest worked out his answer and said: “My son, start with something small: go every week, then every fortnight, then after you can go once a month”. The poor man followed this advice and after a short while he went from Communion only after Confession, then from Confession to the theatre, dancing, etc. Then once he stopped going to Confession, Communion altogether: he began to live a dissolute lifestyle. Some time went by and he was no longer as happy as he used be, his faults were

\textsuperscript{115} ASC A0000302: \textit{Discorsetti di D. Bosco}, Quad. II, 1876; ms by Emanuele Dompé, pp. 18-21 (MB XII, 565-567).

\textsuperscript{116} Quotation from the Vulgate (Si. 1:16): “The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord” (Ws 1:12).

\textsuperscript{117} The quote is an abbreviated version adapted from the Vulgate: “Quoniam in malevolam animam non introbit sapientia, nec habitabit in corpore subdi to peccatis” (Wis 1:4): Wisdom will never make its way into a crafty soul or stay in one which is in debt to sin.
bothering his conscience, and he went back to St. Vincent and said: “I see that by letting go of holy communion I have also let piety go and become worse; From now on I want to follow your advice and go to holy communion frequently”. I recommend the same to you; do this to keep your conscience clean and acquire true wisdom from the Lord. Good night.

**The effectiveness of turning to Mary Help of Christians**

Sunday 20 May 1877

We are approaching Pentecost and the Novena to Our Lady Help of Christians. These are days for obtaining graces from Mary, not just once but many times a day, whether you come here to ask for them and be given them, or whether they are reports we receive from afar about the marvellous graces obtained from Mary our Help.

The Church lets us know about this power and kindness of Mary's with the Psalm that begins: *Si caeli quaeris ianuas, Mariae nomen invoca*, if you seek the gates of heaven, call on Mary's name. If it is enough to call on Mary's name to enter heaven, we need to say she is powerful. And elsewhere the Church presents her like an army in battle array. And although the literal sense of the words mean enemies outside the Church, the Church's spirit understands them also in terms of our particular enemies.

So I recommend, inasmuch as I know and can, that you keep Mary's name engraved on your heart and that you always call on her this way: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro me*. It is not a long prayer, but a very effective one, you will see. When you want to obtain some spiritual grace, and by spiritual grace we can mean freedom from temptations, afflictions of spirit, lack of fervour, etc., if one of you wants to be free from temptation or acquire some great virtue, he only needs to call on Mary. These and other spiritual graces are the one mostly obtained and they are the unknown ones but they do great good for souls. And most of you here, without naming them, confess that if you have been freed from some temptation it is through Mary Help of Christians.

And so many to whom I have recommended this short prayer, *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis*, have confessed how they have felt its effects. And of the hundreds or thousand or more who are or have been here, from the city or beyond, and whom I have recommended to tell me if this prayer was fulfilled or not, up until now nobody has said that it wasn't. One did tell me that his prayer wasn't heard, but after questioning him, he said he intended to pray but hadn't done so. So it is not the Virgin who wouldn't listen but the one who did not want to be listened to. Prayer has to be regular, persevering, with faith and the intention that it be fulfilled.

I would like you to try this out and that you also get your parents and friends to try it

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out, telling them by letter or on the next Feast of Mary Help of Christians, coming here, or else Don Bosco can tell them that if they have some spiritual grace to obtain, pray this way: Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis; and of the prayer is not fulfilled, they can do me the favour of letting me know. And if I come to know that someone has not obtained a spiritual grace from Mary as asked for, I will immediately write a letter to St. Bernard telling him that he made a mistake when he said: “Remember O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided”. But you can be certain that I will never have to write a letter to St. Bernard. You are laughing at this idea of a letter to St. Bernard. Do we not know where to find St. Bernard? “It's a problem for the postman”, Fr Rua was heard to say. “Oh, but we have a much better, faster way of writing to the saints than carriages, steam trains, telegraph”. Because the telegraph, although it is almost instantaneous, takes time just the same; But while I am talking to you, in my thoughts I go up, beyond the stars, before the throne of St. Bernard. Never fear, he will receive our letters immediately, even if the postman is late. So try it and if you are not heard we won't have any difficulty in sending a letter to St. Bernard.

For the end of this novena, which we are making now, I want you to engrave these words on your heart: Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro me, and say it in any danger, any temptation, any need and always; and also ask Mary Help of Christians for the grace to be able to call on her in your need. And I promise you the devil will be bankrupt. You know what it means to say that the devil will be bankrupt? It means he will have no more power over us and will need to back off. Meanwhile I recommend you all to the Lord and to the Help of Christians to bless you and protect you. Good night.

A tranquil conscience

Tuesday 21 August 1877

Holidays are approaching, both for the academic students and for the trade boys: one lot to give their heads a rest, the others their shoulders and arms; but everyone will go on holidays. I need to give you some advice for these holidays. The advice I give is one only and it is that you be really free, maybe play up a bit, but to do this go to a place where God cannot see you. You all know such a place: home, bell tower, the cellar. But I don't think anyone would be such a fool as to believe that there is such a place where the Lord does not see him. And this thought of God's presence should go with us all the time, everywhere and in everything we do. Who would have the courage to do something wrong, offend the Lord, if he knows that the one he wants to offend can,

\[119\] Ibid., pp. 10-13 (cf MB XIII, 427-429).
right that moment before he can utter a word, dry up his tongue, or paralyse the hand that has thought to commit that sin?

You don’t need to think of the Lord as all justice, inflexible. No, in fact he is all mercy, kindness, love. And just as the one who offends should fear him, so the one who can say: “I have nothing on my conscience” can be happy. And I say to this individual: go to sleep in peace, enjoy your recreation, live happily. I the one in harmony with God leads a happy life, the one who cannot say he has a good conscience ought be afraid lest God take away the time (to repent). Yesterday for example the assistant priest at Lanzo was walking in the garden with the parish priest, praising the sermon he gave; and he was happy about it because he had satisfied his listeners. Then all of a sudden the priest saw that Fr Oggero was no longer beside him and he saw him lying on the ground: “Fr Oggero, Fr Oggero!” No answer. he went and shook him: “What's the matter? Are you ok?” He was already dead. This priest had nothing to fear. He was from the Oratory and already a holy individual, but it says that one can die going for a walk, or eating, sleeping or at any moment. Likewise, not long ago, near Fr. Caglieri, at San Nicolás, the priest died. He was a parish priest who was here, visited the Oratory and I remember him. I speak of these two, but I could talk about many who have died suddenly and in all sorts of ways. So tomorrow when you leave, it could be that one of us does not come back. “Who died?” “Don Bosco”. “Oh, how come?” “He is no longer”. And what could happen to Don Bosco could happen to any one of us. If anyone is not prepared, let him do something about it, adjust matters. When someone has a tranquil conscience he can be cheerful, sleep peacefully and have peaceful dreams because he need not fear God’s judgement. Good night.

Holidays, amusements and fleeing idleness

Friday 31 August 1877

I have some good news to give you. Holidays begin Monday. Do you like this news? I see some do. And I am happy for you to go on holidays. But I can tell you that many have asked if they could have them here. I am also happy about this but I want them to do it willingly. They too will have time for recreation, lots of outings, but our holidays will be a bit more withdrawn and exposed to less harm. The one thing I recommend to either group is to flee from idleness. I know that for some it doesn’t sound very nice going on holidays and working. The term holidays (‘vacanze’ in Italian) does not mean resting up as some think, but applying oneself, attending to things. Thus: vacare studio, attending to study; vacare agriculturae, applying oneself to agriculture. But I want us to understand the terms we use. Fleeing idleness means not hanging around doing nothing,

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120 Ibid., pp. 17-21 (cf MB XIII, 431-433).
it does not mean constantly doing manual work, although there is nothing wrong with that, and in fact I recommend it. I remember that when I used go on holidays, I would take some leather, make some shoes then give them away as gifts. I used to take cloth, canvas, cut out a pair of pants or underwear, sew them together and did what I wanted. Or I got some wood and made chairs, benches. There are still some tables at home that I made. Sometimes I went out to cut hay, or turn over the hay with Virgil or some other book in hand. I am not giving these as examples for you to do, but just to let you see how you can occupy holiday time somehow.

So I recommend that in going home, if you have vineyards, eat the ripest grapes; if you find fish, figs, pairs or apples eat the best ones. I recommend that you enjoy yourself: play bocce, soccer... Everyone will have special amusements at home: playing cards, draughts, chess, etc. Take some good walks; I recommend that a lot. Each of you will have time to read, study a passage that you haven't understood properly.

So, always work and play? No, at lunch eat, also at breakfast, and supper too. Serve at table, clean up afterwards, serve bread too, just don't be idle. Rest in the evening, sleep in a little in the morning, but watch out for the kind of rest we call the *daemonium meridianum*. This means the nap we take after lunch: this is the devil's time. If you let him get you the devil can sing a song of victory. He'll walk around and whistle in your ear. Oh, what terrible conversations come back to me! Then he'll squint at you. Oh, what a terrible picture I recall to mind! These temptations remain there, can't be got rid of and he falls into the devil's hands. So, no going to bed after lunch. If you really need to, sit on a chair and snooze a bit.

Oh what a conversation! Let's put it in just a few words: have great holidays, but never remain unoccupied; if you are not working the devil will be working. Work by day; sleep by night.

There are other things I would like to say to you, but I hope to speak to you on Sunday before you leave. Tomorrow and the day after, the last days you are here with us I want you all to come and see me and I will have something to tell each of you. I would like you also to note that Don Bosco suggests you spend your holidays happily. and it is so you can spend your holidays happily that I give you these warnings and if you heed them, you will have happy holidays. Good night.

**While there are still books to read, I will always say: Read!**

Sunday 7 October 1877

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121 The midday devil. Quote from the Vulgate (Ps. 90:6). The Hebrew term *yâšûd* (devastator), translated into Greek and Latin as *daemonion/daemonium*, means the power of evil that is at work at the height of the day. In patristic and ascetic usage *daemonium meridianum* refers to sensual temptation during the afternoon “siesta”.

Heartfelt greetings to everyone, since this is the first time I have seen you since the holidays. It is true that not everyone has arrived as yet, but I see there is already a good number of us and if the table is prepared we will do justice to it just as we are!

Most of you are here to get ready to enter secondary school or move on to a higher grade or correct something that didn't go too well in the final exam, and this means you all need to study. There are others who at the beginning of the year have to repeat the exam for some subjects studied last year, and these also have to study to complete and repeat these exams. The clerics are mixed up in these various groups too.

And does that mean that others without a specific task can continue their holidays? If there were no more books to read, none in the bookshop or library, or if you had already read them all, then I would say: take a rest. But while there are still books to read, I say: Read! Amongst you there are some going on to study philosophy and I would advise these to read the treatise they have to study this year; then they can read or study a book by Virgil, Horace, Ovid or one of Dante's poems or repeat what they studied in language and literature. One book I would advise everyone to read is the Storia d'Italia (History of Italy), and even if you have read it five times, I would say read it again. Because these days all our history books distort things: the Church's enemies use history books to discredit and besmirch it, speaking about exaggerated or even completely fictitious things. Instead, in this history book, the facts are presented as a whole, briefly yes but it gives you the key to studying the history of Italy in detail and the history of the Church which is so closely bound up with it. I am not trying to boast by saying nice things about my own history book, but it is only because I see that it can be of great use.

I have just heard of the death of Fr Cerruti. Tomorrow we will pray for his soul. This is not the only death notice I have received in these days. I came to know of a famous actor who did not recover and died suddenly on stage, and another who was acting with him, seeing him collapse, also collapsed and died. The audience who had come to watch a comedy went away having seen a cruel tragedy. This is not the only such case. I have others. It is about being ready, so that when death comes, we can respond like Abram did when the Lord called him: Abraham, Abraham! Ecce, Domine, adsum. So, good night.

Cleaning your clothes when you come back from a trip

Sunday 29 October 1877

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123 G. BOSCO, La storia d’Italia raccontata alla gioventù da’ suoi primi abitatori sino ai nostri giorni, Torino, Tipografia Paravia e Compagnia 1855 (the 12th edition was printed in 1876).
124 Abram, Abram! Here I am Lord, I am here. Quote adapted from the Vulgate: “Abraham! Abraham! At ille respondit: Adsum” (Gn 22:1).
125 ASC A000303: Conferenze, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 24-26 (cf MB XIII, 438-440).
The reason I have called everyone together here is to welcome you and tell you some news after your holidays. One of the latest items, just come in from Fr Ronchail, is the opening of a new house at Cannes, not far from Nice. We will soon be opening others in other places and we will continue as far as America. So we will be opening at La Navarre, Tonon, Marseilles, Bordeaux…; then on to Barcelona etc. All along the coast, and then two weeks of continuous voyage by steamer to Rio de Janeiro. But I need you to become good priests and good teachers.

But what I wanted to tell you is that after a journey you always end up with clothes covered in mud or at least dirt. So, although there mightn't have been any mud during these holidays, there will be at least some dirt on your clothes or a splash of mud. You have more or less all been on holidays so you need to think how, after you come back from a trip, to clean your clothes. Now you have an opportunity on this Feast of All Saints to go back over your conscience; to prepare well I thought we would have a triduum with a short sermon each evening. Try to put into practice what you will be told. What I would suggest over these days which the Church dedicates to the souls of the faithful departed, is to try to do something in suffrage for them. Those who can go to Communion, let them do so. You can all pray and pray much, and apply indulgences you have gained to them. This is one of the most beautiful ways of making suffrage for their souls. Do this for them as an act of charity, especially for the souls of your family, and you all have some family members, recently or in the past, who have died. These prayers, this good that you can do for the souls in purgatory, is really good for you too; it is like food which you give to someone who likes it but in reality it nourishes the person who takes it.

So spend these days well, reflect on your conscience, and offer up all the good you do for the souls in purgatory; so when we present ourselves for eternity we will find ourselves well prepared, and the good we have done will preserve us from the flames of purgatory and open to us the gates of heaven. Good night.

“Cleanliness and exactitude”

Wednesday 28 November 1877

Don Bosco welcomes you all back and brings you good news. The Novena to the Immaculate Conception begins tomorrow. Our boys have always had a special devotion to Mary Immaculate. There is a Sodality by that name, begun by Dominic Savio when he was alive, along with the regulations he and his friends wrote for it. Many of you belong to this Sodality (only those who are outstanding in virtue).

I recall how at the beginning of the Novena to the Immaculate Conception, Dominic Savio made the resolution to do it well; he came to me and wanted to make a general confession (he had not previously done so as far as I know); and then he kept a clean conscience throughout the novena so he could go to Holy Communion every day. As the Church earnestly wants all Christians to do, and, I would add, all the boys at the Oratory, they should act well in such a way that they can approach the Eucharistic table every day.

What advice can I give you for this novena as a memento? Two things: Exactitude and cleanliness. They rhyme [in Italian: esatezza e pulitezza] and they go well together. Exact observance of all the rules of the house, all without exception. Exactitude in church and study, eating a sleeping. Exactitude in everything. The other thing is cleanliness, not by polishing our shoes, but keeping our conscience clean. It is also good to keep clean like you should, but if someone feels a little niggle in the heart and looking back over his confessions sees the same things all the time: same lies, same wasting time, same faults, sins and confession, confession and sins; well, let him talk about these things, and if he believes he should, make a general review or general confession or mainly on the points he believes necessary. Someone else will feel a little niggle in the heart and will say: “But I'm afraid I once made a bad confession and I am not in a good state; it is true that I forgot that sin but I did it on purpose”. He too – and there are some of these – should speak to his director about it and put it all to him. And another one might say: “I have been worried for some time, and am afraid my conscience is not in a good state”. Let him confide in his spiritual father and if he wants also make a general confession since this is just the right time for that. And the same can be said for everyone who is aware that his confessions lack something by way of sorrow or resolution or preparation.

So remember always, but especially for this novena: exactitude and cleanliness. Be exact in everything and keep your conscience clean so you can go to Holy Communion. Just like I recall Dominic Savio doing in such an exemplary way during his last Novena to the Immaculate Conception, making himself a worthy imitator of St Aloysius; worthy of a boy who at seven and a half years of age at his first Communion, resolved: death, but not sin. And if we do this, Mary Immaculate will do a favour for all of us that will be of most advantage to our soul. Good night.

How to make the retreat

Sunday 2 June 1878

A word after about six months! See how long it is since I have given you a good

127 Ibid., pp. 31-35 (cf MB XIII, 752-754).
night. But if I didn't come in person, I was mentally here with you all the time. While I was in Rome and while I was on my way to Nice or San Pier d’Arena, I was thinking of you at Mass in the mornings, and in the evenings my thoughts went irresistibly back to you. But I have been back for a while now and I hope I will not be going away again too soon. We are here for your spiritual and also temporal advantage.

What I have come tell you however is that tomorrow evening we will begin the students' retreat, and then immediately afterwards for the working boys. Everything I usually recommend for the retreats can be put in a word: pay attention and put into practice what you hear in the sermons or read. How do we put it into practice? In all the sermons, the readings, there is always something for us: it may be our examination of conscience was not well done or we have been lacking in sorrow or good resolutions; or We may have forgotten the confessor's advice etc. We can think about how things were, are, will be; whether there is something in our past actions to be fixed up; or if we are on the right road that Jesus Christ points out to us, and what we need to do in future.

This is the best time to think of your vocation, because in solitude Deus loquitur, and the retreat days are for drawing back and being alone. The trade and working boys too need to think of their vocation, because some need to think whether God wants them to stay here and work in the Congregation and be part of it or if they are being called to something quite different. Everyone needs to take a pause for some days from the usual occupations to apply themselves exclusively to matters of their soul.

Consider that we do not receive great graces so often; and being able to make a retreat is a great grace. How many were here last year listening to these same words and now they have passed on to the next life. I believe everyone made the retreat well last year, but if they hadn't, would they still have had time? And who can promise us that we can still make the retreat here another year? I cannot assure you of that. Only God can tell us that, and in fact he says the contrary: Estote parati, quia qua hora non putatis filius hominis veniet; and he shows us through experience that we can also die young. If this is how things are, let us always be ready, so whenever death comes we can present ourselves tranquilly before the gates of heaven.

So now that we have the opportunity, let's make this retreat well. Since the Lord tells us: Ante orationem praepara animam tuam, so I tell you: before the retreat, prepare your soul; that is, before starting have the intention of drawing profit from it.

And given that I think of you day and night, during these days of retreat I am consecrated completely to your spiritual advantage. In my Mass I will always pray especially for this, that the retreat goes well – and what I say on my own behalf I say on behalf of all those with me and those coming especially for this occasion. These evenings I hope to speak again with you and so I don't keep you too long let's conclude

128 God speaks in solitude. Reference to Hosea 2:14: “I am going to lure her and lead her out into the wilderness”.
129 Stand ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Lk 12:40).
130 Prepare yourself before making a vow (Si 18:23).
these words with this beautiful conclusion: being able to make a retreat is a great grace which we don't always have; therefore we must make it well; to make it well we must put into practice what we hear in the sermons and readings; and since all favours come from heaven, I for my part and you for yours, let us ask God that we can gain the best result possible for our souls. Good night.

Discerning and deciding on our vocation

Tuesday 18 June 1878

For all the Solemnities of Our Lady that have been or are to come, Feast of the Consolation, St Aloysius and St John, St Peter and others before the end of the year, one thing that would be of great importance is to think about your vocation. Some will have already thought about it and are waiting some weeks, some days to make a final decision. That is why every year I usually offer some time for someone who wants to talk about this and this year I would be happy if the boys from 5th and 4th Year and others too who want to talk about their vocation, would come to my room any time after Vespers.

But we can also say something in general now. When we become aware that we are called to the ecclesiastical state, it is also of major importance to see whether it is better to become a secular priest or join some congregation. Whoever wants to embrace the ecclesiastical state must have a right and holy intention: that is, if he wants to save his soul. And could he not also support his family? It is a right and just thing to help our family; so you can be businessmen, shoemakers or whatever you want and then help your family and others with what you like from your earnings. But a priest no, he can give them alms like to anyone else, if they should find themselves at that point, but no more than that. And then you hear the usual objection: “But many priests, this one, that other one have done this, bought that; they have become wealthy, made their families wealthy etc.”. So have they all done badly? I do not want to judge anyone, I only note what the Divine Saviour says and the holy Church. Jesus Christ says it explicitly: whoever wants to be God's minister should not be concerned about temporal affairs; indeed not only should he not be concerned, but non implicet se, Scripture says precisely, not get involved, not get mixed up in: non implicet se in negotiis. The words are clear. Saint Ambrose or Saint Gregory says that whatever the priest has is the patrimony of the poor: not his, you see; it belongs to the poor. His labours are for God, the means are God's and also the earnings must be God's and also belong to the poor.

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132 Do not get caught up in business. Quote adapted from the Vulgate: “Nemo militans implicat se negotiis saecularibus” (2 Tim 2:4): In the army no soldier gets mixed up in civilian life.
The priest must only be interested in saving souls; that means a holy purpose.

What I can also tell you is that someone who does not feel called to the ecclesiastical state should not even think about becoming a priest, and would get nothing good out of it. Whoever does not feel he can preserve the virtue of chastity is not made for the priesthood, and should turn to something else, since as a priest he would only do evil to himself and others. I tell you this so you can have time to think about it and do things well. Good night.
6. Spiritual teaching in the recounting of his dreams

When he was instructing his boys “Don Bosco did not venture into definitions, schemes, theoretical systems”, but “preferred story, narration”. He is skilled at narration and dramatisation. He used narration in a masterly way in his writings and discourses. He created evocative settings, built up intricate and lively dialogue, made good use of metaphors, symbols and all kinds of images. Sensitive to the supernatural and the extraordinary, uncommonly gifted, he also knew how to tell dreams well, and these were especially adapted to impressing his messages about growing up on the hearts and minds of his boys. The dreams make interesting material for discovering the depth and range of features of Don Bosco's spiritual language and his way of thinking, also because the content was fully “consistent with other forms of expressing and communicating his thinking – preaching, conferences, Good Nights, writings – if anything, enhancing their emotional and existential implications”.

We only offer some of them here, to give an idea of his unmistakable style of communication. In this case too we draw from original testimonies directly, with notes indicating where they were written up in the Biographical Memoirs [but note that references are always given to the complete Italian edition].

The snake and the Hail Mary

Wednesday 20 August 1862

I would like tell you a dream I had a few nights ago (it would have been the night of the Feast of the Assumption). I dreamt that I found myself with all the boys at Castelnuovo d'Asti at my brother's house. While everyone was out playing, one came up to me (I don't know who), and called me to go with him. He led me to the field near the playground, and pointed to a snake lying there in the grass, about 7 to 8 metres long. It was a very big one. Horrified at the sight, I wanted to run away.

“No, no”, the man said, “Don't run away. Come here and see”.

“What?”, I gasped, “Don't you realise that monster could spring on me and gobble me up in no time?”

“Don't be afraid, no harm will come to you. Come with me”.

“Nothing doing; I'm not crazy”.

“Well then”, he continued, “stay there”. Then he went and fetched a rope and brought
it to me there where I was, and said:

“Take this rope by one end and hold it tightly in both hands, and I will take the other and go on the other side and we will dangle it over the snake”.

“And then?”

“And then we’ll snap it across its back”.

“Ah! No, for Heaven’s sake! The snake will leap up and tear us to pieces”.

“No, no; let me do it”.

“There, there! I have no intention of risking my life for a thrill like this”.

Again I tried to run away. Again he insisted that I not be afraid, that no harm would come my way. I agreed to his plan and stayed put. Meanwhile he went round to the other side, we stretched the rope then snapped it across the snake’s back. The snake leaped up and struck at the rope, but instead it got ensnared in the noose. Then the man shouted:

“Hold it tight, hold it tight and don’t let it escape from the noose”.

And he ran to a pear tree nearby and tied the rope to it. Then he came to me and tied my end to the iron grating of a window in the house. The snake kept furiously struggling to free itself, writhing, thrashing and flailing about. In its fury it tore itself to pieces, scattering its flesh over the area, till it was slashed to a mere skeleton.

When the snake was dead the man untied the rope, coiled it up and then said:

“Now watch! He dropped it into a box and closed it, then opened it again. We were amazed. The rope was no longer coiled up, but arranged in the shape of a Hail Mary.

“How did that happen?” I asked. “The rope was thrown into that box and now it looks so orderly”.

“Well”, he said: “the snake is a symbol of the devil and the rope is the Hail Mary, or rather the rosary which is a succession of Hail Marys with which we can destroy all of hell’s demons”.

Up to here is the first part of the dream. There is another part which is even more curious and interesting for everyone. But it is already late so we will put it off until tomorrow evening. Meanwhile let’s keep in mind what that man said about the Hail Mary: let’s say it devoutly when any temptation comes, assured that we will always be victorious. Good night.

Thursday 21 August 1862

Given that you have been pestering me I will tell the second part of the dream, and even if not all of it, at least what I can tell you about. But I must place two conditions first. The first is that nobody should write or talk about it outside: you can talk about it amongst yourselves, laugh, do what you want, but just amongst yourselves.

Now while we were talking about the rope, the snake and what they meant, I turned around and saw some boys who were picking up pieces of snake flesh and eating them. I immediately cried out:

“What are you doing? Are you mad? Don’t you know that meat is poisonous and will do you harm?”
“No, no”, they said, “it's really good”.
And yet no sooner had they eaten it than they fell to the ground, swelled up and then hardened like stone. I was helpless, shouting at one, then another; I even slapped one, punched another, trying to stop them eating, but in vain. As soon as one fell to the ground, another would start eating.
So I called the clerics to help me and told them to use whatever means they could to stop any more eating, but to no avail.[Questioned afterwards privately about the clerics, he answered that in fact some of the clerics began eating and collapsed like the others]. I was beside myself, seeing such a huge number of boys lying on the ground. I turned to the man and said:
“These boys know that this meat will kill them, yet they eat it. Why?” He answered:
“You know that carnalis homo non percipit quae Dei sunt.”
“But isn't there some way of saving these boys?”
“Yes, there is”.
“What is it?”
“Only a hammer and an anvil”.
“We need to use them on these boys”.
“You mean put them on the anvil and hit them with the hammer?”
Then the man explained, saying:
“Look, the hammer symbolises Confession and the anvil is holy Communion. We need to use these two means”.
I set to work and found this helpful, but not for everyone. many came back to life and recovered, but for some it didn't work. These were the ones who hadn't made good Confessions.

Faith, temperance, idleness

Sunday 15 June 1876, Corpus Christi

I seemed to find myself in the midst of the courtyard heading towards the exit surrounded by my boys, some greeting me, others telling me something, as usual. Then from the trade school boys' side I heard: “Help! Help!”; and I saw them running full pelt from there, many going through the gate at the back of the courtyard. Then the students too began shouting out, thronging around me. I wanted to go and see what had so scared my boys but they kept telling me not come any further forward, that there was a monster that would devour me, and they held me fast in their midst.

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136 The sensual person does not understand the things of God. Quotation broadly from the Vulgate: “Animalis autem homo non percipit ea quae sunt Spiritus Dei” (1 Co 2:14).
137 ASC A0000301: Conferenze e sogni, Quad. I, 1876, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 1-9 (cf MB XII, 349-356).
While I was wondering what to do, behold this awful monster appeared and came right up to us. That animal or devil or whatever it was, was so ugly, disgusting, terrible, enormous that there wasn't anything else like it on earth. It was something like a bear, but with a small rump compared with its other parts; it had enormous shoulders and a huge stomach, with an enormous head and grotesquely disproportionate mouth with two large tusks like swords sticking out.

All the boys, terrified as they were, crowded around me for advice; but I was also afraid and not a little embarrassed. I told them all to stay together under the porticoes and kneel down and pray to the Blessed Virgin. We were all on our knees quickly, praying with more than the usual fervour to Mary Help of Christians, asking her to free us from the monster, who meanwhile was slowly advancing towards us as if it was going to attack us.

We were there for some minutes when, I don't know how, but we all found ourselves in the clerics' dining hall which had recently been extended and seemed all lit up. And in the middle we could see Mary, similar to the statue above the porticoes or like the one on the cupola, or the church, I can't remember; however, there were rays of light coming from it, and it was surrounded by the Saints and the Blessed so that the dining hall looked like Heaven itself. Wonder replaced fear, and we were all attentive to and focused on Mary who seemed to want to say something to us; she reassured us: “Do not fear, have faith; my Divine Son is only testing you”.

I then carefully noted those who were around the Virgin and I recognised Fr Alasonatti, Fr Ruffino and Bro Michael of the Christian Schools, my brother, and others who used belong to the Congregation but were now in Heaven. Then one of them said in a loud voice: “Sursum corda”. We were already standing and we did not know what to say. And then the same voice said, but louder: “Sursum corda”; and since we were already standing we wanted to see how things were going to finish. I was about to ask for an explanation when Our lady began to speak, her voice wonderfully strong: “But you, as a priest, should understand sursum corda: when you celebrate Mass and say: Sursum corda, what are you saying? Do you mean stand up, or do you mean raise your minds and hearts to God?”.

So then I said to my boys: “As best as we possibly can, let's make an act of love and repentance before God”. And all kneeling again, we began quietly praying. A moment later again we heard “Sursum corda”, and we all stood up. Then we heard Mary singing St Paul's hymn with such harmony: “Sumite scutum fidei”, so clear, full and melodious that we were in ecstasy because in just the one voice we could hear all the notes from the lowest to the highest; it sounded like a choir of a hundred voices all united in one voice.

While we were there in ecstasy listening to that concert, we all found ourselves raised off the ground by some supernatural force, one holding onto a spike, another to a

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138 We stood up.
139 Take up the shield of faith (Eph 6:15).
frame. I was holding on to a window frame, and was amazed we had not fallen to the floor where I could see countless beasts of all kinds and all of them wild running around the dining hall eyeing us suspiciously, and it seemed that they might leap on us at any moment, but had not yet done so.

While we were listening to that heavenly singing, many graceful boys came down from around Mary; they had wings, and approaching us they placed a shield on everyone's heart. It had a steel centre, a ring of silver near the steel centre, another on the outside of diamonds then one of gold. When we all had a shield and the singing had finished, then we heard this voice: “Ad pugnam”, 140 we saw the animals stir, hurl leaden balls, arrows at us, but they either did not reach us or hit our shields; after a long battle we were left unscathed. Then we heard Mary say: “Haec est victoria vestra, fides vestra”; 141 and we found ourselves all on the ground, the animals had gone.

Immediately afterwards were heard an agonising cry in the courtyard: they were our boys that seemed to have been torn apart by those wild animals. I wanted to leave the dining hall to see if I could in some way bring them relief. They did not want me to leave, afraid that something terrible would happen to me. I took no notice of their fear and said to them “I want to go and see what has happened, even if I should die with them”. I went out and saw a terrible sight: all the animals were pursuing our boys, injuring them, tearing them apart. But the animal that was creating the most frightful scene of all was the one that had first appeared: he was piercing the boys on both sides of their chest, in their stomach, in the heart, right and left with those two big tusks, and many fell to the ground, some dead, some wounded. When I appeared I ran at the monster, but he could not hurt me or the others who had followed me out, because our shield defended us.

I looked carefully at the monster's two swords, and what a mess they were making of my boys. On the point of one of them I read Otium, and on the other, Gula. Then I understood, but found it hard to explain why my boys were sinning through idleness, or gluttony, because it seemed to me they had been working or studying when and where they should be, and they were not wasting time in recreation; and regarding gluttony, they had not seemed intemperate to me.

I went back to the dining hall very sad, and I asked someone who was with Mary to explain it to me, and he answered: “Ah my good friend, you are still a novice in these things, and you think you have had lots of experience. Know that by idleness we mean not only not working or keeping busy or not just time spent amusing oneself in recreation, but we also mean time left for fantasy to roam free, leading to harmful thoughts; odd moments not properly occupied and especially in church. As for gluttony, you need to know that we can sin by lack of temperance even with just water and when we eat and drink more than we need; that is always intemperance. If you can get your

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140 Let's fight!
141 This is your victory, your faith. Quote along the lines of the Vulgate: “Haec est victoria quae vincit mundum, fides vestra” (1 Jn 5:4).
boys to be temperate in these little things, they will always overcome the devil; and with temperance comes humility, chastity and the other virtues. I they are always busy doing their duties, they will never fall into the devil’s temptations and will live and die as holy Christians”.

I thanked him for such a beautiful instruction and went up to Brother Michael and the others I knew, to find out if what I had seen and done was real or just a dream. But while I was trying to shake their hand, I seemed to be quite beyond myself. Seeing my amazement one of them spoke to me: “You should know, and you have studied this, that we are pure spirits and to be seen by mortals we have to take on our former likeness until the final resurrection when we will get our bodies back but with all the gifts of immortality”. Then I wanted to get up close to Mary who seemed to want to say something to me, but when I found myself almost up close, I heard a noise from outside me and awoke.

Lanzo dream, or the dream of the Salesian garden

Friday 22 December 1876

A plain like a perfectly calm sea, but made of shining crystal. The eye gets lost over the vast surface.

So many plants, grasses, flowers, vineyards, little woods, all kinds of flowers covering the surface. Wonderful lanes, magnificent buildings were an extra adornment. Everything was like on earth, but beautiful, unutterably so.

Instrumental music that sounded like thousands of instruments, each with a different sound, higher or lower, but all in perfect harmony. The same can be said for the voices. A huge number of people could be seen enjoying listening and taking part in singing and playing. The more one listened the more the desire grew to listen and everyone was yearning to hear more.

At a certain point all the music stopped and then many of the listeners turned to me. I was not on that marvellous plain, but nearby on a small hillock. I knew many of them. The ones who came closest were Dominic Savio, Fr Alasonatti, Fr Giulitto of whom I had thought much during the day. They were close enough to touch my hand. I was

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142 From an original manuscript of Don Bosco’s published in C. ROMERO, I sogni di Don Bosco. Edizione critica. Presentazione di P. Stella, Leumann (Torino), Elle Di Ci 1978, pp. 40-44. A much treasured dream in the Salesian tradition. The saint writes simply, not in a stilted way; while G.B. Lemoyne’s version (MB XII, 586-595) is more elaborate, written up after the oral version in the Good Night of 22 December 1876.

143 Vittorio Alasonatti (1812-1865); Cesare Chiala (1837-1876); Giuseppe Giulitto (1853-1876). Cf G. B. FRANCESIA, D. Vittorio Alasonatti primo prefetto della Pia Società Salesiana. Cenni biografici, S. Benigno Canavese, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1893; G. BONETTI, Un fiore salesiano o breve biografia di D. Giuseppe Giulitto, Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1878; the biographical outline

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trembling and did not dare speak. The others looked at me with smiling faces as if they had wanted to say something, but nobody said a word.

Dominic Savio was dressed thus: a white tunic studded with diamonds covered him; a red sash edged in gold encircled his hips. His face was ruddy, shining, as beautiful as an angel's. In one hand he held a garland of flowers as if to give it away. I noticed a lily, rose, violet, sunflower, perennials, a stalk of wheat, gentian and others, but beautifully interwoven and of indescribable beauty.

With his free hand Savio made a sign for me to listen and began to speak like this:

“I am afraid of where I am and what I do not know; and I do not know what all this is or who I see”.

“The earth you are on now, if cultivated, will become a floor of precious stones in Heaven. These are the Lord's servants who had faith in him and now enjoy the fruits of their labour”.

“But why are you alone speaking and not the others?”

“Because I am the one who has been here longest”.

“What is this white tunic you are wearing?”

Savio went quiet and the others sang as a chorus: *Dealbaverunt stolas in sanguine Agni, ideo sunt ante tronum Dei.*

“Why this sash?”

Fr Alasonatti, Fr. Chiala and others answered, singing: *Habuerunt lumbos praecinctos, virgines enim sunt, ipsi sequuntur agnum quocumque ierit.*

“Is this garden the Heaven that you are enjoying?”

“Not at all. It is nothing other than material beauty; any mortal who saw supernatural light would fall dead. Would you like to see a small ray of supernatural light? Close your eyes then quickly open them again”.

As soon as I opened my eyes I saw a light from which a tiny ray like lightning flashed towards me, but so bright I cried out involuntarily as if my eyes had been pierced. A little later I opened my eyes and everything was as before. …

“But tell me why this visit of yours, and first of all tell me if I am awake or dreaming”.

“Neither one nor the other. You are about to receive a strict command from the Lord

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144 They have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, and that is why they stand before God's throne. Rough quote from the Vulgate: “Hi sunt, qui […] laverunt stolas suas, et dealbaverunt eas in sanguine Agni. Rev 7:14-15).

145 They have girded their loins, since they are virgins and follow the Lamb wherever he goes. Rough and extended quote from the Vulgate: “Amicti stolis albis” (Rv 7, 9); “[…] virgines enim sunt. Hi sequuntur Agnum quocumque ierit (Rv 14, 4).
and woe to you if you do not put it into practice. Some things refer to the past, others the present, and not a few to the future. Regarding the past, it is lack of faith, being too timid. Look how many souls the Oratories have brought to Heaven and we can see multitudes of them. There would have been a hundred thousand more had you had the faith that the minister of the King of kings should have”.

“But this frightens me too much: tell me something of the present”.

“For the present you have here a bouquet of flowers; take it, and give it as a gift to your sons of any age and condition, and you will ensure the Kingdom of Heaven for them”.

“But I don't understand what this means”.

“I will give you a hint: the rose is charity; the violet humility; the lily is chastity; the sunflower obedience; the perennials are for perseverance; the ivy, mortification; the stalk of wheat is Holy Communion; the gentian is penance. Each of these things must be duly and fully explained, and you will give your Salesians a finite treasure that will lead them to an infinite reward”.

“Tell me something for the future”.

“I will not say more but, but the merciful God alone knows it and says this: Next year you will lose six and then another two people very dear to you; but they must be transplanted into a place of delight, the paradise of the Eternal One.

A bright dawn of glory will come forth from the Congregation to the four corners of the earth. Battles and triumphs there will be, but the soldiers will increase by many unless the leaders allow the chariot on which the Lord is seated to go off course. The time is near when good and bad alike will be astonished by the marvels that will quickly occur, but it is all mercy and everyone will be consoled”.

“What is the actual state of my boys?”

“You have to guide the children of God whom he entrusted to you and for which in time you will have to render account. Take these three sheets of papers and on each you will see what is needed”.

I took the sheets and on each of them was written as follows: Note those who are currently on the right path to heaven. And I saw many names I knew and many which in fact I did not know. The second was entitled: Vulnerati and it was a large number also; but not like the first. On the third one it said this: Lassati sumus in via iniquitatis.

“You can see the names of the first two and they can be seen by the spirits. But not those of the third group. Those in Heaven, although pure spirits, would have to put up with an unbearable stench just seeing them. If you want to know the names and see them turn the page over”.

I turned the page and saw, not the names, but individuals, doing the most abhorrent

146 Wounded.
147 We left no path of lawlessness or ruin unexplored. Quote from the Vulgate (Ws 5:7).
things. There was a voice like thunder that deafened me: *Execrables viae eorum coram Deo et coram omnibus viventibus.*

And just then with that noise, I awoke. I looked up, but everything had become dark, I could not see anyone and only then I realised I was in bed, but so battered and so worn out by that dream that I could neither rest, nor think of anything else but the dream, which still torments me day and night.

**The lambs, the storm and the healing ointment**

Thursday 24 October 1878

I am happy to see my army of soldiers again *contra diabolum*. Although in Latin, even Cottini can understand it! And I have so many things to tell you, this being the first time I am speaking to you after the holidays, but for now I only want to tell you a dream. You know that we dream when we are asleep and that we don't have to put much faith in them; but if it is not wrong not to believe, sometimes there is nothing wrong either with believing them and they can also instruct us, like this one for example.

I was at Lanzo for the first of the retreats and I was sleeping, as I said, when I had this dream. I found myself in a place and did not know where it was, but I was close to a town where there was a garden and near this garden was a very large meadow. I was in the company of some friends who invited me to come into the garden. I came in and saw a huge number of lambs gambolling, running, and prancing around like they do. Then a gate opened onto the field and the lambs scampered out to graze. But many did not want to go out. They stayed in the garden and went around nibbling some grass here and there and grazed that way, though there was not as much grass there as there was outside where the larger group had gone.

“I want to see what the lambs outside are doing”. We went out and we saw them peacefully grazing; and then, almost immediately, the sky darkened, there was lightning and thunder and a storm was brewing. “What will happen to these lambs if they are caught in the storm?” I was saying; “let's bring them in and save them”. And I started calling them. Me on one side, my companions on the other, we tried shepherding them back into the garden, but they did not want to know about it. We chased them here we chased them there; ah but they had faster legs than us. Then it began to spit, then rain but I couldn't get them in. One or two though came into the garden, but all the others, and there was a lot of them, stayed out in the meadow. “Well, if they don't want to come, bad luck for them; meanwhile, we'll go back in”. And we went back into the

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148 Abominable behaviour before God and all living beings.
garden.

There was a fountain there on which were written in red letters: Fons signatus, sealed fountain. It was covered. And then it opened, the water shot up, and made a rainbow, but shaped like this arch. We and the lambs in the garden with us got under it and the rain and hail couldn't reach us. “But what is this?” I was asking my friends; “and what about those poor lambs outside?”

“You will see”, they answered. “Look at the foreheads of these lambs. What do you see?” I looked and on the forehead of each lamb was written the name of a boy at the Oratory.

“What is this?”
“You will see, you will see”.

Meanwhile I couldn't hold back any longer and wanted to run out and see what the poor lambs left outside were doing.

“I will pick up the ones that were killed and send them straight to the Oratory”, I was thinking. I got wet as well and I saw those poor little lambs collapsed on the ground struggling to limp into the garden but they couldn't walk. I opened the gate but all their efforts were useless. The rain and hail had so battered them and they were a pitiful sight as it continued to do so. One was hit on the head, another on the face, another on the ears, another the legs, others elsewhere. The storm had ceased meanwhile.

“Look”, those near me said, “at the foreheads of these lambs”. I looked and on the forehead of each lamb was written the name of a boy at the Oratory.

“But”, I said, “I know the boy by this name and to me he seems like a little lamb”. “You will see, you will see”.

Then a golden jar with a silver cover was presented to me, and I was told: “Dip your hands into this ointment and touch the lambs' injuries with your hand. They will recover”. I began calling them:

“Baa! Baa!”

Nothing. Nothing happened. I tried approaching one and it ran away.

“It doesn't want to, so bad luck for him!” I went to another and it ran away. And this useless game went on.

I finally reached one whose eyes were hanging out of its sockets, so badly had it been struck, poor thing. I touched it with my hand and it recovered and went into the garden. Many others were no longer afraid and allowed themselves to be touched and healed, and went into the garden. But there were still many left, mostly the worst off, and it was impossible to approach them.

“If they don't want to be healed, then that's their problem; but I don't know what I can do to get them back into the garden”.

“Let them go”, one of the friends with me said, “they will come, they will come”. “We will see”.

Sg 4:12: the two images, the enclosed garden and the sealed fountain that the Scriptures refer to the bride in the Song of Songs; Christian tradition attributes to the Virgin Mary.
I put the jar back where it was before and returned to the garden. It had all changed, and at the entrance I read: *Oratory*. As soon as I went in, the lambs who did not want to come entered by sneaking in and were playing hide and seek; not even then could I approach any of them. There were a few of them unwilling to be given the ointment which then turned into poison for them and instead of healing them made their injuries worse.

“Look, do you see that standard?”

“Yes, I see it. I was reading this word in huge letters: *Holidays*."

“So, this is the result of the holidays”, one who was with me explained, because I was already beside myself with grief. “Your boys go out to pasture with good will, but then come the storms, the temptations; then the rain which is the devil’s assaults; then comes the hail when they fall into sin. Some go to confession and are healed, but others either don't make a good confession or don't go at all. Keep it in mind and never tire of telling your boys that holidays are like a devastating storm for their souls”.

I was looking at the lambs and I saw terrible injuries on some; I was looking for a way to heal them when, as I said, I was sleeping and Fr Scappini made a noise in the room next to me while getting up and I awoke.

This is the dream, and although just a dream, just the same it has a meaning that will not do harm to anyone who puts his faith in it. And I can tell you that I noted some names amongst the lambs in the dream and comparing these with the boys, I saw that these behave just like it happened in the dream. However things are, during this novena for All Saints we should respond to God's loving kindness. He wants to show us mercy and through a good confession purge the wounds on our conscience. We then should all agree to fight the devil and with God's help we will be victorious and receive the crown of victory in Heaven.
PART 2

INDICATIONS FOR A CONSISTENT, ACTIVE CHRISTIAN LIFE

This second part is made up of five sections:

1. Our God is loving and merciful (pp. 00-00).
2. The Christian's spiritual resources (pp. 00-00).
3. “Maria Auxilium Christianorum” (pp. 00-00).
4. United we are stronger: “Vis unita fortior” (pp. 00-00).
5. Spiritual counsels for friends, Cooperators and benefactors (pp. 00-00).
1. Our God is loving and merciful

At the heart of Don Bosco's spirituality is the thought of God, a merciful and provident Father, his saving activity reaching out in tender love to every human being. He unceasingly invites man to respond to his love and enter into communion with him. It is not only an appeal to conversion, but an invitation to unconditional surrender of self so that God may reign in our heart and sanctify it. Through the religious assistance he offered at the Refuge for wayward girls and his personal experience with boys at risk, Don Bosco discovered the wonders of divine grace in sincerely penitent hearts. At the invitation of the Marchioness Barolo, in 1847 he wrote up the Exercise of Devotion to God's Mercy, from which we draw two heartfelt meditations.

God's infinite mercy

All the earth, Scripture tells us, is filled with divine mercy, misericordia Domini plena est omnis terra. God's benefits are evident wherever our gaze should fall. The air we breathe, the sun that gives us light, the elements that sustain us, fire, water that serves for so many uses, the animals which are there for our comfort, whatever is beautiful to the eye, precious or magnificent everywhere, demonstrates divine goodness. How many accidents a man might meet with by day, by night, eating, drinking, on the road, at work and in anything else he does, but God has preserved us until now.

And that is what we see in temporal matters; so what can we say about what God is doing for us in spiritual ones? The intellect, by which man knows the truth, reasons by which he can distinguish good from evil, his will with which he follows the way of virtue and gains merit in the Lord's sight, his memory, the faculty of speech, reason, knowledge, in other words the thinking principle, the soul: they are all gifts the Lord has given us and through his everyday kindness and providence preserves for us. Churches, Sacraments, all other spiritual comforts make this divine mercy for man's benefit so much the more evident.

The Lord also assures us that these benefits are shared by just and sinner alike. “He causes his sun to shine on bad men as well as good and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike”. Since the sinner forfeits many of these gifts by sinning, it would seem that the Lord goes to seek him out and gives him more, restores what he has lost through sin. We see how he has one of his holy prophets say: “If the sinful man leaves his evil ways and returns to his Lord, he will have compassion on him”. Come to me, he says elsewhere, and I will give you back what you have lost while you were far from me, I will give you not only what you do not have, but what you did not even consider.

Our Saviour does the same when in the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation he had particular regard for the just souls who were waiting so long for him; and he himself assures us that he did not take on human flesh and do all that we read in the Gospel for

152 Ps 33:5.
153 Cf Mt 5:45.
154 Cf Is 55:7.
155 Cf Ez 18:32.
the just, but for sinners, *non veni vocare justos sed peccatores*,\(^{156}\) and elsewhere: I came to save what was lost: *veni salvum facere quod perierat*.\(^{157}\) Almost as if to say: by his sinfulness the sinner despises and rejects all the favours of divine goodness and is worthy only of eternal death; I came to give him the hope of life and give him back all he has lost: *veni salvum facere quod perierat*. Besides, after sin, all of creation rebels against the sinner. St Thomas says that by nature and instinct fire, earth, water, air tend to punish the sinner to vindicate the injury done to their Creator. *Omnis creatura excandescit adversus inustos*.\(^{158}\) Only God takes pity. While all the elements want to exterminate sinful man from the face of the earth, not only does he restrain them, but he sees that they continue to serve man almost, as Holy Scripture puts it, glossing over the view he has of people's sins so they may repent. *Dissimulans peccata hominin propert paenitentiam*.\(^{159}\) He continues to lavish his gifts on everyone without distinction; he looks regretfully on the sinner who stands far apart from him and encourages him in a thousand ways, wanting to show him mercy.

But who would believe it? Despite such moving kindness from our God, many live as if they are insensitive to the mess their lives are in, not heeding the fact that the time for mercy might well come to an end and that they will have to submit to his rigorous justice. It happens unfortunately that the sinner who is far from his God no longer thinks of him, and while God seeks him out to show him mercy it would seem that the sinner is challenging him, annoying him and moving him to punish him. Let us ponder this divine goodness well, and how it is renewed each day on our behalf! Let us no longer be ungrateful; and if sin should ever distance us from God, let us detest it in the most heartfelt way and return to him as soon as possible. Since the sinner, after falling, does not usually think about returning to his Lord, let us today, especially enlightened as we are by God, prostrate ourselves before the throne of divine mercy and call on him to send his divine grace down on the obstinate sinner, to enlighten him so that he may return. Deploring the unhappy state of all sinners, let us detest our own sins and let us speak to God this way: My Lord, I know that today I should be in Hell but, through your mercy, you have given me this day to throw myself at your feet and know that you wish to lavish mercy on me and forgive me so long as I repent of the insults I have given you.

Yes, my God, I thank you for all the benefits you have given me and continue to give me each day; in the past I ignored these, but now I love you with all my heart, and I repent for having offended you; I am more sorry for having offended you than I am for any harm I might have incurred; enlighten me, o infinite goodness, and help me to understand my terrible ingratitude; ah, that I may never offend you again! O my Jesus, pardon me and see that from today onwards I may love you alone, and live only for you who died for me. This grace that I ask for myself, I also ask for all sinners that they may know your great goodness through the benefits you give them, and may leave the unhappy state they find themselves in and return to taste the delights of the loving Father that you are. I ask this grace through the infinite merits of your divine Son and our Saviour Jesus Christ. May you, loving Mother of mercies, kindness and comfort of sinners, see that this is granted me since there has never been a grace that you have asked of God that has not been granted.

\(^{156}\) Lk 5:32.

\(^{157}\) Lc 19:10.

\(^{158}\) All creatures rail against the unjust; a reference to the Vulgate: "Creatura enim tibi Factori deserviens, exardescit in tormentum adversus iniustos (Ws 16:24): For creation, in obedience to you its Maker, exerts itself to punish the wicked.

\(^{159}\) You overlook men's sins so that they can repent (Ws 11:23).
Although there are countless reasons that should move us to thank God, it would seem that the loving kindness with which he welcomes the sinner merits special thanks, and this will help him present himself with greater confidence to his offended Lord, who lovingly calls out to him.

The princes of this earth do not always decide to listen to their rebellious subjects who ask their forgiveness; unless they show very keen signs of repentance, they must pay with their lives. God does not do that with us. He assures us that he will not turn his face away from us if we should return to him; no, because it is he himself who invites us and promises us a ready and loving acceptance. *Revertere ad me et suscipiam te*: Return to me, sinner, and I will welcome you (Jer 3, 1). *Convertimini ad me, et convertar ad vos, ait Dominus*: Return to me and I will return to you (Zc 1:3). With what love, with what tenderness God embraces the sinner who comes back to him! Let us recall again the earlier mentioned parable of the lost sheep. The good shepherd finds it, puts it around his shoulders, carries it home and calls his friends to rejoice with him, crying out: rejoice with me for I have found the sheep that was lost. *Congratulamini mihi quia inveni ovem quae perierat.* This is what the Redeemer meant mostly by the parable of the prodigal son, saying that he is the father who runs to meet the lost son on his return; he embraces him before he has a chance to speak, kisses him tenderly, almost dies of tenderness for the consolation he experiences (Lk 15:11-32).

One thing that might hold sinners back from returning is that God will remember the offences they have caused; this happens amongst men who forget offences for a while but the smallest incident can remind them again. It is not so with the Lord; he came to say that if the sinner repents he would like to overlook his sins as if he had never committed them; listen to his exact words: if the wicked man does penance he will have forgiveness and I will forget all his iniquities: *si impius egerit paenitentiam vita vivet; omnium iniquitatum ejus non recordabor.* And again he says (and it would seem that divine mercy could not go this far): *venite et arguite me, dicit Dominus: si fuerint peccata vestra ut coccinum, quasi nix dealbabuntur* (Is 1, 18). He wants to say, come, sinners, and try me out; even though your soul is black from a thousand iniquities, if I do not forgive you, *arguite me*, take me and treat me as unfaithful. God cannot overlook the contrite and humble of heart; we glory in the Lord when he exercises mercy and forgiveness towards sinners: *exaltabitur parcens vobis* (Is 30, 18); and what must console the sinner most is that he will not need to lament much: at the first tear, at the first words of “I repent”, the Lord is immediately moved to mercy, *statim ut audierit,* white as snow.

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161 Quotation adapted from the Vulgate: “Revertere ad me, dicit Dominus, et ego suscipiam te” (Jer 3:1c): You would come back to me? It is Yahweh who speaks.
162 Rejoice with me. I have found my sheep that was lost (Lk 15:6).
163 The evil-doer who is penitent, lives; none of his misdeeds will be remembered. Quotation adapted from the Vulgate in reduced form: “Si autem impius egerit poenitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis quaerat, et custodierit omnia praecepta mea, et fecerit judicium et justitiam, vita vivet, et non morietur. Omnium iniquitatum ejus quas operatus est, non recordabor” (Ez 18:21-22): But if the wicked man renounces all the sins he has committed, respects my laws and is law-abiding and honest, he will certainly live; he will not die. None of the faults he has committed will be remembered.
164 Come, let us talk it over, says the Lord; even though your sins are like scarlet, they will become white as snow.
165 Cf Ps 51:19.
166 He will arise and have pity on you.
respondebit tibi;\textsuperscript{167} as soon as you repent and ask his forgiveness, he immediately pardons you

Perhaps timid souls will say it is true that the Lord's mercy is great, but no one can deny that he is also a just judge who will deal with our sins as they deserve. Unfortunately there are many sinners terrified of finding the severe judge in God and do not dare return to him. Such are the judges of this world who treat miscreants according to the seriousness of their misdeeds. But, we repeat, God does not deal this way with sinners. Sometimes he applies justice, but only to correct the sinner and get him to return to the fold; he is terrible, but for the one who returns he is all-loving, all charity; \textit{Deus caritas est}.\textsuperscript{168} Perhaps the insults done to the Divine Saviour are what terrify us? Not even these should terrify us: Jesus Christ is our judge, but he is also our friend, \textit{vos amici mei estis}.\textsuperscript{169} in his own words. Indeed, Jesus Christ came to save sinners. \textit{Veni salvum facere quod perierat}.\textsuperscript{170} It was for the sinner that he came down to earth from heaven, was born into poverty, lived amongst the poor, gave his life amidst pain and shed his precious blood - to save the sinner. Therefore he can only experience satisfaction when he sees his suffering produce results when the sinner repents. He wanted to show this when he said that all the blessed rejoice and there is great feasting in Heaven when a sinner repents.\textsuperscript{171} So away with any fear of divine justice; let us rather thank our good God for the many benefits he has given us in our lifetime especially when he waited for us to repent. Let us promise him with all our heart that in the future we will be faithful to him and constant in serving him. And let us tell him lovingly that because of the many kindnesses he has shown us any pain, tribulation, suffering, our life and even our death would not be enough to thank him and repay our huge debt. Meanwhile, grateful for the many signs of divine goodness and moved by the loving acceptance we find in him, let us confidently approach the throne of grace,\textsuperscript{172} and assured of forgiveness for our sins let us promise God that we will use every moment of our loves to thank him, bless him and praise him. However many days he will be pleased to spare us in this life they will be but a continuous thanksgiving for his kindness to us until, praising his mercy here on earth we can one day praise and exult with all the saints and blessed ones in Heaven: \textit{Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo}.\textsuperscript{173}

2. The Christian's spiritual resources

We find all the means of salvation in the Church, where holiness and charity flourishes. Don Bosco constantly invited young people and adults to cooperate in the action of grace with faith,

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{167} When he hears, he will answer. (Is 30:19).
    \item \textsuperscript{168} God is love (1 Jn 4:8).
    \item \textsuperscript{169} You are my friends (Jn 15:14).
    \item \textsuperscript{170} I came to save what was lost (Lk 19:10).
    \item \textsuperscript{171} Cf Lk 15:7.
    \item \textsuperscript{172} Heb 4:16.
    \item \textsuperscript{173} I will celebrate your love for ever Yahweh (Ps 89:2).
\end{itemize}
hope and charity, and the generous offering of their lives; through constant prayer, frequenting the sacraments; and especially by imitating Jesus Christ by a virtuous life rich in works of charity.

**Faith, hope and charity**

St Paul the Apostle says that without faith it is impossible to please God, *sine fide impossibile est placere Deo.* Let us then always keep the flame of faith alive in our hearts. We need faith to enlighten us all the way through our lives. Faith must be the food that sustains us in spiritual life as Holy Scripture tells us: *justus ex fide vivit,* the just man lives by faith. So that the faith we received from God at holy Baptism may not diminish in our hearts we should often stir it up. To do this we should often make acts of faith; protest with all our heart that we firmly believe the main truths of the Catholic religion and all that God wishes us to be taught by means of the Church. We do this by reciting the words of the act of faith.

But, dear Christian, faith is not enough for our eternal salvation, because we also need the virtue of hope by which we abandon ourselves into God's hands, like a child in the arms of its tender mother. We need to obtain many favours from God and usually God does not grant them unless we hope for them. How many sins we have committed; we therefore need God to show us mercy and forgive us. We constantly need the help of God's grace to live as holy people on this earth. Now this mercy, this forgiveness, this help from his grace God wants to grant but only to those who hope for it. God has prepared a sea of delights for us in the next life; but nobody will be there to enjoy that unless they have the virtue of hope. And for this we must make frequent acts of this virtue, reviving in our hearts a great trust in everything we will obtain from God's goodness through the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ. To reawaken and keep this virtue alive in us let us devoutly recite the words of the act of hope.

Of all the virtues, then, charity is the greatest and the most excellent. The others could not obtain eternal salvation without it. But in what does this virtue of charity consist? It consists in loving God above all other things and our neighbour as ourselves for love of him. Love for God then, and for our neighbour must always be a flame burning in our heart. We must primarily love God with all our heart because he is a most perfect spirit, a being of infinite goodness, our highest good. We must also love him because he has filled our lives with countless benefits; he created us out of nothing; he saw that we were born into the Catholic religion which is the only one that can lead us to the gates of salvation. Although we have offended him so many times, he did not strike us dead as he could have done and as he has done for others who did not repent after sinning. Out of love for us he came down to earth from Heaven amidst sinners; he suffered a most terrible death for us. Out of an excess of love he left us the holy Eucharist as our food. And finally he has prepared a wonderful place for us in Heaven for all eternity. And who, considering these cases of God's love for us, would not feel his heart burning with love for God?

But we must also love our neighbour as ourselves. Everyone in the world is our brother, children of the same father, who is God. They all have a right to be loved by us.

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174 [G. Bosco,] *Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi,* Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868, pp. 87-91 (OE XIX, 95-99). This small booklet was compiled by Don Bosco with the help of Fr Giovanni Bonetti.

175 Heb 11:6.

176 Gal 3:11.
Jesus Christ made a direct command of this, saying: *hoc est praeceptum meum ut diligatis invicem:* this I command that you love one another.\textsuperscript{177} We must not only love our friends but also our enemies. Our Divine Saviour gave us the example by forgiving and praying for those who crucified him.\textsuperscript{178} May the flame of this charity be always alight in us. This is why we make frequent acts of this virtue by reciting the words of the act of charity.

**The means of salvation**\textsuperscript{179}

What a priceless gift it was to create us so we are able to benefit from his grace and go to Heaven! What a special benefit it was for us to be born in a Catholic country where we have so many things to help us to be saved! As Supreme Lord he has given us existence; as a Father he has preserved us; as Redeemer he has redeemed us. And what do we say of such a great gift as the Sacrament of Penance, through the mercy of which we can regain the friendship of God lost through sin? But the divine favours do not finish here; he wanted even more to give us all the means needed to strengthen us in our weakness and keep us in his grace. He gave us churches where we can attend sacred functions; he assures us that this holy place is his house and that whoever should ask something of him there will be infallibly heard: *in ea omnis, qui petit, accipit.*\textsuperscript{180}

Besides, our merciful God, knowing our inclination to evil, our passions, the bad habits that lead and encourage us to fall again and again, instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist as a most effective remedy for our fragility. With his own body and his most precious blood he strengthens us against every assault by the enemy of our soul and makes us invincible to his efforts. Because of the miserable state we find ourselves in we could find ourselves afraid of this sacrament in all its grandeur, but he invites us with these loving words: Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest: *venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos.*\textsuperscript{181} He then orders his ministers to exercise gentle strength and to almost force us to frequent this great sacrament, *compellite intrare.*\textsuperscript{182}

We do not know how to pray nor what we should ask God for; our Divine Saviour taught us the *Our Father,* a prayer we can use to pray to God effectively without danger of asking for things that will not be for our salvation.

When we need divine mercy more than any other time is doubtlessly at the point of death, when we have no more strength and the devil tries every trick to win us to himself. O how many remedies God has provided for us! There is Viaticum to strengthen us, the last anointing which cancels any sins that should remain, the papal blessing with its plenary indulgence; there are many other blessings and prayers which the Church asks us to apply to people in their final moments; these are all pure mercy and divine kindness to demonstrate just how dear our salvation is to him.

But where do all these acts of divine mercy lead? They lead those who are still in the Church militant to love those in the Church triumphant who live in heavenly glory. The Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ is head of the Church we are part of: it is none other than

\textsuperscript{177} Jn 15:12.  
\textsuperscript{178} Cf Lk 23:34.  
\textsuperscript{179} [G. BOSCO,] *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio,* pp. 103-110 (OE II, 173-180).  
\textsuperscript{180} The one who searches always finds (Mt 7:8).  
\textsuperscript{181} Mt 11:28.  
\textsuperscript{182} Force people to come in (cf Lk 14:23).
a step towards the Church triumphant, the delight of all the blessed, which the same Jesus Christ is head of. He greatly desires these two Churches to be the one kingdom of saints, so he spared no effort in anything that would help souls to be saved. If anyone is lost it is his own fault for not wanting to make use of the means that God has provided. When will that most coveted moment come when, leaving our exile in this world, we will be perfectly united with God in the Church of the blessed? My dear faithful people, there will certainly be a place prepared up there for each of us; certainly the Lord wants to see us all with him, saved; and it is also certain that our time in this present life is short but that our heavenly beatitude depends on it.

So courage then. Our Saviour gained the kingdom of glory for us. He is our means, our guide and its crown; the only thing missing is our cooperation. We will need to suffer in the few days of life that remain to us; but if we compare these short sufferings with the eternal reward prepared for us in Heaven, ah no, there is no comparison. We suffer here for a while, but there we will enjoy forever; here we have to suffer hunger, thirst, tribulation and also death; but that does not matter, this will be compensated by joy, perfect and complete happiness and a glory that we cannot imagine, understand, express, except by saying that we will be with the Lord forever: semper cum Domino erimus.\(^{183}\)

**Jesus Christ, every Christian's model\(^{184}\)**

One day the Lord said to Moses: “Remember to carry out my orders well and do everything according to the pattern I showed you on the mountain”.\(^{185}\) God says the same to Christians. Jesus Christ is the pattern or model to be copied by every Christian. Nobody can boast of belonging to Jesus Christ unless he makes the effort to imitate him. So in the life and actions of the Christians we should find the life and actions of Jesus Christ himself.

The Christian should pray, since Jesus prayed in recollection upon the mountain, humbly, confidently.\(^{186}\)

The Christian should be accessible as was Jesus Christ, to the poor, the ignorant, children.\(^{187}\) He should not be proud, pretentious, arrogant. He should be all things to all people in order to win everyone over to Christ.

The Christian should take care of his neighbour since Jesus Christ took care of his followers: Therefore his dealings should be edifying, charitable, serious, kind and simple.

The Christian should be humble as was Jesus Christ, who knelt to wash his disciples' feet including Judas, even though he knew he would betray him.\(^{188}\) The true Christian considers himself less than others and servant of all.\(^{189}\)

\(^{183}\) 1 Th 4:17.


\(^{185}\) Cf Ex 25:40.

\(^{186}\) Cf Lk 6:12.

\(^{187}\) Cf Lk 18:15-17.

\(^{188}\) Cf Jn 13:4-15.

\(^{189}\) Cf Mk 9:35.
The Christian should obey as Jesus Christ obeyed, submissive as he was to Mary and St Joseph, and he obeyed his heavenly Father until death, death on the cross. The true Christian obeys his parents, his employers, his superiors, because he recognises God himself in them; they stand in for God.

In eating and drinking the true Christian should be as Jesus Christ was at the wedding feast of Cana in Galilee, and Bethany, meaning sober, temperate, attentive to others' needs and more concerned with spiritual nourishment than with dishes that nourish the body.

The good Christian should be with his friends in the same way Jesus Christ was with St John and St Lazurus. He should love them in the Lord and out of love for God; he should warmly confide in them the secrets of his heart; and if they should fall into evil, he should exercise every care to have them return to the state of grace.

The true Christian should be resigned in suffering privations and poverty as Jesus Christ suffered them. He did not even have a place to lay down his head. He should know how to put up with contradictions and calumny, as Jesus Christ tolerated them from the Scribes and Pharisees, leaving it to God to justify him. He should know how to put up with insults and slights, as Jesus did when they struck him, spat in his face and insulted him in a thousand ways in the Praetorium.

The true Christian should be ready to put up with sufferings of the spirit, as Jesus Christ did when he was betrayed by one of his own, denied by another and abandoned by them all.

The true Christian must be ready to patiently accept any persecution, any illness, even death, as Jesus Christ did. Crowned with painful thorns, his body lacerated from blows, his feet and hands pierced by nails, he consigned his soul peacefully into his Father's hands in heaven.

The true Christian should be able to say with the Apostle St Paul: It is not I who live, but Jesus Christ who lives in me. Whoever follows Jesus Christ according to the pattern described here, can be certain of being one day glorified with Christ in Heaven and reigning with him in eternity.

Prayer

Prayer means lifting up our hearts to God and engaging with him through holy
thoughts and devout sentiments. Therefore every thought about God and every glance towards him is prayer when joined with pious sentiments. Whoever thinks of the Lord and his infinite perfection and feels a sense of joy, veneration, love, admiration, is praying. Whoever considers the great benefits received from his Creator, Father and the One who has preserved him, and feels a sense of gratitude, is praying. Whoever, amidst dangers to his innocence and virtue, is aware of his own weakness and asks God to help him, is praying, and finally whoever is contrite of heart and turns to God, remembering that he has insulted his Father, offended his Judge and lost his greatest good, and then begs pardon and promises to amend his behaviour, is praying.

Therefore it is so easy to pray. In any place or at any moment, each one can lift up his heart to God by means of pious sentiments. Exquisite and especially studied words are not needed, just simple thoughts accompanied by devout inner feelings. Prayer that consists only of thoughts, for example a quiet admiration of divine greatness and omnipotence, is an inward prayer or meditation or contemplation. If it is externalised by words it is called vocal prayer.

One or other of these ways of praying should be dear to the Christian who loves God. A good child willingly thinks of his father and lets the affections of his heart flow freely. So how then could a Christian not willingly think of God, his most loving Father, and of Jesus Christ his merciful Redeemer, without showing outward signs of reverence, recognition, love and dear confidence, praying to him for help and grace? …

For the prayer of the Christian to be fully acceptable to God and infallibly obtain its effect, certain conditions are needed:

1. Whoever prays must be in the state of sanctifying grace, meaning he must not have any mortal sin on his conscience that has not been cancelled through sacramental Confession or through contrition. Because, as Scripture tells us, the Lord is far from the wicked man, but hears the prayer of the just (Pr 15:29). Despite that, whoever is in the state of mortal sin, if he at least has the desire to correct himself and prays with the intention of honouring God, although he has no right to be heard, because he is not in God's friendship, nevertheless is prayer is highly useful and through the infinite divine goodness will not fail to obtain graces.

2. One should pray inspired by a keen faith, because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6) and where faith is lacking one does not pray in a heartfelt manner, and does not give honour to the goodness, wisdom and omnipotence of God as he demands of us.

3. One should pray with humility and feel both the need of grace, and one's total lack of any merit or entitlement to receiving what is asked for. Because God opposes the proud and gives generously to the humble (Jm 4:6).

4. The Christian must also reserve a certain order regarding the things asked for in prayer. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well (Mt 6:33), Jesus Christ tells us. Therefore we must first seek spiritual goods, like forgiveness for sinners, enlightenment to know the divine will and our errors, strength, an increase and perseverance in virtue, after that we can also ask for temporal goods, health, the means for managing our life, heavenly blessings on our occupations, our affairs, our farms and our families, and that misfortunes, pains and afflictions may be kept far from us. This is what the fourth request in the Our Father teaches us and the example of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Olives. But the request must be made on condition that it is God's will and will not harm our souls. Father, let it be as you, not I, would have it (Mt 26:39).

5. One needs to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, aware that no grace can be obtained from God unless through the merits of our Divine Redeemer.
6. One needs to pray with the enlightened hope of being listened to. Whoever prays doubting that he will be heard is insulting God who assures us that we will be heard so long as we pray with a keen faith, that is with the firm hope that he will hear us and fulfil our request. So when we ask a favour of him, let us abandon ourselves to him as a child abandons himself into the hands of his dear mother, certain that she will help him. Prayer done this way is all-powerful; and it has never been heard in this world, nor will it be heard, that one who has recourse to God in trust will not be satisfied.

Our Divine Saviour reassures us thus: If you have faith, anything you ask for in prayer you will receive.\footnote{Cf Mt 21:22.} The Apostle St James warns the Christian to pray without hesitating and doubting, if he wants to obtain what he asks for.\footnote{Cf Ja 1:6-8.}

7. Our prayers should be united with the prayer and merits of our Blessed Lady, the angels and the saints in Heaven, the souls in purgatory and all the just on earth.

8. Finally, one needs to persevere in prayer according to what Jesus Christ recommends to us. He says: \textit{You need to pray always, without ceasing.}\footnote{Cf Lk 18:1.} and if we ask him how long we have to keep praying, he answers: until the end of your life.

Many Christians think their prayers are useless either because they do not immediately see their effect or because they do not gain the specific graces they were asking for. But we need to know that God responds to our prayers in the way and at the time he sees it most opportune and convenient for the sanctification of our souls and the progress of his kingdom, without letting us know this way or this time. When we are in the other world, we will clearly see that not one word of our prayers ever went without its effect. In fact any time our prayers lack result, the fault is ours for not praying with the correct dispositions.

To conclude this brief instruction note that one cannot pray well without preparation. \textit{Before praying, prepare your soul and do not be like the man who tempts God} (Sir 18:23). Reflect on what an honour it is to come before the Lord, King of Heaven and earth, and reflect too on what you want to ask God; choose the kind of prayer adapted to your circumstances and needs; put yourself in God's presence and see that the words you say by memory or read from a book come from the heart. In this way you will pray in spirit and in truth.\footnote{Jn 4:23.}

Although you can pray devoutly in any position, it would still be good to choose one which gives the best outward signs of your inward faith and devotion. This is how we see the Divine Saviour, the Apostle Paul, the publican, Mary Magdalene, Moses, Solomon, Daniel, Micah praying, with hands joined, kneeling, looking up to Heaven as a sign of faith or to the earth in humility. When praying in church we must have an especially devout and respectful attitude, both out of respect for the Blessed Sacrament on the altar, where Jesus Christ is present, and to not give bad example to others whom we should edify through our outward approach.
1. We have a wonderful sign of God's mercy towards sinners in the Sacrament of Confession. If God had said that he would forgive our sins only through Baptism and would no longer forgive those committed after we have received this Sacrament, how many Christians would certainly go to perdition! But knowing our great misery, God established another sacrament with which sins committed after Baptism are remitted. This is the Sacrament of Confession. This is how the Gospel speaks: Eight days after his Resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples and said to them: peace be with you, as the heavenly Father sent me, so I am sending you, with the faculty given me by my heavenly Father that whatever you judge to be for the salvation of souls, I give to you. Then the Saviour breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained. Everyone understands that the words retain or not retain mean giving or not giving absolution. This is the great faculty given by God to his Apostles and their successors in the administration of the holy Sacraments. From these words of the Saviour comes an obligation for the sacred ministers to hear confessions, and at the same time there is an equal obligation for the Christian to confess his sins so that we may know when to give or not to give absolution, what advice to suggest to make up for the evil done, in short to give all the fatherly advice judged necessary to make reparation for the evils of one's past life and no longer commit them in the future.

2. Nor was confession only practised at a certain time or in a certain place. As soon as the Apostles began preaching the Gospel, they began to practise the Sacrament of Penance. We read that when St Paul was preaching in Ephesus, many of the faithful who had already embraced the faith came to the feet of the Apostles and confessed their sins. Confitentes et annunciantes actus suos. Since the time of the Apostles until now the practice of this great Sacrament has always been observed. The Church has always condemned as heretics those who had the foolhardiness to deny this truth. Nor has it ever advised anyone that they can be dispensed of the need for it. Rich and poor, servants and masters, kings, monarchs, emperors, priests, bishops, the supreme pontiffs themselves, all must kneel at the feet of a sacred minister to obtain pardon for the sins they have committed after baptism. But alas! How many Christians so rarely or so badly profit from this Sacrament! There are those who come without examining themselves, others who confess nonchalantly without sorrow or good resolutions, and others who keep silent about important things in Confession or do not fulfil the obligations imposed by the confessor. These are taking the most holy and useful of things and using it for their own ruin. St Teresa had a fearful vision about this. She saw souls falling into Hell like snow falling on the mountains. Terrified by such a revelation, she asked Jesus Christ for an explanation and received the answer that they were lost because of the bad confessions they had made in life.

3. Courage, O Christians, and let us profit from this Sacrament of mercy, but let us profit from it with the appropriate dispositions. First we make a diligent examination of our faults, and then we confess them all, what we are certain of, what we are doubtful about, as we know it, but with great sorrow for having committed them; and let us promise never to commit them again in future. But especially, let the results of our

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207 Jn 20:19-23.
208 They confessed and revealed their actions (Acts 19:18).
confessions be seen through the improvement in our life. God tells us in the Gospel that we shall know the goodness of the tree from its fruits, and so from the improvement in our lives the value or otherwise of our confessions will be seen: *ex fructibus eorum cognosce eos.*

**Example** - A young man from Montmirail in France had lived as a good Christian until he was fifteen, when he had the misfortune to fall in with bad companions. Improper conversations, reading bad books left him wallowing in the depths of lack of belief and loose living. His parents tried to guide him to better things, but unable to succeed, they went to church in the evening of the Immaculate Conception (8 December 1839) and recommended him to the prayers of the members of the Sacred Heart of Mary Sodality. On that very same evening, the young man returned home, and without saying anything, which was not usual for him, he went to bed. He wasn't thinking about Mary, he was thinking about himself. On 10 December, almost beside himself, he called on his father and said: “My father, I am unhappy and suffering so much. I have neither eaten nor slept for thirty six hours. I am like an angry lion and know neither what to say nor what to do; I have to go and see the priest”. He left, went to the parish priest and his conscience all filled with remorse, he begged him to hear his confession. “Please", he begged the priest, "hear my confession immediately”. I cannot live in this state any longer”. The parish priest encouraged him, comforted him and then soon heard his sorrowful confession. When he had received absolution, he immediately felt his heart filled with such consolation that he could not keep it to himself. As soon as he arrived home he explained to his father the grace he had received and the heavenly peace he was experiencing. What he still felt so bad about was seeing those whom he had drawn into sin through his scandal. Filled with Christian courage, and with no further care about what his old friends might say, he told them what had happened to him, the consolation he felt after his confession and di what he could to get them to do the same. So to put things in a few words this new result of Mary's mercy did as the penitent David did when he tried to win over souls for God to make reparation for the scandal he had given. *Docebo iniquos vias tuas.*

**Brief prayer:** Obtain for me from God, Mother of love / real sorrow for my sins.

**The Sacrament of the Eucharist**

1. Do you understand, Christian, what it means to go to Holy Communion? It means approaching the table of the angels to receive the body, blood, soul and divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ given as food for our souls under the species of consecrated bread and wine. At Mass, when the priest says the words of consecration over the bread and wine, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The words our Divine Saviour used when he instituted this Sacrament are: This is my body, this is my blood: *hoc est corpus meum, hic est calix sanguinis mei.* These are the very words the priest uses in Jesus' name in the sacrifice of the holy Mass. Therefore when we go to

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209 By their fruits you will know them (Mt 7:20).
210 I will teach sinners your ways (Ps 51:15).
212 1 Cor 11:24-25.
Communion we receive Jesus Christ himself in his body, blood, soul and divinity, that is, true God and true man, alive in Heaven as he is. It is not an image of him, a representation like in a statue or crucifix, but it is Jesus Christ himself as he was born of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and as he died for us on the cross. Jesus Christ himself assures us of this real presence of himself in the Eucharist when he said: This is my body, given up for you: *corpus, quod pro vobis tradetur.*213 This is that living bread come down from Heaven: *hic est panis vivus, qui de caelo descendit.* The bread that I will give is my flesh. The drink that I give is my true blood. Whoever does not eat of this body nor drink of this blood, has no life within him.214

2. Having instituted this Sacrament for the good of our souls, Jesus wants us to approach him often. Here are the words he invites us with: Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest: *venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos.*215 Elsewhere he tells the Hebrews: “Your fathers ate the manna in the desert and died; but the one who eats the food that the manna represented, the food that I give, the food that is my body and blood, he will never die. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I in him; my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink”.216 Who could oppose these loving invitations from the Divine Saviour? To respond to these invitations Christians in early times went daily to listen to God's word and went to Communion each day. It is in this Sacrament that the martyrs found their strength, virgins their fervour, the saints their courage. And how often do we approach this heavenly food? If we examine what Jesus Christ wanted and our own need we should go to Communion very often. Since manna was the daily bodily food for the Hebrews all the time they were in the desert, until they reached the promised land, so Holy Communion should be our comfort, our daily food amidst the dangers of this world to lead us to the promised land of Paradise. St Augustine says thus: If we ask God for bread for our bodies every day, why do we not try to feed ourselves daily with spiritual bread through holy Communion? Saint Philip Neri encouraged Christians to go to Confession each week and go to Communion more often according to the advice of their confessor. and finally, holy Church manifests its keen desire for frequent Communion at the Council of Trent where it says: “It would be a most desirable thing for each Christian faithful to be in such a state of conscience as to be able to go to Holy Communion each time he attends Mass”. Pope Clement XIII granted the following favour to encourage Christians to go frequently to Confession and Communion: Christian faithful who have the praiseworthy habit of going to Confession weekly can gain a plenary indulgence whenever they go to Holy Communion.

3. Someone might say: I am too much of a sinner. If you are a sinner, try to return to grace through the Sacrament of Confession and then go to Holy Communion and you will have much help. Another might say: I go to Communion rarely so I can be more fervent. He is fooling himself. Things done rarely are mostly done badly. If your needs in other things are great, then so must you seek frequent help for your souls. Some might add: I am spiritually sick and do not dare go to Communion often. Jesus Christ answers: *those who are well have no need of a doctor;*217 so those who have greater woes, those are the ones who should go more often to see the doctor. So courage, Christian, if you want to do something more glorious for God, the most pleasing thing

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213 1 Cor 11:24.
214 Jn 6:48-58.
215 Mt 11:28.
216 Cf Jn 6:49. 57-58.
217 Cf Mt 9:12.
for all the saints in Heaven, the most effective for overcoming temptations, the most certain thing to do to persevere in doing good, is certainly Holy Communion.

_Example_ - a young lad called Dominic Savio, out of a keen desire to please Mary, prayed to her daily but every Saturday he went to holy Communion in her honour. He called her his dearest mother. In 1856 he celebrated Mary's month with such fervour that his friends were all edified. Every day he asked Mary to take him from the world rather than he should lose the virtue of purity. On the final day he asked for just one grace: to be able to make a good Communion before dying. The holy Virgin heard his prayer. Nine months later (9 March 1857) he died at fifteen years of age after receiving holy Viaticum with great tenderness and devotion. In the moments between receiving Viaticum and his death, he kept repeating: “O Mary, you listened to me, I am so rich. I ask nothing else of you than that you help me in these final moments of my life and accompany me from this life into eternity”. almost as soon as he had said these words, his soul flew to Heaven certainly, accompanied by Mary to whom he was so devoted in life.

_Brief prayer_: I adore you at every moment / living Bread from Heaven / great Sacrament.

**Charity to the poor and the little ones**

God is infinitely rich and is infinitely generous. Since he is infinitely rich he can give us immense recompense for anything done out of love for him; as a Father who is infinitely generous he repays everything we do out of love for him with good and abundant measure. The Gospel says that you will not give a glass of cold water to one of the least of mine, in my name, without have a reward.

Almsgiving, God tells us in the Book of Tobit, frees us from death, purges our soul of sin, and brings us mercy in God's sight and leads us to eternal life. *Elemosina est quae a morte liberat: purgat peccata, facit invenire misericordiam et vitam aeternam.*

Amongst the great rewards there is also this, that the Divine Saviour regards as done to himself any act of charity done to some poor unfortunate. If we saw the Divine Saviour walking begging in our squares, or knocking on the doors of our houses, would there be a Christian who would not generously offer him every last penny in his purse? The Saviour is also represented in the person of the poor, the most abandoned. Everything you do even for the most despicable, he says, you do for me. So it is no longer poor children who as asking for charity, but Jesus in the person of these poor children.

What can we say then of the exceptional recompense that God reserves for that most important and difficult moment when our fate will be decided with a life of eternal

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219 Cf Mt 10:42.

220 Almsgiving saves from death and purges every kind of sin; it deserves mercy and eternal life (Tb 12:9).

221 Cf Mt 25:40.
beatitudes or eternal unhappiness? When we, gentlemen, present ourselves before the
judgment seat of the Supreme Judge to give account of our actions in life, the first
thing he will lovingly remind us of will not be the houses we built, the savings we
made, the glory we gained or the wealth we procured; of those things not a word, but
he will only say: Come, O blessed of my Heavenly Father, come and possess the
Kingdom that has been prepared for you. I was hungry, and you gave me bread in the
person of the poor; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was naked and you clothed me; I
was out on the street and you gave me shelter.²²² Tunc dicet rex his qui a dextris eius
erunt: Venite, benedicti patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum a constitutione
mundi. Esurivi enim et dedistis mihi manducare; sitivi et dedistis mihi bibere; hospes
eram et collegistis me; nudus et cooperuistis me (Mt 25, 34-35).²²³

These and other words are what the Divine Judge will say since they are written in
the Gospel, and then he will give you his blessing and lead you to possess eternal life.

But God the father of kindness, knowing that our spirit is willing but our flesh is very
weak,²²⁴ wants our charity to be rewarded a hundredfold even in this life.²²⁵ How many
ways, gentlemen, does God give us a hundredfold for our good works? A hundredfold
are the special graces of living and dying well, the fertility of our fields, peace and
harmony in our families, good results for our temporal affairs, the health of our relatives
and friends, the preservation and good upbringing of our children. The reward of
Christian charity is the pleasure each one has in his heart for doing good works. Is it not
a great consolation when one reflects that with a small item of almsgiving one
contributes to preventing people from being a danger to civil society and helping them
become people who are of some advantage to themselves, their neighbours, to Religion?
People who are on the brink of becoming the scourge of the authorities, people who
break public laws and end up living off other people's sweat, in prison, but instead you
make them able to honour their dignity as human beings, take up work and through their
work earn honest sustenance, and this to the honour of the country they live in and well
as the families they belong to?

Beyond all these recompenses that God grants in the present life and in the future
one, there is one yet that those who have received charity will give to their benefactors.
Yes, gentlemen, we do not want you to miss out on the recompense that is completely in
our power to give. All the priests, clerics, all the young people who live in and are
educated in the houses of the Salesian Congregation, and more especially those of the
Patronage de Saint-Pierre raise their minds in prayer morning and evening for their
benefactors. Morning and evening, those you have been charitable towards will invoke
divine blessings on you, your families, your relatives and friends, with appropriate
prayers. They will ask God to keep peace and harmony in your families, grant you
stable health and a happy life, keep misfortune far from you in spiritual and temporal
things and add to all this perseverance in doing good, and for as long as it has pleased
God to give you life, at the end crown your life with a holy death. If then, gentlemen, in
the course of your mortal life you will have the good fortune to meet one another in the
streets in the city or in any other place, oh yes, then we will joyfully recall the benefits

²²² Mt 25:34-36.
²²³ Then the king will say to those standing on his right: Come you blessed of my Father, and
receive the reward of the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. Because I was
hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you made me
welcome, naked and you clothed me.
²²⁴ Cf Mt 26:41.
²²⁵ Cf Mt 19:29.
received and we will respectfully doff our caps as an indelible sign of gratitude on earth, while the merciful God will assure you of a just reward in Heaven. *Centuplum accipietis et vitam aeternam possidebitis.*

3. **“Maria Auxilium Christianorum”**

*Don Bosco, tireless apostle of devotion to Mary, in The Companion of Youth and his preaching emphasises especially the Virgin’s role during life’s journey in helping individuals achieve salvation: she is the mediatrix of graces, defence against the assaults of evil, support for our commitment to Christian living and on our way to holiness.*

As the years passed, the saint saw devotion to Mary in a much broader ecclesial context and from an apostolic perspective. The Mary Help of Christians Association responded to the religious sensitivities of the late 19th Century, but flourished in strict connection with the worldwide spread of Salesian activity for the salvation of youth and service of the Universal Church.

The title “Help”

The title ‘*Auxilium*’ (Help), attributed to the august mother of our Saviour, is not something new. In the Holy Books themselves, Mary is called the Queen who stands at her divine Son's right hand side, dressed in gold and surrounded by beauty. *Adstitit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato, circumdata varietate* (Ps 45:10). This mantel is arrayed with gold, according to the spirit of the Church, as well as gems and diamonds, or the titles with which we usually call on Mary. So when we call the Blessed Virgin *Help of Christians*, it is but a special title, one that is appropriate for her, like a diamond on her gilded clothing. Mary was greeted this way, *Help of humankind*, from the earliest times in the world when Adam, falling into sin, was promised a liberator to be born of a woman, and whose immaculate feet would squash the head of the insidious serpent.

In fact this great woman is symbolised by the tree of life to be found in the earthly paradise; by Noah's Ark, which saved those who adored the true God from the flood; by Jacob's ladder, which reached up to Heaven; by Moses' bush, burning but not burning up and which alludes to Mary who remained a Virgin after giving birth; by the Ark of the Covenant; by the Tower of David, defence against every assault; by the rose of Jericho; by the sealed fountain; by the well-cultivated garden looked after by Solomon; she is found in the aqueduct of blessing; in Gideon's fleece. Elsewhere she is called Star of Jacob, as beautiful as the moon, shining like the sun, iris of peace, pupil of God's eye, the dawn of consolation, virgin and mother and parent of her Lord. These symbols and expressions which the Church applies to Mary, make God's providential design clear. he wanted to make her known before his birth as the first amongst all creatures, most excellent protectress, help and support, even the one who would repair the evils to which the human race succumbed.

In the New Testament she is not only called help of mankind in general, through

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226 You will receive a hundredfold and will possess eternal life (Mt 19:29).

227 Cf above, pp. xxx.


229 On your right stands the Queen dressed in gold from Ophir.
symbols and prophecies, but the help, support and defence of Christians. No longer symbolic expressions and figures; everything is the fulfilment and realisation of the past. Mary is greeted by the Archangel Gabriel who calls her full of grace; God beholds the great humility of Mary and raises her up to the dignity of being mother of the Eternal Word. Jesus, great God, becomes Mary's child. He is born of her, raised, helped grow up; and the Eternal Word made flesh submits in complete obedience to his august mother. At her request Jesus worked his first miracles in Cana in Galilee; on Calvary she became mother of all Christians. The Apostles had her as guide and teacher in virtue. They gathered to pray with her in the Upper Room; they waited there with her in prayer and finally received the Holy Spirit. Her last words were to the Apostles and then she flew gloriously to Heaven.

From her high throne of glory she gazes down with motherly affection, saying: Ego in altissimis habito, ut ditem diligentes me et thesauros eorum repleam.\(^{230}\) On my high throne of glory I enrich those who love me and fill their treasuries with heavenly favours. Since her assumption into Heaven the constant, uninterrupted flow of Christians to Mary began and it was never heard, St Bernard says, that one who had recourse to this most blessed Virgin, was never heard. Here is the reason why every century, each year, each day and we could say, each moment is marked in history by some great favour granted to someone who called on her with trust. Here is the reason why each kingdom, every city, country, family has a church, a chapel, an altar, a statue, a picture, or some sign recalling the universal veneration for Mary and which at the same time reminds one of the many graces granted to those who have recourse to her for the necessities of life.

**The Association of Mary Help of Christians\(^ {231}\)**

1. In the church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians in Turin an Association of her devotees has been canonically erected with the authorisation of his Excellency the Most Reverend Archbishop of Turin. They propose to promote the glories of the mother of the divine Saviour in order to deserve her protection in life and especially at the point of death.

2. Two special means are proposed: to spread devotion to the Blessed Virgin and veneration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

3. This will be done through words, advice, works and with the authority to foster decorum and devotion at novenas, feasts and solemnities celebrated throughout the year in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Blessed Sacrament.

   Spreading good books, holy pictures, medals, notices, taking part and recommending others to take part in processions in honour of Mary and the Blessed Sacrament, frequent Communion, attending Holy Mass, accompanying Vaticum: these are all things that members promise to promote with all the means compatible with their state in life.

4. Members will take the greatest care in their own regard and with others dependent on them to prevent blasphemy and any talk against religion and inasmuch as they can will remove any obstacle to keeping Sundays and other Feasts holy.

5. Each member, following the advice of the catechisms and spiritual masters is warmly encouraged to go to Confession and Communion every fortnight or once a

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\(^ {230}\) In Heaven I enrich those who love me, filling their treasuries (cf Pr 8:21).

\(^ {231}\) G. BOSCO, Associazione de’ divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice..., pp. 48-50 (OE XXI, 386-388).
month and to attend Mass daily in as far as the obligations of one's state in life permit.

In honour of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament members will, each day, following their usual morning and night prayers, recite this brief prayer: *May the most holy and divine Sacrament be blessed and praised at every moment.* And in honour of the Blessed Virgin: *Maria, Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis.* It is enough for priests at each Holy Mass to have the intention of praying for all members of this pious association. These prayers will serve as a bond to unite all members in one heart and one soul in giving due honour to Jesus hidden in the most holy Eucharist and to his august mother, and in taking part in all works of charity carried out by each member.

**Prayers convenient to the spirit of the association**

Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven and earth, in whom, after God, I place all my trust, I throw myself humbly at your feet as the least of your servants, to consecrate myself to your service in this Pious Association erected under your protection, and I promise with all my heart to practise everything the Rules prescribe with the greatest possible devotion, so that through the merits of Jesus Christ your beloved son and through your powerful intercession all members may be preserved from all spiritual and bodily harm in their lives; may the Lord be blessed in all their activities and may they finally obtain the grace of dying the death of the just. Since only the desire to please you is what has led me to embrace this devout association, I humbly implore you, holy Virgin, to number me amongst your children and obtain for me the grace of corresponding, through good behaviour and holy deeds, with the sublime nature of your servant.

O glorious Virgin Mary deign, from your exalted throne, to look down on me with a kindly eye always open to one who is consecrated to your service; and since today I am writing my name in the book of this pious Association, deign to engrave it also on your maternal heart; ask your Divine Son to be pleased to list me amongst those names written in the book of life. Amen.

**Act of a child who wishes to take the Virgin Mary as mother**

- My Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, only Son of God and the Virgin Mary, I thank you and adore you as my beginning and my end. I implore you to renew for me that mysterious loving testament you gave on the cross, giving your especially beloved St John the quality and title of son of your mother Mary. Also say these words to me: *Woman, behold your son.* Give me the grace of being able to belong to her as her son and to have her as a mother throughout my mortal existence on this earth.

Most blessed Virgin Mary, my principle advocate and mediatrix, I N. N. a poor sinner, the most unworthy and weak of your servants, humbly prostrate before you, entrusted to your goodness and mercy, and encouraged by a keen desire to imitate your beautiful virtues, I choose you today as my mother, and I ask you to receive me amongst the fortunate number of your beloved children. I give you all of myself entirely and irrevocably. Receive this offering gracefully; be pleased with the trust with which I abandon myself into your arms. Give me your motherly protection throughout my life and especially at the hour of my death, so that my soul, free from bodily ties, may pass from this vale of tears to enjoy eternal glory with you in the kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

**Prayer of His Holiness Pius IX**

- Lord, all-powerful God, who permits evil to draw good from it, hear our humble prayers with which we ask you that we may remain faithful amidst so many assaults and persevere faithfully until death. Give us the

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232 Ibid., pp. 56-59 (OE XXI, 395-397).
strength, through the mediation of Mary most holy, to always be united with your most holy will.

4 United we are stronger: “Vis unita fortior”

Pontifical approval of the Society of St Francis de Sales and its Constitutions showed the legal separation that existed between consecrated and non-consecrated in the Salesian mission. Don Bosco, having tried to go down the road of “external members”, set up a more far-reaching organisation and founded the Salesian Cooperators Association with its own apostolic spirituality. Various different profiles flow into this “pious union”: the idea of the ‘tertiary’ or Salesian religious in the world aiming at Christian perfection and charitable and apostolic activity; the idea of the collaborator in Salesian works through catechism lessons, schools and other activities; the idea of the benefactor, supported, sympathiser; the idea of the committed lay person in youth works depending on parish priests and bishops. The result was the birth of a vast network of cooperation spread throughout the world thanks to Don Bosco’s and his successors’ personal efforts. Every local group under the care of a Director participates in the Salesian mission in their local area a strategic factor in the fruitfulness and development of the works.

"Extern" members of the Pious Salesian Society

1. Any person, even someone living in the world, at home, in the bosom of his family, can belong to our society.
2. He does not take vows; but he will try to put into practice that part of the rule that is compatible with his age, status and circumstances such as teaching or promoting the teaching of catechism to poor children, spreading good books; organising triduums, novenas, retreats and other similar works of charity aimed especially at the spiritual good of the young or the common people.
3. In order to share in the spiritual benefits of the society the member should at least promise the rector that he will be involved in those things that the rector judges to redound to the greater glory of God.
4. Such a promise of course shall not be binding under pain of sin, not even venial sin.
5. Every member of the Society who leaves the same for a reasonable cause is regarded as an external member and can still share in the spiritual benefits of the entire Society, so long as he practices that part of the rule prescribed for external members.

Salesian Cooperators, or a practical way of promoting morality and civil society

As soon as the work of the Oratories began in 1841 some pious and zealous priests and

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233 G. BOSCO, Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1858]-1875. Critical texts edited by F. Motto, Rome, LAS 1982, p. 208; a text located at the end of the manuscript of the Salesian Constitutions presented in 1864 for the Decretum laudis. The Holy See established that external members could not be affiliated to a society of consecrated persons. Don Bosco asked that he be allowed to include this text at least as an appendix to the Constitutions, but it was not possible (cf ibid., pp. 233-234).

lay people soon came to help work in the harvest which was then an abundant one amongst the class of young people at risk. These collaborators or cooperators were always the support of the pious works that Divine Providence had put in our hands. Each one tried to work and fit in with the discipline in force and the norms proposed, but they all asked for a rule that would serve as a basis and a bond for preserving uniformity and spirit in these popular institutions. We hope that this desire will be satisfied by the present small booklet. It does not contain rules for the festive Oratories or houses of education, which have separate rules, but is a commitment by which Catholics who so desire can be associated with the Salesians and work according to common and stable norms until such time as these become fixed and stable enough to preserve the traditional practice and purpose. …

Thus those who wish to exercise their charity by working for the salvation of souls beyond the great reward proclaimed by Saint Augustine: *animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti*, will ensure a great treasure for their souls thanks to the holy indulgences.

May the Lord God, rich in graces and blessings, pour out his abundant heavenly favours on all those who lend their efforts to win souls for Jesus our Saviour, do good for youth at risk, prepare good Christians for the Church, upright citizens for civil society, so that one day they may all be fortunate inhabitants of Heaven. Amen.

Turin, 12 July, 1876.

Fr John Bosco

**Christians need to come together in good works**

Good [Christians] have at all times seen the necessity of uniting in order to help one another in doing good and in avoiding evil. This is the example that the faithful of the early Church left us. Faced with impending dangers every day, they did not give up. United as one heart and one soul, they encouraged one another to be steadfast in the faith and to stand ready to overcome the assaults that relentlessly threatened them. This is also what the Lord taught us when he said: “Feeble forces that unite become strong. A single strand may be easily broken, but a three-ply cord is hard to break: *Vis unita fortior; funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur.* Even men of the world are used to doing this in their temporal affairs. Should the children of the light be less prudent than the children of the dark? Certainly not. We Christians must unite in these difficult times to foster the spirit of prayer charity administered by religion in every way possible and so remove or at least mitigate the evils that threaten the morality of growing youth, in whose hands lies the destiny of civil society.

**The Salesian Congregation, bond of union**

The Salesian Congregation, having been definitively approved by the Church, may provide a sure and stable bond uniting the Salesian Cooperators. Its primary purpose is to work for the good of young people, on whom the happy or evil future of society depends. We make no claim that what we are proposing is the only means to achieve that end. There are a thousand other ways, and therefore we urge everyone to freely use the means that seem most conducive to that great goal. The way we are proposing, one of the many, is the *Work of the Salesian Cooperators*. We are inviting good Catholics living in the world to join their efforts to those of the members of this our Congregation. True, the number of Salesians has grown considerably, but it is unequal by far to the

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235 You have saved a soul, therefore you have predestined your own salvation.
236 United efforts are stronger; it is more difficult to break a rope with three strands (cf Qo 4:12).
numerous requests for help that we are receiving every day from various parts of Italy and of Europe, from China, Australia and the Americas, from the Argentine Republic in particular. These insistent requests are for sacred ministers who would undertake the care of young people at risk, who would open houses and schools, and who would initiate or sustain missionary activity in places where evangelical workers are greatly needed and desired. It is in order to respond to all these needs that we are looking for cooperators.

**Purpose of the Salesian Cooperators**

The principal purpose of the Salesian Cooperators is the spiritual good of the members themselves through their embracing a way of life similar, in so far as it is possible, to that of religious living in community. Many people would willingly embrace the cloistered life, but cannot do so because of age, health or state in life, but mostly for lack of opportunity. They may, however, while continuing in their daily occupations and living with their family, become Cooperators and so live in effect as members of the Congregation.

Because of this, the Supreme Pontiff regards this association as a kind of traditional Third Order, but with a difference. While in those third orders Christian perfection was made to consist in exercises of piety, in this association the principal purpose is the active life engaged in the exercise of charity toward neighbor, especially toward young people at risk.

**Style of cooperation**

The Salesian Cooperators share the same harvest as the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, to which they wish to be associated.

1. The members shall promote novenas, triduums, spiritual retreats and catechetical instruction, especially in places where material and moral means are lacking.

2. The scarcity of priestly vocations in these times of ours is felt in all its severity. Hence, those members who are in a position to help shall take special care of youngsters, and adults as well, who have the necessary moral qualities and an aptitude for study, and show signs of a vocation. They can help them with timely advice, and by directing them toward those schools and boarding establishments where they may receive nurture and guidance. The Work of Mary Help of Christians is directed precisely to this purpose.

3. [There’s an urgent need to] counter the irreligious press by good press. Hence members can help by spreading good books, leaflets and all kinds of printed matter, in those places and among those families in which acceptance may prudently be expected.

4. Finally there is the exercise of charity to youth at risk by taking them in, instructing them in the faith, getting them to take part in religious functions, advising them of dangers, taking them to where they can be instructed in religion. These are all are part of the harvest for the Salesian Cooperators. Those who are personally unable to carry out these works might do so through others, such as by encouraging a relative or friend to do so. Everything recommended for boys at risk is also recommended for girls in a similar situation.

5. One can cooperate through prayer or by providing material means where needed, following the example of the early faithful who laid their goods at the feet of the Apostles so they could be used on behalf of widows, orphans and others in serious need.
Constitutions and government of the Association

1. Whoever is at least sixteen years old can become a Cooperator, so long as this person has the firm intention of abiding by the rules proposed here.

2. The Association is humbly commended to the kindness and protection of the Supreme Pontiff, bishops, parish priests on whom it will be absolutely dependent in all things pertaining to religion.

3. The Superior of the Salesian Congregation is also the Superior of this Association.

4. The rector of each house of the Congregation is authorised to enrol members. He will pass on the name, surname and place of residence to the Superior who will note everything down in the common register.

5. In towns and cities where none of these houses yet exist and where there are at least ten members, one will be appointed as group leader [called a 'decurion'], preferably a priest or an exemplary lay person. He will correspond with the Superior, or with the rector of the nearest house.

6. Each Cooperator if necessary may indicate to the Superior things that he believes should be taken into consideration.

7. Every three months and even more often, by means of a bulletin or printed leaflet, members will be given a report on things proposed, done or indicated for future action. At the end of each year members will be advised of projects that should be given priority in the coming year, and at the same time will be advised of the members who were called to eternal life in the previous year. They will be recommend to the prayers of all. On St Francis de Sale's Feast day and on the Feast of Mary Help of Christians each rector, each decurion [group leader] will bring his Cooperators together for mutual encouragement in devotion to these heavenly protectors, calling on their patronage so they may persevere in the works they have begun according to the purpose of the Association.

Particular obligations

1. The members of the Salesian Congregation will regard all Cooperators as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ and will turn to them any time their work could redound to the greater glory of God and to the advantage of souls. Cooperators, when necessary, will turn to members of the Salesian Congregation with the very same freedom.

2. All members, then, since they are all children of our heavenly Father, all brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, will do what they can with their own material means or those collected from charitable people, to promote and support the works of the Association.

3. Cooperators have no financial obligation but will make a monthly or annual offering as the charity of their heart may prompt. These offerings will be sent to the Superior to support works promoted by the Association.

4. At least two conferences will be given each year: one on the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, the other on the Feast of St Francis de Sales. A collection will be taken up at each of these conferences, as indicated in the preceding item (3). In places where the Cooperators have not yet reached ten in number or where someone cannot attend the conference, the offering will be sent to its destination through whatever means is easiest and safest.

Advantages

1. His Holiness, Pius IX currently reigning, in his decree dated 30 July 1875, grants the benefactors of this Congregation and the Salesian Cooperators, all the favours, spiritual graces and indulgences granted the Salesian religious, except for those
referring to common life.

2. They will share in all the Masses, prayers, novenas, triduums, retreats, sermons, teaching of catechism and all the works of charity that Salesian religious carry out by their sacred ministry anywhere in the world.

3. They will also share in the Masses and prayers offered each day in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, calling down Heaven's blessings on their benefactors, families and especially those who morally or materially offer charity to the Salesian Congregation.

4. On the day following the Feast of St Francis de Sales all Salesian priests and priests who are Cooperators will celebrate Holy Mass for deceased members. Those who are not priests will endeavour to go to holy Communion and recite a third part of the Rosary.

5. When a member is ill, the Superior will be quickly advised. He will quickly see that special prayers are offered to God for him [or her]. The same will be done in the case of the death of any Cooperator.

Religious exercises

1. No external practices are prescribed for Salesian Cooperators, but so their lives may be somewhat similar to those who live in the religious community they are encouraged to be modest in attire, frugal at table, simple in their domestic arrangements, blameless in speech, exact in carrying out the duties of their state, and see that people who are dependent on them observe and keep Sundays holy.

2. They are advised to make some days of retreat each year. On the last day of each month or on another day that is more suitable, they will make the exercise for a happy death, going to Confession and Communion as if it were really the last day of their life. Both at the retreat and on the day they make the exercise for a happy death they will acquire the plenary indulgence following what the Church prescribes.

3. Each one will say each day an Our Father, Hail Mary to St Francis de Sales for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff. Priests and others who say the canonical hours or the office of the Blessed Virgin are dispensed from this prayer. It is sufficient for them to add this intention in the divine office.

4. They should endeavour to go more often to the holy Sacraments of Confession and Communion; that way each one can gain a plenary indulgence each time.

5. These plenary and partial indulgences can be applied in suffrage for the souls in purgatory, except for the indulgence 'in articulo mortis' which is exclusively personal and can only be gained when the soul has left the body for eternity.

Circular to Salesian Cooperators

Turin, September 1877

In our Regulations, my worthy Cooperators, it is laid down that a monthly Bulletin is to be published, giving you a report on things done or to be done in view of the aims proposed for us. We are now following up this common desire, so that each one can carry out his work in unity of spirit and address all our concerns to one common end: the glory of God, the good of civil society.

We consider that the Booklover [Bibliofilo cattolico] will serve this purpose, a
bulletin printed at our printing press in Turin from this year onwards and which in future will be printed at our Hospice in Sampierdarena. This Bulletin of ours will offer:

1. Things that members and their rectors want to offer for the general and particular good of members, and practical norms for Cooperators.

2. Exposition of facts that are fruitful for members and can serve as an example for others. So, things that have happened or that we have heard about or read so long as they are tied to the good of humanity and religion; news and letters from missionaries working for the faith in Asia, Australia and especially from Salesians spread throughout South America amongst the savages - all this is good material for us.

3. Communications, notices of various kinds, projects we have in mind; books and maxims which should be spread around, will make up a third of the Bulletin.

By presenting our thinking this way we are responding to the question coming from everywhere, wanting to know what the practical purpose of the Cooperators is.

The title of the certificate or booklet given to Cooperators explains the purpose. But we will give a brief explanation here just the same. Salesian Cooperators are those who want to get involved in charitable works, not just generally but specifically, in unison with and according to the spirit of the Congregation of St Francis de Sales.

A Cooperator can do good by him or herself; but the results are very limited and mostly do not last long. By contrast, when working together with others there is support, advice, courage, and often with simple effort much can be done, because even weak forces become strong when they work together. Herewith the great saying that united efforts bring strength, *vis unita fortior*.

Therefore our Cooperators, by following the purpose of the Salesian Congregation, work according to their strengths to bring together youngsters at risk and left to their own devices in the streets and squares; teaching them catechism, being with them on Sundays and holy days, seeing that they are with an upright employer, guiding them, advising them, helping them as much as possible to become good Christians and upright citizens.

The guidelines to be followed in works proposed for Cooperators to this end will be material for the Salesian Bulletin.

We add the words: *in a practical way*, to note that here we are not setting up a confraternity, nor a religious, literary or scientific association, not even a newspaper; it is a simple union of benefactors of humanity who are ready to dedicate not promises but deeds, concerns, sacrifices and disturbances to help our neighbour. The words *in a practical way*, are there because we do not intend to say that this is the only way of doing good in the midst of civil society; indeed we approve of and have the highest praise for all institutions, unions, public and private associations aimed at benefiting humanity and we ask God to send all of them the moral and material means they need to continue on, make progress and achieve their purpose.

We in turn intend to propose here a way of working and this way is proposed through Salesian Cooperators Association.

The words: *useful for morality*, make it even more clearly known what we want to do and what our common intention is.

Outside of politics, we constantly keep away from anything that might go against someone constituted in civil or ecclesiastical authority. Our program is this and unalterably so: let us look after poor and abandoned youth, and we will make every effort to do the greatest good we can for them, knowing that it can be useful for morality and civilisation.

Fr. John Bosco
“Do you want to do something divine? Educate the young”

I do not know, worthy Cooperators - I do not know if I should first thank you or invite you to thank the Lord together for having brought us together in this compact body and put us in the position of being able to do great good and for having brought us here together this evening for the first conference for Salesian Cooperators in Turin.

But before coming to anything else, I want to tell you a little bit of the history of what the Salesian Cooperators here in Turin have already done and what their task is at this time. So listen.

Thirty five years ago the area presently occupied by this church served as a place for gathering young people at risk. They came here to fight and curse. There were two houses nearby which gave great offence to the lord: one was a tavern where drunkards and all kinds of bad people came; the other, right here where the pulpit now stands and extending off to my left, was a house of ill-repute and immorality. Then a poor priest arrived and rented two rooms in this very house at an exaggerated price. The priest was accompanied by his mother. Their aim was to see if they could do some good for the people in the vicinity. All the assets they had were a hand-basket they carried, with a number of items in it. Well then, this priest saw young people coming here to get into mischief, and he was able to approach them and the Lord saw that what he said was listened to and understood. He immediately saw the need for a chapel for divine worship. Starting from the epistle side of this high altar and going off to the right as you look, there was a shed that served as an outhouse. He was able to get hold of it and having nothing else, adapted it as a church. These problematic youngsters, little by little were attracted to and came to church, and their number soon grew so much that it was filled, and in the little square where this church is now, we taught catechism, since the church couldn't hold them all.

Now this priest was alone. But he had the very zealous priest Fr Borel, who had done so much good in Turin, come to help; but working as he was in the prisons, helping those condemned to death, in work at the Cottolengo, with the Marchioness Barolo, the Refuge and other things, he could only be there for a while since his life lay elsewhere. The Lord provided for what was lacking and gradually various worthy ecclesiastics joined the poor priest, some hearing confessions, some preaching, others teaching catechism, lending a hand. And that is how the work of the Oratory was supported by these worthy ecclesiastics. But this was not enough. Given the growing need also for Sunday and evening schools, a handful of priests was not enough. Then various gentlemen also began to lend a hand. It was Divine Providence that sent them and through them good work was multiplying. These first Salesian Cooperators, priests and lay people, were not concerned about discomfort and effort, but seeing the good that was done and how many rough boys set out on the path to virtue, they sacrificed themselves. I saw many of them leave their comforts and come not only every Sunday, but even every day in Lent, even at very inconvenient times for them, but the best time for the boys, and they came and helped the work of the Oratory.

Meanwhile time passed and there was an even more felt need to help these children, including materially. Some had their pants and jacket in tatters and hanging off them,
even at the expense of their modesty; some had no change of clothing, just the torn shirt on their back. This was when the kindness and usefulness of the Cooperators began to shine out. I would now like, to the glory of these good people from Turin, to tell you how many of them, even though their families were hard up, saw no shame in taking those jackets and pants and patching them with their own hands; they took the torn shirts, which had maybe never seen water before, they themselves took them, I say, and washed them, patched them up to give them back to the boys again. The boys were attracted by this Christian charity and stayed on at the Oratory and persevered in the practice of virtue. Many of these worthy people then sent clothing, money, food and whatever else they could. Some of them are here at the moment listening to me and many others have already been called by the Lord to receive the reward for their labours and charitable works.

So this is how, with the help of many people, Cooperators, men and women, things could be achieved that each one separately could never have done. With such powerful help of priests, men and women, what happened then? Thousands of boys came for religious instruction to the very same place where earlier they had learned to curse; they came to learn virtue in this very place that had been the focus of immorality. We were able to open Sunday and evening schools and the poorest and most neglected of the boys were taken in, and in 1852 the little square became this church And the house became a hospice for poor boys. All this is your work, my worthy Cooperators.

They continued to help and others were added to their number every day. We were able to open another two oratories in two other parts of the city, one in Vanchiglia called the Guardian Angel which, after the parish church of St Julia was built, moved next to the parish; the other, called St Aloysius, was opened at Porta Nuova. The church of St John the Evangelist is being built next to this.

But these deeply felt needs in Turin were beginning to be felt in other cities and towns too and given the constant help of the Cooperators, they were able to establish a rule and then extend beyond Turin. It was necessary for the great lack of clergy felt throughout Piedmont and beyond to be compensated for by the Cooperators. How could they do that? The Catholic religion does not look to just a place, city, town; it is universal and wherever it wants good to be done and wherever the need is greater, there the religion asks for greater efforts. So a house was opened at Mirabello, then another at Lanzo, then more and more elsewhere. There is now a hundred or more that have been opened, counting churches and houses and more than 25 thousand boarding or day boys receiving religious instruction in our houses. Who does all this? One priest? No! Two, ten, fifty? Not even that. They would not have achieved so much There were so many Cooperators who banded together to help these few priests in every town, city. Yes, it was them, but not only them. Ah yes! We need to recognise God's hand. He wanted so much good work to come out of nothing. Yes, it is Divine Providence that sent so many means to save so many souls. If it hadn't been the Lord who wanted this, I would say that it would have been impossible for anyone to have done so much. But the need was real and great and the Lord sends great help for great needs. And these needs are growing greater and more demanding by the day. Will the Lord abandon us?

This is what I tell you. It is a firm reality that the needs are growing by the day. Oh if you could only see how many requests from all over the world are answered because we can open houses for poor and abandoned youth. If you only knew how many places feel a need which in times past only seemed to be obvious in the big cities. You would be astonished. And how much the mission need is growing now. Note that it is no longer a case of life being challenged amongst the savages by the dangers of martyrdom or great suffering. Now they themselves are beginning to appreciate their miserable state and
want to be educated. It is they themselves, I say, who are reaching out to us, asking us to
go and civilise them, teach them the religion without which they acknowledge their life
is unhappy. These requests for missions are coming from everywhere. From India,
China, Santo Domingo, Brazil, the Argentine Republic, heart-rending requests are
coming, such that if while talking to you now I were able to say I had two thousand
missionaries, I would immediately know where to send them, and would be sure of the
results they would bring. So even in the missions good has been done through the work
of the Oratories and we hope that with the support and help of the Cooperators this good
work can be increased a thousand times for the greater glory of God.

Then there is another work done by these Oratories, a work that I don't want
published, but it would be good for you to know about it. This is the work of looking for
boys with good will and giving them the means to become priests. The number of the
Lord's ministers, as you see, is decreasing daily by frightening proportions. So we have
looked for boys everywhere that give real signs of hope, we have brought them together,
got them to study and now, with the Lord's blessings on this work, hundreds and
hundreds of priests have come from our houses. Do you want me to secretly tell you
how many clerics we had last year? Listen. From all of our houses in Italy, France,
Uruguay and the Argentine Republic last year we had 300 clerics. Most of these go back
to their dioceses but just to tell you of one, look at the Casale diocese: out of 42 clerics
in the seminary, 34 came from our houses. Others become religious, others go to the
missions or stay with us and help us with everything they can. So do you see where
your alms, your help and charity goes?

Another and no small effort is to shore up against the heresy that threatens to invade
our cities and towns. It is devastating Catholic countries and spreading further as
freedom spreads in the world of politics; because when in the name of freedom we give
open slather to evil to operate, and we put restrictions on the work of the good, there
will always be sad consequences. So we sought to challenge heresy and impiety with
books well adapted to this purpose, and with much effort and at great expense we
printed them and disseminated them amongst the Catholic people. But the books don't
achieve everything. We saw the need, like a sentry keeping watch in places where there
is greatest danger, to place a squad of soldiers at least to paralyse evil, and so near the
Protestant church, since 1847 we have opened the Oratory of St Aloysius, and now after
so much research and effort we have managed to start building the church of St. John
the Evangelist. Construction is under way.

At S. Pier d’Arena heresy was also threatening and here we built a hospice. In Nice,
right next to the Protestant church, we built the Patronage of St Peter. Heresy had
already made extraordinary inroads at La Spezia: here we made every effort and now
there are some appropriate schools. I don't want to talk about everything along these
lines, but I want to tell you what happened at Ventimiglia. Here, given the increase in
the population, a valley known as Valle Crosia filled up with homes. The number of
inhabitants grew to a hundred, then to a thousand. Since they were all new homes,
obody thought of a church or they were unable to build one. The Protestants, seeing
how convenient this was, built a nice centre or large building there which served as a
hospice and school, and also a church. Given that there were no other schools, the
inhabitants of the valley were attracted to them and many started attending their church.
The bishop did not know what to do; building a church, setting it up as a parish are
things that the private individual can no longer do these days. We were called on and we
willingly began work. We did not have the means, but Providence helped us, and since
we could not do anything else, we rented a house, adjusted the ground floor a bit, made
an altar and then we had a church. In the rooms off to the right and on the first floor we
opened two classrooms for boys; in the rooms on the left of this little church we called in the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians and they opened classes for girls. What a change! The festive oratory attracted big and small, and all the people living around could attend Mass; the boys' classrooms filled up immediately; those for the girls as well. Things then took such a turn that now the Protestant schools are absolutely closed because there is nobody, not a single boy or girl, attending them. Many who had started going to the Protestant church, able to come to the Sacraments for Easter, abandoned the place that had become a centre of heresy in Liguria.

All these various works would be impossible for one person alone. We need to have Cooperators. Their subsidies for example help us go out there and set up the early stages: then the Cooperators come and set up in the place itself and things make progress. Without the work of the Cooperators, the Salesians would be stranded and unable to exercise their zeal. It is true that we always encounter many difficulties in achieving these works but the Lord sees that they can always be overcome.

This year, then, the difficulties have multiplied; just the same we see that the Lord's hand is always supporting us. Our incomparable benefactor, Pius IX, died this year; it was Pius IX who approved the Cooperators Association and enriched it with so many wonderful indulgences; it was Pius IX who wanted to be enrolled as the first Salesian Cooperator; it was Pius IX who never missed a good occasion to benefit us. He died, but the Lord saw that his successor was Leo XIII. I presented myself to him and spoke to him of the Salesian Cooperators. I asked him to allow his august name, like the name of his predecessor of happy memory, to appear amongst the Salesian Cooperators. And once he was well informed of their spirit, he added: “I do not intend to be only a Salesian Cooperator, but an operator. Should not the Pope be the first to contribute to works of charity?” So this is how, when we had lost a father, the Lord saw that we would have another no less kind than the first. This very year a number of worthy people have died who have been of great help to the Oratory; but the Lord saw that others took their place and the charity of the faithful has not left us lacking what we need.

So now, here is what has to be the more direct purpose of the Salesian Cooperators; this is what they need to take up. They need to continue the works begun, the ones I have spoken of; indeed these works need to increase a hundredfold. We need people and means for this. We sacrifice our people: every day the Lord sends us personnel who are ready for any kind of sacrifice, even giving their lives for the salvation of souls. People are not enough: we need the means. And this is your task, worthy Cooperators. I give you the task of finding the material means; see that they are not lacking. Note well how great the Lord's grace is; he puts the means in your hands for cooperating in the salvation of souls. Ah yes, the salvation of many souls is in your hands. We have seen, from what I have told you, that the salvation of so many souls results from the cooperation of good people.

So now it is time for me to thank you. But what thanks can I give? I cannot do it. If I were to thank you for your good works it would be too little a recompense. So I will leave the Lord to thank you for it. Yes, I have said many times that he considers what is done for our neighbour as done to himself. and it is also certain that charity which is not strictly corporal but which also has a spiritual aim, has even greater merit. I could say that it not only has a greater value, but a divine one. The Fathers agreed with what St. Dionysius said: Divinorum divinissimum est cooperari Deo in salutem animarum.239 And explaining this passage with St Augustine, he says that this divine work is an

239 Amongst divine things, the most divine is cooperating with God for the salvation of souls.
absolute pledge of one's own predestination: *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti.*

Do you want to do something good? Educate the young. Do you want to do something holy? Educate the young. Do you want to do something very holy? Educate the young. Do you want to do something divine? Educate the young. Amongst divine things, this is the most divine.

Oh! If you are part of all this good I have been hinting at, you can be sure of saving your own soul. So I leave him to give you special thanks. Just know that in the church of Mary Help of Christians morning and evening, and I could say all day, there are special prayers for you, that the Lord may be able to thank you with the words that he will say to you on that decisive day of judgement. *Euge, serve bone et fidelis...* make sacrifices, but keep in mind that Jesus Christ sacrificed himself far more and that we will never ever get even near to the sacrifice he made for us. Those who make the effort to imitate him in making sacrifices to save souls can have the peace of mind that *animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti* is no exaggeration and that they will certainly be crowned with the *intra in gaudium Domini tui* that I so earnestly desire and pray for all of you.

### 5. Spiritual advice for friends, Cooperators and benefactors

*Don Bosco’s correspondence with Cooperators and friends, lay people and church people, always contains some kind of guidance on essentials of spiritual life, aimed at proposing an inner life which combines devotion, spiritual fervour, the exercise of virtue, practical charity and the duties of one’s state in life faithfully and lovingly accomplished.*

#### A lay person seeking perfection

**Turin, 24 September 1862**

**Dear Sir,**

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with us.

It is some time since I received the two letters you were kind enough to send me, but I did not answer because I was uncertain of where you were staying.

I am including the red ticket [for the lottery], indeed two, so you can win two prizes. The tickets I sent were not so much just for you to sell off but something you could have to help poor Don Bosco give bread to his poor boys with.

Going back over things in your first letter, I very much admire your heart’s desire to blindly follow the advice of a poor priest like me. It is something difficult for both of us, but let us try.

“What do I need to do to lead a life”, you asked, “detached from the world and that binds my heart to the Lord in such a way that I may constantly love virtue”?

R. Good will assisted by God’s grace will produce this marvellous effect. But to succeed you must try to know and taste the beauty of virtue and the joy that someone who loves God experiences.

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240 You have saved a soul, therefore you have predestined your own salvation.
241 Come, good and faithful servant… (Mt 25:21).
242 Come and join in your master’s happiness (Mt 25:21).
243 E(m) I, pp. 525-526; letter to Ugo Grimaldi.
Then consider the emptiness of worldly things. They cannot give us the least consolation. Put all your journeys together, what you have seen, enjoyed, read and observed. Compare all this with the joy a man experiences after approaching the holy Sacraments, and he will see that the first is nothing, while the second is everything.

Once we have established this base then we come to the practice. You told me: “1. Mass and meditation each morning. 2. After midday a little bit of spiritual reading. 3. A sermon and benediction every Sunday. 4”. ... “Slow down”, you say, “a little at a time”. You are right; begin putting into practice what I write in passing and if you keep up with me, I hope with the Lord's help to be able to lead you to the third heaven.

When you come to Turin we can discuss some bigger projects. Meanwhile do not forget to pray for me. I warmly wish you everything good from the Lord. I am, your friend and servant

Fr John Bosco

To a religious

Turin, 22 July 1866

My good lady,

Lukewarmness, when it is not backed by our will, is totally devoid of guilt. In fact I believe that this lukewarmness, which takes the name of dryness of spirit, can be worthy of merit in the Lord's eyes. Nevertheless it takes matches to get some sparks going and I find these in brief prayers or a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, kissing a medal or crucifix. But more than any other thing the thought that occasional tribulations, pains and spiritual dryness are also sweet-smelling roses for eternity.

I will not fail to recommend you to the Lord at Mass and, while recommending myself and my poor boys to the charity of your prayers, I have the honour of sincerely and gratefully professing myself to be,

your humble servant

Fr John Bosco

To Marquis Ignazio Pallavicini

September 1867

Your Excellency,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us. Amen.

Here I am speaking with Your Excellency as I would with my brother. What I wrote to you in August was neither a threat nor a passing whim; it was something loving and preventive. That said, you should consider three things: yourself – your household – your own affairs.

Self. Take a look at resolutions made in Confession and not kept; advice given to avoid evil and do what is good, but forgotten. The great defect of not being sorry for sins committed. This can be remedied through meditation and an examen of conscience in the evening or at some other more appropriate time. Right now God wants you to be more patient in your dealings, especially in the family; more confidence in the Lord's

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244 E(m) II, p. 276; letter to Dominican Sister Margherita Stoli.
245 E(m) II, pp. 423-424.
kindness; more peacefulness of spirit, and never ever be afraid of death surprising you by night or at some other unexpected moment. Make an effort to practise the virtue of humility and trust in the Lord and fear nothing. For the future, go to Confession and Communion in such a way that you become a model for everyone who knows you.

*Your household.* See that your dependants fulfil and have the time to fulfil their religious duties, and arrange things in their regard in such a way that in death and after death they will have reason to bless their master. In the family, charity and kindness with everyone; but never miss an occasion to give advice or counsel that can help as a rule in life and as good example.

*Your affairs.* A lot needs to be written about this. On Monday I need to go to Alessandria and there I will make a visit to Mombaruzzo, where I hope to write or speak to you more calmly. What God especially wants of you is for you to foster veneration of the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as much as you can.

May God help you to take the road to Heaven. Amen.

I gratefully profess myself to be Your Excellency's humble servant

Fr John Bosco

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**To geometry teacher Giovanni Turco**

Turin, 23 October 1867

My dear Turco,

Your letter gave me much pleasure and was even more pleasing in that you spoke with me with our old confidence, something that for Don Bosco is the dearest thing in the world.

Considering your letter from just a single point of view I thank the Lord that, amidst some of the most difficult years of your life, he has helped you preserve the healthy principles of religion. We could say that the most calamitous time is now in the past; the more you progress in years the more will the illusions that man has about this world disappear and you will be even more confirmed in what you have told me, that religion alone is stable and can always and at any age make man happy now and in eternity.

So after that bit of philosophy, I advise you to continue your profession as a geometry teacher where you are; practise your religion especially through frequent Confession which is a real balm for you; but do everything possible to help and console your father in his old age. Thanks be to God he seems to be thriving.

In the past I have always recommended you to the Lord in my holy Mass and I will do so even more willingly in the future because you ask me to. And you also pray for me, do you not?

I have some good books to be translated from French; would you translate one of them for me? It will be published in the *Catholic Readings*.

I will experience consolation every time you write to me. May God bless you and your father and keep you both happy in life *ad multos annos*.

Fr Francesia, Fr Lazzero, Chiapale and many other friends of yours greet you and I will always be, in the Lord,

your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

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246 E(m) II, p. 445.
To the mother of a family

I received your enormous sum of fr. 10,000 from Sr Filomena's hand. You offer this out of charity in honour of Mary Help of Christians to be used for various and serious needs of this new building. I was not able to stop and speak with Sister except in passing and so I could not give her my grateful thanks to bring back to you. Now while I am fulfilling this duty of gratitude I assure you I will continue to pray our common special prayers every day for you at the altar of Mary Help of Christians and I hope that the grace you ask of Her will be granted without delay.

You tell me that it has not been granted so far; you tell me that it is a problem in the family, one that I do not know about, but here is something positive I can tell you: continue to pray and resign yourself to the divine will. This problem will soon come to an end. Some things that look like thorns now, God will change into flowers. A glance at the crucifix and a fiat voluntas tua, is what God wants from you.

Meanwhile accept this advice: family sores have to be medicated, not amputated. Gloss over what annoys you, speak with everyone and advise them in all charity, and firmly. This is the remedy that will heal everything. Pardon me for taking this liberty: I would give lessons to Minerva, I would even give her sympathy.

Tomorrow (12) I will celebrate Mass and my boys will go to Communion for your intentions. May God bless you and all your family and grant you all a long and happy life with the precious gift of final perseverance.

I am gratefully yours and profess myself your humble servant

Fr John Bosco

To a suffering widow

My dear lady,

I was honoured to receive your letter and it gave me true pleasure. I see from it that your heart has been torn apart by the loss of your beloved husband, but has now become more calm and given way to being resigned to the divine will which, whether we want it or not, we need to submit to. Do not fear that your husband's affection for you will be diminished in the next life, indeed it will be perfected very much more. Have faith; see him in a much better position than when he was amongst us. The best thing you can do for him is to offer your every worry to God for the repose of his soul.

Now give me some freedom to say something. It is of our faith that we enjoy an infinitely better life in heaven than on earth. So why be so sorrowful if your husband has gone to take possession of it? It is of our faith that death for us Christians is not separation, but a deferral of the moment when we see one another again. So when someone goes before us - patience; he goes to prepare our place.

It is also of our faith that at any moment through works of piety and charity you can

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247 E(m) III, pp. 133-134.
248 E(m) III, pp. 211-212; letter to the Marchionness Carmes Maria Gondi.
do good for the souls of the deceased: so why not rejoice in your heart if God has given you the chance to survive? Then, helping children, comforting your *bon père*, practising your religion, spreading good books, giving good advice to someone who needs it: are these not all things that must bring the Lord's blessing on the years he still gives you?

There are still other motives that for now I judge best not to say.

So, let us adore God in everything, in consolations and afflictions and let us be sure that He is a good Father and will not permit us to be afflicted beyond our strength. He is all-powerful and therefore can lift us up when he wants.

Meanwhile I have always recommended you and your family to the Lord at holy Mass and I will continue to do the same, as well as in the prayers that we say together at Mary's altar.

May God bless you and your efforts; pray for me. I profess that I am your humble servant

Fr J. Bosco

A committed Catholic\(^{249}\)

Turin, 13 July 1870

Dear Sir,

May God be blessed in everything. Do not be worried because you cannot do much. Before God, the one who does his will in little things does much. So take the inconveniences you are subjected to as coming from the Lord's holy hand, do the little you can and be at peace about everything.

In these times we feel the serious need to promote good press. It is a vast field, but each one doing what he can, can achieve a lot.

I will not fail to pray for you and your friends. I revere them so much in the Lord. Pray for me too. With real affection I profess myself to be,

your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

To a priest friend\(^{250}\)

Rome, 8 May 1876

My dear Fr Perino,

I am so happy about your promotion to parish priest of Piedicavallo. You will have a much wider field to win souls for God. The basis of a successful parish is taking care of the children, being with the sick, loving the elderly.

For you: frequent confession, some meditation each day, exercise for a happy death once a month.

For Don Bosco: spreading the *Catholic Readings* and coming to lunch at the Oratory

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\(^{249}\) E(m) III, pp. 227-228; letter to 'Commendatore' Luigi Corsanego Merli.

\(^{250}\) E(m) V, p. 142; letter to Fr Luigi Perino.
every time you come to Turin. The rest we can speak about when we meet.

May God bless you, your efforts, your future parish and pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

your affectionate friend,
Fr John Bosco

To a priest who is tempted\textsuperscript{251}

Rome, 12 [January] 1878

My dear Fr ….

God has allowed you to have a great trial, but you will have a great victory. Prayer will overcome everything. Work, temperance especially in the evenings, do not lie down for a rest during the day, never more than seven hours in bed, these are all very useful things.

Principis obsta; as soon as you are tempted, start working if it is daytime; start praying if it is night time; do not stop praying until you are overcome by sleep. Put these suggestions into practice; I will pray for you at holy Mass, God will do the rest. Courage, dear Fr …; seal your heart, hope in the Lord and go ahead without being worried.

Pray for me. I will always be, in Jesus Christ,

your affectionate friend,
Fr John Bosco

To Right Rev Edoardo Rosaz, bishop of Susa\textsuperscript{252}

Rome, 7 February 1878

Dear and Reverend Bishop,

I received news from Turin then from your dear letter, of how the great Pontiff Pius IX thought of you in fatherly terms and appointed you as Bishop of Susa. I was not a little amazed, because I know how humble you are and how you must take up a new approach \textit{verbo et opere}.\textsuperscript{253} But I soon blessed the Lord, because I was and I am convinced that the Church has gained a bishop according to God's heart and that you will do much good for the diocese of Susa.

I am very happy about it and with all my heart I offer you all the houses of our Congregation for whatever service they can render you or the diocese that Divine Providence has entrusted to you.

I do not pretend to lecture you, but I believe that you will soon win over everyone's heart if:

1. you take special care of the sick, the elderly and poor children.
2. go slow in making any changes to personnel already put in place by your

\textsuperscript{251} E(c) III, pp. 271-272.
\textsuperscript{252} E(c) III, pp. 293-294. Archbishop Edoardo Giuseppe Rosaz (1830-1903), founder of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters (1874) for the education of poor and orphaned girls, appointed bishop of Susa at the consistory on 31 December 1877.
\textsuperscript{253} Way of speaking and acting.
predecessor.

3. do what you can to win the esteem and affection of some who held or still hold high positions in the diocese; those who feel they were overlooked while your Lordship was chosen.

4. when taking strong measures against anyone amongst the clergy, you go slowly and as much as is possible listen to the one accused. For the rest I hope that in March we can speak personally.

Today, around three thirty, the Supreme and incomparable star of the Church, Pius IX, died. Newspapers will give you the details. Rome is in consternation and I believe the whole world as well. Within a very short time he will certainly be on the altars.

I believe that your Lordship will always allow me to write with the confidence of earlier times; I pray to God that he will enlighten you and keep you in good health. I recommend myself to the charity of your prayers and with the greatest veneration I profess myself to be,

Your Lordship's affectionate friend,
Fr John Bosco

To a scrupulous woman254

Turin, 26 September 1878

Esteemed friend in Jesus Christ,

With regard to your conscience, consider:
1. never going back over past confessions.
2. thoughts, desires and internal things are never subject for confession.
3. confess only deeds, conversations that the confessor could judge blameworthy and nothing else.
4. blind obedience to your confessor.

Be tranquil of conscience and pray for me. I remain always, in Jesus Christ,
your humble servant,
Fr John Bosco

To a discouraged parish priest255

Turin, 25 October 1878

Dear Fr,

I received your good letter and the 18 Francs enclosed. Thank you. May God reward you. It is manna that falls to help us in our difficulties.

Be at peace. Do not talk of leaving your parish.

There is work to do? I will die working, *sicut bonus miles Christi*.256

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254 E(c) III, pp. 388-389; letter to Giuseppina Armelonghi.
255 E(c) III, p. 399.
256 Like a good soldier of Christ (2 Tm 2:3).
There are thorns? When the thorns have become flowers the angels will weave a crown for you in Heaven.

Times are difficult? They always were, but God's help was never lacking. Christus heri et hodie. 258

Are you asking for advice? Here it is then: take special care of the children, the elderly and the sick and you will become master of everyone's hearts. For the rest, when you come to pay me a visit we will speak at length.

Fr John Bosco

To a mother concerned about her son 259

Turin, 11 November 1878

My good lady,

Your son is certainly in a bad situation. Age, knowledge, substances are terrible snares the devil uses to lure so many unwary youths to spiritual and bodily ruin. A Christian mother in this case should:

1. Take him in hand, go with him everywhere if he will put up with it. Reason with him, advise him to go to the holy Sacraments, listen to sermons, do some good reading. If he does not give in, have patience, but keep it up.

2. If you want you can tell him that for sure if he does not control himself better, his life will be short and maybe…

3. Try to get him to mix with other family members or other upright people and keep away from bad companions.

4. Pray to God and Saint Monica.

In my own poor way I will also pray especially to Mary Help of Christians. And then, I also have much need of your spiritual and corporal charity. I have an abundant harvest in my hands; we could win over many souls, but I lack the material means.

May God bless you and all of your family and pray for me too. I will always be, in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

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257 I can do everything in him who gives me the strength (Ph4:13).
258 Christ is the same yesterday and today (Heb 13:8).
259 E(c) III, pp. 411-412.
PART 3

CONSECRATED TO GOD FOR HIS GLORY AND FOR THE SALVATION OF THE YOUNG

This third part is divided into six sections:

1. The spirit that should animate consecrated Salesians (pp. 00-00).
2. Rules for Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (pp. 00-00).
3. Circular Letters about religious perfection (pp. 00-00).
4. Spiritual advice in personal correspondence with Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (pp. 00-00).
5. Spiritual conferences to the Salesians (pp. 00-00).
6. Dreams relating to Salesian religious perfection (pp. 00-00).
The spirit that should animate consecrated Salesians

In the retreat in September 1869, following the pontifical approval of the Congregation, Don Bosco for the first time offered Salesians his overall vision of consecrated life. The notes he drew up for this occasion, broadly re-worked, were a basis for his draft of the instruction Ai soci salesiani (To Salesian confreres), which is the introduction to the first Italian translation of the Constitutions, or Rule of the Society of St. Francis de Sales (1875), and was then refined and notably added to with collaboration from the master of novices, Fr Giulio Barberis, for the third edition of the Constitutions (1885). It is from this final version that we take the beginning and central parts that best represent Don Bosco’s thinking on Salesian consecration.

To Salesian confreres

Our Constitutions, my dearly beloved sons in Jesus Christ, were definitively approved by the Holy See on 3 April 1874.

We should welcome this fact as being amongst the most glorious in the annals of our Society, since through it we have the assurance that by observing our rules we rest upon a firm, secure and, I may add, infallible basis since the judgement of the Supreme Head of the Church who sanctions them is infallible.

But whatever its inherent value may be, this approval would be of little avail if the rules were not known and faithfully observed. It is precisely so that they may be easily known, read, meditated upon and put into practice by everyone, that I consider it well to present them to you as a translation from the original text. The Latin text was printed separately. Here you have the rules common for all Salesian confreres.

I believe it would be useful to bring some practical matters to your notice which will make it easier to understand the spirit informing the rules and which will help you observe them with diligence and love. I am speaking the language of the heart, and I am briefly placing before you what experience tells me is conducive to your spiritual profit and to the benefit of our whole Congregation.

Ways of safeguarding our vocation

The vocation to the religious state can be thought of as the precious pearl the Gospel speaks of which we should safeguard jealously and diligently. Saint Alphonsus suggests three practices in order not to lose it. They are: Secrecy, prayer and recollection. Here is what St Alphonsus says: “Firstly, speaking universally, you need to keep your vocation a secret from everyone except your spiritual director, since ordinarily, others have no scruples in telling poor young people called to the religious state that they can serve God anywhere, even in the world. Yes, someone not called to religion can serve God anywhere, but not someone who has already been called and wants to remain in the world; it will be difficult for him to lead a good life and serve God. …

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261 Ibid., 120-125.
262 Cf Mt 13:45-46.
263 This chapter is drawn from A. M. De Liguori, Opuscoli relativi allo stato religioso, in Opere ascetiche di S. Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori, vol. IV, Torino, Giacinto Marietti 1847, pp. 400-404 (op. I, § 2).
“Secondly you need to be of the view that these vocations are only preserved through prayer. The one who puts prayer aside will certainly leave his vocation. It takes prayer, much prayer; therefore do not omit at least half an hour of prayer morning and evening. Do not omit the visit to the Blessed Sacrament and Mary most holy each day, in order to obtain perseverance in your vocation. The religious should not omit going to Communion a number of times during the week. He will meditate often on his vocation, considering how great is the grace that God has given him by calling him to himself. The more he ensures that his eternal salvation is guaranteed, the more he will be faithful to God in following his vocation. And to the contrary, what danger he will expose himself to if he is unfaithful!

“Thirdly, there is need for recollection, and this cannot be achieved without drawing aside from conversations and secular amusements. What does it take to lose one's vocation in the world? Nothing much. An entire day doing little, a comment from a friend, an unbridled passion, attachment to something, a fear, a regret not put behind one - any of these are enough. Anyone who does not abandon his pastimes needs to be persuaded that he will doubtless lose his vocation. He will suffer remorse at not following it but he will certainly not follow it. How many have lost their vocation, and their souls, for lack of attention to this fact!” (St Alphonsus, Doctor of the Church).

The Vows

The first time the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX, spoke of the Salesian Society, he said: “vows are necessary in a religious congregation or society, so that all its members may be united by a tie of conscience to their Superior, and the superior keeps himself and his subjects united with the Head of the Church and as a consequence, with God himself”.

Our vows therefore may be called so many spiritual cords by which we consecrate ourselves to the Lord and place our will, our goods, our physical and moral faculties in the power of the Superior, so that we may all form but one heart and soul in order to promote the greater glory of God, according to our Constitutions, precisely as the Church invites us when in her prayers she says: *That the faith in their minds and the piety of their actions may be one.*

The vows are a generous offering by which the merit of our works is greatly increased. St Anselm teaches that a good work without vow is like the fruit of a tree. He who does it by vow offers up the fruit and the tree itself. St Bonaventure likens the work done without vow to the offering up of interest without capital. With a vow both interest and capital are offered to God. Furthermore the holy Fathers of the Church unanimously teach that every act performed by vow has a twofold merit, that of the good work itself, and that of carrying out the vow which has been made.

Furthermore, the act of pronouncing religious vows, according St Thomas, restores our baptismal innocence, that is, it puts us in the state as if we had just received baptism. The Doctors of the Church were also accustomed to comparing religious vows to martyrdom, saying that the merit of the one who professes vows is that of one who receives martyrdom; because what the vows fall short of in intensity is made up for in duration.

If the religious vows so greatly increase the merit of our works and make them acceptable to God, then we ought earnestly strive to fulfil them.

He who feels he is not able to keep them should not make them, or should at least

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265 Note in the original “*Ut una sit fides mentium, et pietas actionum*, Feria V, post Pascha”.
defer professing them until he feels in his heart that he is firmly resolved to keep them. Otherwise he makes a faithless and foolish promise to God, which cannot but displease him: For, says the Holy Spirit, the foolish and unfaithful promise is displeasing to God.\textsuperscript{266} Let us therefore prepare ourselves well for this heroic consecration; once we have made it, let us endeavour to keep it even at the cost of long and burdensome sacrifice: pay your vows to the Most High, is what he himself commands.\textsuperscript{267}

**Obedience**\textsuperscript{268}

The perfection of every virtue lies in true obedience, says St Jerome. All religious perfection consists in suppressing one's own will, in other words in the practice of obedience, says St Bonaventure. The speech of the obedient will always be heard, says the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{269} St Gregory the Great concludes that obedience leads to the possession of all other virtues and likewise preserves them all.

This obedience however ought follow the example of the Saviour, who practised it even in the most difficult things, even to death on the cross; and should the glory of God demand as much from us, we also ought be obedient, even to the point of sacrificing our lives.\textsuperscript{270}

The express orders of the Superiors, therefore, and the rules of the Congregation and the customs of each house ought be obeyed. And should anyone at times be guilty of failing in them, let him readily ask pardon of the one whom he has disobeyed. This act of humility helps immensely towards obtaining forgiveness for the fault committed, and obtains grace from the Lord for the future and so keeps us on our guard from falling into the same fault again.

St Paul the Apostle, recommending the practice of this virtue, says: obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.\textsuperscript{271}

Note well that doing only the things that are pleasing to us and which are for our gratification, is not true obedience but is merely following our own will. True obedience, which makes us dear to God and to our Superiors, consists in cheerfully doing whatever is commanded by our Constitutions or by the Superiors themselves; for, as St Paul says, God loves the cheerful giver.\textsuperscript{272} It consists too in showing ourselves docile, even in things which are most difficult and contrary to self-love, and performing them courageously even at the cost of pain and sacrifice. In these cases obedience is more difficult, but it is also more meritorious and leads us to the possession of the kingdom of heaven according to the words of our divine Redeemer: the kingdom of

\textsuperscript{266} Qo 5:3.  
\textsuperscript{267} Ps 50:14.  
\textsuperscript{268} P. BRAIDO, Tratti di vita religiosa salesiana nello scritto “Ai Soci Salesiani”, 130-132.  
\textsuperscript{269} Cf Pt 21:28.  
\textsuperscript{270} Cf Ph 2:8.  
\textsuperscript{271} Cf Heb. 13:17.  
\textsuperscript{272} 2 Cor 9:7.
If you practise obedience in this way I guarantee, in the Lord's name, that you will lead a truly peaceful and happy life in the Congregation. But at the same time I must also tell you that the day you choose not to act according to obedience but according to your own will, you will begin to feel discontented with your state in life. And if in religious orders some are found to be discontented or for whom community life is a burden, it will be seen on close observation that this springs from the want of obedience and submission of their own will. If you become discontented reflect on this and know how to remedy it.

**Poverty**

If we do not leave the world for the sake of love, one day we shall have to leave it of necessity. Those on the other hand who leave it spontaneously will receive a hundredfold of graces in the present life and an eternal reward in the life to come. Whoever cannot make this sacrifice voluntarily will have to make it at the point of death, yet without recompense for it, and with the obligation of rendering to God a strict account of all the things he has possessed.

It is true that our Constitutions permit the possession and use of all civil rights; but after entering the Congregation one cannot any longer either administer or dispose of things that are his own without the consent of the Superior and then only within the limits prescribed by him, so that in the Congregation one is considered as literally possessing nothing, having made oneself poor to become rich with Jesus Christ. He is following the example of our Saviour who was born into poverty, lived deprived of all things and died stripped of his clothes on the cross.

Let us listen to what our divine Master says: “So therefore whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple”. 275 To another who desired to be amongst his followers he said, “Go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me”. 276 To his disciples he used to say that they should not have more than one garment, nor give thought to what they might need in their preaching. 277 In fact we do not read that Jesus himself or his apostles, or any of his disciples possessed land, houses, furniture, clothes, food or drink or the like. St Paul says clearly that the followers of Christ, wherever they go and whatever they do, ought to be content with the food that is strictly necessary for life and with clothing to cover them: *But if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content*. 278

Everything that goes beyond food and clothing is superfluous for us and contrary to a religious vocation. It is true that at times we shall have to suffer some inconvenience on our journeys, at work, in times of health and in sickness; we shall sometimes have food, clothing or other things not to our liking; but it is precisely then that we ought to bear in mind that we have made profession of poverty and that if we wish to have its merit and reward we ought to bear with its consequences. Let us be on our guard against the kind...

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273 Mt 11:12.  
275 Lk 14:33.  
276 Mt 19:21-22.  
277 Cf Lk 9:3.  
278 1 Tm 6:8.
of poverty censured by St Bernard when he says: “There are some who glory in being called poor, but who will not bear the consequences of poverty. There are those too who are content to be poor provided they want for nothing”.

Should our state of poverty however cause us any inconvenience or suffering let us rejoice with St Paul who declares that he is overjoyed with his affliction. Or again let us do as did the apostles who were filled with happiness when they returned from the Sanhedrin, because they had been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. It is precisely to this sort of poverty that our divine Redeemer not only promised heaven, but assured us of it saying: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Moreover to live in such a state, to dwell willingly in a room that is uncomfortable or poorly furnished, to wear plain apparel, eat course and common food, greatly honours him who has made the vow of poverty because it makes him like Jesus Christ.

It is also part of poverty not to damage anything, to take care of books, clothes, shoes; or also not to be ashamed of using things or wearing garments that are old, mended, or somewhat threadbare.

**Chastity**

The virtue that is supremely necessary, the great virtue, the angelic virtue, the one to crown all others, is the virtue of chastity. He who has this virtue can apply to himself the words of the Holy Spirit: *All good things come to me along with her.* Our Saviour assures us that those who gain this priceless treasure become, even in this life, like the angels of God. But this spotless lily, this precious rose, this pearl beyond all price is beset everywhere by the enemy of souls because he well knows that if he succeeds in snatching it from us, the whole affair of our sanctification may be said to be ruined. Light is changed into darkness, flame into black coal, and the angel of Heaven into Satan, so that every virtue is lost. Here, my dear sons, I believe it will be very useful for your souls if I single out things, which if put into practice, will be to your great advantage; indeed I feel that I can assure you they will preserve this virtue for you and all others as well. Bear in mind then:

1. Do not enter the Congregation before you have consulted some prudent person who will judge if you are likely to be able to keep this virtue.

2. Avoid familiarity with persons of the other sex, and never indulge in special friendships with any of the boys Divine Providence entrusts to our care. Charity and good manners with all but sentimental attachment to none. On this point St Jerome says: “Either love none or love all equally well”.

3. After night prayers go straight to rest and hold no further conversation with anyone until after holy Mass the next day.

4. Keep the senses under control. The Holy Spirit clearly says that the body weighs down the soul. St Paul therefore, although weighed down by his labours, subdued his...
boy with severe self-discipline and wrote: *I pommel my body and subdue it.* I recommend special moderation in eating and drinking. Wine and chastity cannot go together.

5. The haunts, the persons and things of the world present grave dangers for chastity. Keep away from them with all care and not only in body but also in mind and in heart. I do not remember having read or heard it said that a religious had visited his native place and brought back any spiritual advantage. On the contrary there are thousands and thousands who, showing themselves unconvinced of this, have tried it out but were bitterly deceived, while not a few of them found themselves the unhappy victims of their own imprudence and temerity.

6. The exact observance of our holy rules, and especially of the vows and the practices of piety, triumphs over every vice, and is the faithful guardian of chastity. The Christian religion may justly be compared with a strong and fortified city, according to these words of Isaiah: *We have a strong city: he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks.* The vows and rules of a religious community may well be regarded as so many lesser advance fortifications. The walls, the ramparts of religion are the commandments of God and his Church.

To cause their violation the devil makes use of every strategy and deception. But in order to induce religious to transgress, he contrives in the first place to level the outposts and advanced fortifications to the ground, the rules and constitutions of their institute. When the great enemy of souls seduces a religious and makes him violate the divine commandments he first causes him to be careless in things of less importance, and then in things of greater moment; afterwards, he leads him easily enough to break the law of the Lord so proving the truth the Holy Spirit proclaims: *he who despises small things will fail little by little.*

Let us then, dear sons, be faithful to the exact observance of our rules, if we want to be faithful to the divine commandments, especially to the sixth and ninth. Let us also with constancy and diligence that we be solicitous in the exact observance of the practices of piety, the foundation and support of all religious institutes, and then we shall live chaste, almost angelic lives.

**Fraternal charity**

We cannot love God without also loving our neighbour. The same precept which commands us to love God, commands us also to love our neighbour. In fact we read these words in the First Letter of St John the Evangelist: *And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.* In the same verse the apostle warns us “If someone says he loves God and hates his brother, he is a liar.”

When this brotherly love reigns in a community towards one another and all rejoice in the other's good just as if it were their own, then that house becomes Heaven itself.

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286 1 Cor 9:27.
287 Is 26:1.
288 Sir 19:1.
290 1 Jn 4:20-21.
and justifies the words of the Prophet David: *How good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity.* But as soon as self love gains dominion there, and disagreements and dislikes arise amongst the members, then that house quickly resembles Hell. Our Lord takes great pleasure in seeing brethren living in his house *in unum*, that is, united in heart and mind, serving God and helping one another in charity. This is the praise that St Luke had for the early Christians, that they so loved one another that it seemed they had but one heart and one soul.

A great deal of harm is done in religious communities by fault-finding, which is directly opposed to charity. *A whisperer defiles his own soul and is hated in his neighbourhood.* On the contrary what edification that religious gives who always speaks so well of his fellow religious and when occasion arises seeks to excuse his failings! Be careful therefore to avoid all that savours of fault-finding, especially against your companions and still more against your superiors. It is also a case of fault-finding and even worse to put a bad interpretation on virtuous actions or say that they were done with a bad intention.

Be on your guard against telling a companion the evil another may have said of him, for the trouble and rancour that come from it may last for months and even years. What an account these tale-bearers in communities will have to render to God! A man who sows discord among brothers...is an abomination to him.

If you hear anything against another, do what the Holy Spirit enjoins: *Have you heard a word? Let it die with you.*

Be careful not to vex any of your brethren even though it be in jest. Jokes which cause displeasure to our brother and give him offence are contrary to charity. Would you like to be laughed at and derided by others as you hold up your brother to be?

Be on your guard too against disputes. Disagreements will sometimes arise over trifles which are mere nothings, from which it is easy to pass to insults and wrangling which destroy unity and offend deplorably against charity.

If you love charity, try to be affable and gentle in manner to everybody. Meekness is a virtue well loved by Jesus Christ: *Learn from me,* he said, *for I am gentle and humble of heart.* Whatever you do or say show well-mannered kindness, not only towards superiors but towards all, especially to those who have offended you in the past or who look upon you now with an unkindly eye. *Love bears all things;* So he who will not bear another's defects will not have true charity. There is no man on earth, no matter how virtuous he be, who does not have his faults. I therefore he wishes others to bear his defects he should begin by bearing those of others, and thus, as St Paul enjoins, fulfil the law of Christ: *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

We now come to the practice. In the very first place control of one's temper, so easily lost when there is a disagreement; then be careful not to use words which displease and more still guard against crude and harsh ways of dealing with people, for a rude manner can often be more offensive than insulting words. Whenever a brother who has offended you comes to ask your pardon receive him well, do not treat him curtly and give him a

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291 Ps 133:1.
292 Acts 4:32.
293 Ws 21:31.
294 Cf Pr 6:16.19.
295 Ws 19:10.
296 Mt 11:29.
297 1 Cor 13:7.
298 Gal 6:2.
harsh reply; quite otherwise, show true kindness, affection and good will.

If it should happen that it is you who has offended someone, put things right at once, and try to remove all feelings against you from the other's heart, mindful of the teaching of St Paul, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger”, and do this as soon as you can and be reconciled with your brother, overcoming the repugnance that you have in your heart.

Do not content yourself with just loving your companions with words only, but go out to help them. St John, the apostle of charity, advises: *Let us not love in word or in speech but in deed and in truth.* Charity also requires compliance with the reasonable requests of others; but the best of all acts of charity is to have zeal for our neighbour's spiritual good. Whenever an occasion arises for doing good never say that this is not my business, I will not meddle with it; this is the answer given by Cain who dared to answer God, saying: *Am I my brother’s keeper?* Everyone is bound when he can to save his brother from ruin. God himself commands that we take due care of our fellow man. Endeavour therefore to help everyone, both by word and deed, but especially in prayer.

It is a great stimulus to charity to see Jesus Christ in our neighbour and to recall that the good we do to someone is regarded by the Lord as done to himself: *Truly I say to you: as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.* From what has been said you see how necessary and how desirable is this beautiful virtue of charity! Practise it and you will receive blessings in abundance from Heaven.

Practices of piety

Just as food nourishes and preserves the body so do the practices of piety nourish the soul and make it strong in time of temptation. As long as we observe our practices of piety, we shall live in harmony with everyone and we shall see the Salesian cheerful in spirit and happy in his vocation. If on the other hand he neglects them, he will begin to have doubts about his vocation and will undergo strong temptations. Church history shows us that Religious Orders and Congregations have all flourished and promoted the good of religion as long as piety was maintained in vigour amongst them; on the other hand we have seen not a few fall into decay, and others cease to exist, and when? Only when the spirit of piety grew lax and their members began to seek the things that were their own, and not the things which are of Jesus Christ, as St Paul lamented concerning certain Christians.

If therefore, my sons, we value the glory of our Congregation; if we want it to spread and continue its prosperity for the good of our own and for our neighbours' souls, let us be really solicitous never to omit meditation, spiritual reading, the daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament, our weekly Confession, frequent and devout Communion, the Rosary of Our Lady, a little mortification on Friday and other things like that. Although each one of these practices taken by itself does not seem to be a thing of any great

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300 1 Jn 3:18.
301 Gen 4:9.
302 Cf Sir 17:12.
303 Mt 25:40.
305 Cf Ph 2:21.
necessity, nevertheless it contributes efficaciously to the building up of our Christian perfection and salvation. If you would increase and grow great in God's sight, says St Augustine, begin with the little things.

The fundamental practice of piety which in some way embraces them all, consists in making the retreat each year and the exercise for a happy death every month.

He who cannot make this latter exercise in common, should with the permission of his Superior, make it by himself, and he whose occupations will not allow him to employ a whole day upon it should employ at least a part, putting off to another day such work as is not strictly necessary. But let all, more or less, follow these rules:

1. Besides the usual morning meditation, let there be a half-hour's meditation as well the preceding evening on the last things.
2. The Confession which all should make on that day should be more than an ordinary act, having in mind that it may indeed be the last, and holy Communion should be received as though it were Viaticum.
3. Let each one reflect for at least half an hour on the progress or otherwise in virtue during the month, and this especially with regard to observance of the rule; and let form resolutions be made.
4. Let all the rules of the Congregation, or at least part thereof, be read on that day.
5. It would be well to choose on that day some saint as a protector for the coming month.

It is my belief that the salvation of a religious may justly be said to be assured if he approaches the Sacraments every month and puts his conscience in order as if he were really about to leave this life for eternity. If therefore we hold the honour of our Congregation dear, if we really desire the salvation of our soul, let us be observant of our rule and let us also be exact in the most ordinary things, for he who fears God neglects nothing which contributes to his greater glory.306

The "Rendiconto" (manifestation) and its importance307

Confidence in Superiors is one of the things that contributes in a special way to the well-being of a religious society, and to the peace and happiness of each member. By this confidence the members open their hearts to their superior to find relief for the troubles they may have, anxieties connected with their duties cease, and the superiors are able to make provision to avoid unpleasantness and discontent. They get to know the moral and physical strength of the confreres and in consequence can give them those tasks for which they seem best suited. Should any disorder creep in, it is at once discovered and a remedy applied. For this reason it has been laid down that each one should meet with his Superior at least once a month. In this connection our Constitutions say that each one should make known with simplicity and readiness his external faults against the rule, progress made in virtue, difficulties met with, and whatever else he feels the need to reveal to receive counsel and comfort.

The chief points with which such a manifestation ought deal are as follows: 1. Health. - 2. Study or work. - 3. Whether he is able to fulfil his obligations and what

306 Cf Qo 7:18.
diligence he shows. - 4. Whether he has sufficient time to perform his religious duties and what diligence he shows in fulfilling them. - 5. How he manages at prayer and meditation. - 6. With what frequency, devotion and fruit he approaches the Sacraments. - 7. How he observes his vows and whether he has any doubts about his vocation. But it should be noted well that the manifestation only concerns external matters and not matters for Confession. - 8. Whether he has any vexations or troubles, or feels any coolness towards anyone. - 9. Whether he knows of any disorder to which a remedy can be applied, especially if it is a case of preventing some offence against God.

Here now are some words of St Francis de Sales on this subject:

“Every month let each one, in a brief and concise manner, open his heart to his superior, and in all simplicity and faithful confidence lay before him all his secrets with the same simplicity and candour that a child has when it shows its mother the scratches and bruises, wasp stings it may have received. In this way each one shall give an account, not so much of his acquisitions and progress, as of his losses and failings in the exercise of prayer, virtue and the spiritual life, indicating also his temptations and interior troubles not only for his consolation, but for his humiliation too. Happy are those who devoutly and sincerely practise this rule, which contains a portion of that holy infancy which is so much recommended by Our Lord from which proceeds and by which is preserved all true peace of mind”... 308

Rectors are urged never to omit the manifestations of their members. Let all be persuaded that if they make it well, with perfect openness and humility, they will find in it great relief of soul and a powerful aid to progress in virtue, and the whole Congregation will greatly profit by it.

One point in which I recommend the greatest clearness is that of vocation. Let no mystery be made about this with superiors. This is the most important point of all, because on it depends the thread of the life we have to lead. Unhappy he who hides doubts he has about his vocation and determines to leave without seeking good advice and without the opinion of his spiritual director. Such a one might endanger his eternal salvation.

The first reason why it is important and necessary to deal with Superiors in all sincerity is because it enables them the better to govern and direct the members. The Superior is obliged to rule and direct; this is his office. To be a Rector and Superior is precisely this. But if he does not know them because they are not open with him, he cannot possibly direct and help them with counsel and suggestion.

The second reason, which makes what has gone before more obvious, is that the greater the knowledge that the Superiors have of the confreres, the greater will be their care and concern to guard and guide them in times of danger and in difficulties of all kinds arising from time and place.

There is a third reason why sincerity and confidence with Superiors is important: they are thus the better enabled to arrange for and provide what is best for the whole Congregation of whose well-being and honour, together with the honour of each member, by their office they have the duty to take care. When anyone therefore deals frankly with them and gives a full account of himself, the Superior, while safeguarding the member's honour and never compromising him, can then have regard for the general good of the whole Congregation. But if the member does not so open his heart, he could perhaps expose to danger both his own honour and his own soul, and also the honour of the community itself, which depends in some measure on his own. Very great indeed is

the happiness and satisfaction of the religious who is as an open book to his superior to
whom all that disturbs him is well known! If he is charged with office, then he can put
his whole trust in God who will come to his aid and keep him free from trouble. “Lord”,
he will be able to say, “I did not put myself here; I made known my lack of qualities, my
too small spiritual worth: you, Lord, it is who have sent me, you have commanded it, so
supply for my shortcomings”. With this trust he can say with St Augustine: Lord, give
me what you command and command what you will; God is placed, as it were, under an
obligation of giving what he asks. But he who is not open, does not reveal his
weaknesses, what consolation can he expect? It is neither God nor obedience that sends
him, but his own will to put himself forward; he is an intruder, neither called nor bidden
and he will not succeed.

2. Rules for the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of
Christians

In the laborious work of drawing up and gaining pontifical approval of the Salesian
Constitutions, something which took more than fifteen years (1858-1874), Don Bosco carefully
studied the rules of other Institutes, from which he drew various elements. Recourse to these
sources however did not prevent him from giving the Rule of the Society of St Francis de Sales
“content and inspiration which was especially demanded by the youthful and popular nature of
the mission to which the Society was consecrated”. We are aware, from reading the documents,
that “consecration, while having the strong stamp of the Gospel on it”, takes a particular shape
in relation to its special kind of mission and spirit. What follows are the central chapters of
the early rules of the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the chapters that
best define their spirituality.

From the first Rule of the Society of St Francis de Sales

1. The purpose of the Salesian Society is the Christian perfection of its members;
every kind of work of charity, spiritual and corporal, toward young people, especially
poor [young people]; and also the education of young seminarians. It is composed of
priests, clerical students and laymen.

2. Jesus Christ began to do and to teach; likewise shall the Salesian members also
begin by perfecting themselves through the practice of every interior and exterior virtue,
and through the acquisition of knowledge; and then shall they go to work for the benefit
of their neighbour.

3. The first exercise of charity shall be that of gathering together poor and abandoned
young people in order to instruct them in the holy Catholic religion, especially on
Sundays and holy days.

310 G. Bosco, Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales secondo il decreto di
approvazione del 3 aprile 1874, Torino, Tipografia dell’Oratorio 1877 (OE XXIX, 201-288); it is the
Italian translation of the written text approved by the Holy See in 1874.
311 G. Bosco, Regole o Costituzioni, pp. 54-55 (OE XXIX, 251-253).
312 Cf Acts 1:1.
4 Since it often happens that some young people are found that are so abandoned that, unless they are given shelter, every care in their case would be without effect—for this reason, as far as possible, houses shall be opened in which, with the means that Divine Providence will provide, shelter, food and clothing are supplied to them. And while they are instructed in the truths of the Catholic faith, they shall also be started on some trade or work.

5. Moreover, since the dangers that young people who aspire to the ecclesiastical state have to face are many and grave, this society shall take the greatest care to cultivate the piety of those who show a special aptitude for study, and are commendable for [their] good conduct. In admitting young people for the purpose of studies, those who are the poorest [or, poorer] shall be accepted by preference, for the very reason that they could not pursue their studies elsewhere—provided they give some hope of a vocation to the ecclesiastical state.

6. The need of upholding the Catholic Religion also among the Christian people at large is keenly felt, especially in villages—hence the Salesian members shall zealously endeavour to give spiritual retreats [designed] to strengthen and direct in piety those who come to hear them out of a desire to change their lives.

7. Likewise they shall endeavour to spread good books among the people, making use of all the means that Christian charity inspires. Lastly, through the spoken and written word, they shall try to erect a barrier against irreligion and heresy, which in so many ways attempt to make inroads among simple and uneducated people. To this end should be directed the sermons occasionally preached to the people, as well as the triduums, the novenas and the spreading of good books.

**The form of this Society**

1. All the members lead the common life bound only by the bond of fraternal charity and of simple vows, which binds them [together] so that they form one heart and one soul, in order to love and serve God by the virtue of obedience, poverty and holiness of life, and by a committed Christian way of living.

2. Clerics and Priests, even after making their vows, shall retain possession of their patrimonies or simple benefices; but they shall neither administer them nor enjoy the fruits thereof, except in accordance with the Rector’s will.

3. The administration of patrimonies, benefices and of anything whatever that is brought into the Society pertains to the Superior General. He shall administer them either personally or through others; and for as long as the individual remains in the Congregation the same Superior shall receive their annual revenues.

4 Every priest is also bound to hand over the Mass stipends to the same general or local superior. Everyone then, priests, clerics or laymen will hand over all money and any gifts they may receive in any way.

5. Everyone is bound by his vows, whether triennial or perpetual. Nor can anyone be released from vows except through dispensation from the Supreme Pontiff or through dismissal from the Society by the Superior General.

6. Let each one persevere in his vocation until the end of his life. Let him call to mind daily those most weighty words of Our Lord and Saviour: *Nemo mittens manum ad aratrum et respiciens retro aptus est regno Dei*; No one who has put his hand to the plough and looks back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

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314 Lk 9:62.
7. Nevertheless, should anyone leave the Society he shall not be entitled to claim anything for himself for the time he has spent therein. He shall, however, recover his full right over the immovable, as also the movable, goods the ownership of which he had reserved to himself upon entering into the Congregation. But he shall not be entitled to claim any fruit, nor demand any account of their administration for the time he has remained in the Society.

8. One who brings money, furniture or any other thing into the Congregation with the intention of retaining ownership of it must hand a list of all these things to the superior, who once he has seen it, will give him a receipt. Should the member then want to take back items that have become worn through use, he will receive them in the state in which they are then found and will not be entitled to any recompense of any kind.

**The vow of obedience**

1. The prophet David would earnestly beseech God that He would teach him to do His holy will. The Lord, our Saviour has assured us that He came down to earth not to do His own will, but that of His Father in heaven. This is the purpose of the vow of obedience, namely, that we may be all the more certain of doing the holy will of God.

2. Let each one be submissive to his superior and look to him in all things as to a loving father; let him obey him unreservedly, promptly, cheerfully, and humbly, as the person who in that command expresses the very will of God.

3. Let no one be anxious to ask for any particular thing or to refuse it. But when one knows that a particular thing is harmful or necessary, let him respectfully mention the fact to his Superior, who will take care to see to [the member’s] needs.

4. Hence it is good that the members frequently give an account of their external life to their higher superiors of the Congregation. Let each one with simplicity spontaneously manifest to his Superiors external faults against the constitutions as well as his progress in virtue, so that he may receive from them counsels and comfort, and, if needs be, appropriate admonitions.

5. Let everyone obey without any sort of resistance, either in deed, or in word, or in heart, lest he lose the merit of the virtue of obedience. The more repugnant the thing commanded is to him who does it, the greater will be his merit before God for having faithfully obeyed.

**The vow of poverty**

1. The vow of poverty of which we speak here has to do only with the administration of something, whatever it may be, and not with its possession; Those, therefore, who have made the vows in this Society can retain the radical ownership of their goods; but the administration and the disposal and use of their revenues is absolutely forbidden to them. Moreover, before taking the vows, they must cede, even if only in a private form, the administration, and the usufruct [revenues] and use thereof to anyone they wish, also to the Congregation, if they think they would like to do so. To this cession they may also attach the condition that it may be at any time revocable: but still the professed cannot in conscience use the right of revocation, without the consent of the Holy See.

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316. Cf Ps 143:10.
All the foregoing must likewise be observed with respect to those goods which the member may acquire by inheritance, after making his profession.

2. Nevertheless the members can freely dispose of the ownership, either by will-and-testament, or with the Rector Major’s permission by some public act. In this latter case, the concession which they have made of the administration, usufruct and use, shall cease, unless it is their desire that the concession should, notwithstanding the cession of ownership, still continue in force for a further such length of time as they may be pleased to specify.

3. The professed, moreover, shall not be forbidden to perform, with the Rector Major’s permission, all those acts in respect of property that the laws prescribe.

4. The professed are not allowed to appropriate or reserve to themselves anything that they have acquired either by their own industry, or by the means that the Congregation offers; but everything must be contributed to the common benefit of the Congregation.

5. It is part of this vow [that the members should strive] to keep the[ir] rooms in the simplest possible style, seeking with all their might to adorn the heart with virtue, and not the[ir] person or the walls of their room.

6. Let no one, either in the house or out of it, keep any money in his possession or deposited with others, for any reason whatsoever.

7. Finally, let each one keep his heart detached from every earthly thing. Let him be content with what the Society provides, as regards food and clothing; and let him not keep in his possession anything whatsoever, without the superior’s special permission.

The vow of chastity\textsuperscript{319}

1. Whoever deals with abandoned youth must certainly make every effort to enrich himself with every virtue. But the virtue that must be cultivated most, which must always be kept before our eyes, the angelic virtue, the virtue dearest of all to the Son of God, is the virtue of chastity.

2. Whoever does not have the well-founded hope, with divine help, of preserving this virtue in words, works, thoughts, should not join this Congregation, because he would be exposed at every step to great danger.

3. Words, looks, including the most innocuous, are sometimes badly interpreted by the young who have already been victims of human passions. Therefore one must use the greatest caution in speaking and dealing with anything with young people of any age and circumstance.

4. Keep away from worldly gatherings where this virtue could be endangered, especially conversations with people of the other sex.

5. Let no one visit homes of friends or acquaintances without the consent of the superior, who, if he can, will always provide him with a companion.

6. Ways of diligently safeguarding this virtue are frequent Confession and Communion, exactly carrying out the advice of the confessor, fleeing idleness, mortification of the senses, frequent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, frequent brief prayers to Mary most holy, St Joseph, St Francis de Sales, St Aloysius Gonzaga, who are the principal protectors of our Congregation.

Pratice of piety\textsuperscript{320}

1. The active life to which our society is mostly committed deprives its members of the opportunity of engaging in many practices in common. They shall accordingly

\textsuperscript{319} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 60-61 (OE XXIX, 258-259).

\textsuperscript{320} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 80-83 (OE XXIX, 278-281).
endeavour to make up [for this lack] by mutual good example and by the perfect fulfilment of the general duties of a Christian.

2. Each member shall approach the sacrament of penance every week [administered] by confessors who are approved by the ordinary and who exercise that ministry toward the members with the Rector’s permission. The priests shall celebrate holy Mass every day: Seminarians [chierici] and Coadjutors shall take care to assist at the Sacrifice daily, receive holy Communion on Sundays and holy days and every Thursday. Personal composure, a clear, devout, distinct pronunciation of the words contained in the divine offices, modesty in speech, looks and gait both inside and outside the house, ought to be so outstanding in our members that particularly by these traits they are to be distinguished from others.

3. Every day each one, besides vocal prayers, shall devote no less than half-an-hour to mental prayer, unless one is prevented [from doing so] by the calls of the sacred ministry. In that case he shall make up for it by frequent ejaculatory prayers and by offering to God with greater fervour and love those labours that keep him from the prescribed exercises of piety.

4 Every day the third part of the Rosary of the Immaculate Mother of God shall be recited, and some time shall be devoted to spiritual reading.

5. Friday in every week shall be kept as a fast in honour of the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. On the last day of every month each one, leaving all temporal cares aside, shall recollect himself and shall make the exercise which is customarily made [to prepare] for a good death. He shall dispose all his affairs both spiritual and temporal as though he had to leave the world and set out on the way to eternity.

7. Every year, each one shall make a retreat for about ten, or at least six, days which will conclude with his annual confession. Before being received into the Society, and before taking vows, each one shall devote ten days to a retreat directed by spiritual masters [and shall make] a general confession.

8. When Divine Providence calls a member, whether he be a layman, cleric or priest, to eternal life, the Rector of the house in which the member lived will immediately see that ten Masses are celebrated in suffrage for his soul. Other then, who are not priests, will approach holy Communion at least once to this end.

9. Whenever the parents of a member die, priests in the house where that member lives will likewise celebrate ten masses in suffrage for their souls. Those who are not priests will approach holy Communion.

10. On the death of the Rector Major all the priests of the Congregation shall celebrate Mass for him and all non-priest members will offer up the usual suffrages for two reasons: (1) out of gratitude for the pains and labours sustained in the government of the Society; (2) for his release from the pains of Purgatory of which we may have been the cause.

11. Every year after the Feast of St Francis de Sales all priests will celebrate Mass for deceased members. All the others will approach holy Communion and recite a third part of the Rosary of Our Lady with other prayers.

12. Each one will take special care: 1. not to adopt an special habits even in unimportant things; 2. to keep their clothing, bed and cell clean and decent; and everyone will avoid any kind of silly affectation or ambition. Nothing adorns the religious better than holiness of life, making him an example to others in everything.

13. Each one will be prepared, when the need arises, to suffer heat, cold, thirst, hunger, fatigue, scorn whenever these redound to the greater glory of God, are spirituall useful to others and for the salvation of his own soul.
From the first Rule of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1878)\textsuperscript{321}

\textbf{To the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians}\textsuperscript{322}

Through the special favour of our Heavenly Father, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, to which you have the happiness to belong, has for some time past been making great progress. In the course of a few years we have been able to open many Houses in Piedmont, Liguria, France, and even in distant America.

While the Institute was centred in the Mother house at Mornese, a few manuscript copies of the Rule was enough to enable every Sister to become acquainted with it; but now that Divine Providence has multiplied the Houses and the number of Sisters has increased, these copies are not sufficient.

Wherefore I have deemed it conducive to the greater glory of God, and to the benefit of your souls to have the Rule printed, and I now present it to you. It has already been approved by many Bishops who have found it well suited to sanctify one who aspires to be entirely devoted to Jesus Christ, and who desires at the same time to employ her whole life in the service of her neighbour, and especially in the education of poor children. Furthermore, the Institute itself was commended and approved by a special decree given by the Right Rev. Bishop of Acqui, in whose diocese the Institute had its origin in 1872, and where it still flourishes.

You should therefore hold in high esteem the Rules which govern the Institute and should meditate upon them, but above all remember that it would avail nothing even to know them by heart, if you did not practise them. Wherefore each one must be deeply solicitous to observe them with exactitude. To this end both the vigilance and zeal of Superiors and the diligence and efforts of the Sisters should be directed. By this means you will find in your Congregation peace of heart, the path to Heaven, and thus become Saints.

Meanwhile I gladly avail myself of this opportunity to urge you to pray always for the repose of the souls of the Very Rev. Fr Domenico Pestarino, the first Director of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, whom God made use of to lay the foundations of the Institute and who by his charity and zeal, has indeed merited our deepest gratitude.

Pray also for one another that God may keep you constant and faithful to your vocation, and make you worthy to accomplish much good for his greater glory. Pray especially for those Sisters who have already gone, or will go to far distant lands in order to bear thither the name of Jesus Christ, and to make him known and loved. Pray above all for the Holy Catholic Church, for its visible Head on earth, for your Bishops and Pastors; pray also for the Salesian Society to which you are affiliated, and do not forget to pray for me who have your happiness at heart.

May Our Lady Help of Christians protect us and be our defence in life and in death; through her powerful intercession may she obtain from her Divine Son the inestimable grace of being one day gathered under her maternal mantle in eternal bliss.

Turin, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1878.

Fr John Bosco


\textsuperscript{322} G. Bosco, Regole o Costituzioni per l’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice aggregate alla Società Salesiana, Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1878, pp. 3-6 (OE XXX, 293-296).
Purpose of the Institute

1. The object of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is for them to attend to their own perfection and to cooperate in the salvation of others, especially by giving a Christian education to the girls of the poorer classes.

2. Therefore the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will endeavour, above everything else, to practise Christian virtues, and then to act for the benefit of their neighbour. They will take special care in directing schools, teachers, kindergartens, festive oratories, and also opening workshops to the advantage of poor girls in the cities and villages. Wherever there is need they will also provide assistance to the poor and the sick and in other works of charity of the kind.

3. They may also receive in their houses girls of humble condition but will never teach them sciences or arts that are for noble and distinguished families. They shall put all their efforts into training them in piety, making them good Christians and also able, in due course, to earn an honest livelihood.

4 The Institute is composed of unmarried women who profess the common life in everything with three lots of temporary vows of three years each. The major superior, in agreement with the chapter superior, when the triennial vows have been professed one or two times, may also admit [the Sister] to perpetual vows when she judges that this would be good for her and for the Institute.

The principle virtues recommended for novices to study and for the professed to practise

1. Patient and zealous charity, not only with children, but also with young girls.
2. Simplicity and modesty; inward and outward spirit of mortification; strict observance of poverty.
3. Obedience of will and judgement, willingly, and without comment accepting advice and corrections and the duties entrusted to her.
4 The spirit of prayer with which the Sisters carry out their practices of piety will keep them in God's presence and abandoned to his sweet Providence.
5. These virtues must be well-proven and deep-rooted in the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians since they must combine the active and contemplative life in equal measure, copying Martha and [Mary] Magdalene.

The vow of chastity

1. A constant exercise of all the virtues to an uncommon degree is needed in order to continually practise charity towards our neighbour, and to deal fruitfully with poor girls. But the angelic virtue, the virtue dear above all others to the Son of God, the virtue of chastity should be practised in an eminent degree by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. In the first place because the duty which they have of instructing and guiding their neighbour in the way of salvation is like that of the Holy Angels. It is therefore necessary that they should live with a pure heart and in the angelic state, since virgins are called Angels of the Earth; secondly because their vocation, to be properly carried out demands a total detachment, both internal and external, from all that is not of God.

323 G. Bosco, Costituzioni per l’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice, pp. 255-256.
324 Ibid., p. 270.
325 Ibid., pp. 277-278.
2. In order to observe this vow the Sisters must practise a most vigilant guard over the senses which are like doors through which the enemy of the soul can enter. They must no longer live and breathe but for their Heavenly Spouse alone, in all uprightness, with all purity and holiness of spirit, of words, deportment and of deeds, by means of immaculate and angelic conversation, bearing in mind the words of Our Lord Who says "Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God". 326

3. In order to preserve so great a treasure they shall call to mind the presence of God, turning to Him often with acts of lively faith, firm hope and ardent love. They shall flee from idleness; practise inward and outward mortification, the former without limits, the latter to the extent that obedience permits.

4. Let them foster a special devotion for Mary Immaculate which will also serve effectively for preserving the beautiful virtue, to the glorious St Joseph and to their Guardian Angels; and let them never forget that faithful spouses of Jesus Christ who shall have lived and died in the state of virginity, shall enjoy a particular glory in Heaven where together with Mary they shall sing to the Divine Lamb a hymn which it is not granted to the other Blessed to sing.

**The vow of obedience**327

1. The life of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, needing to be a continual holocaust, would be lacking in sacrifice if their own will were to enter in, and this is precisely what they offer to the Divine Majesty in the vow of obedience. Furthermore, we know that the divine Saviour himself said that he came on earth not to do his own will but that of his heavenly Father.328 It is to be certain that they carry out God's will in every action that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians make the vow of holy obedience.

2. This vow obliges them to be only preoccupied with things that the superior judges to be for the greater glory of God and the advantage of souls, according to the rules of this Institute.

3. The Sisters should obey in a spirit of faith, seeing God in their superiors, convinced that what is ordained by obedience will redound to their greater spiritual advantage.

4. Let their obedience be willing and cheerful, that is without delay, dispute or sadness.

5. Finally, let it be prompt, without judging or criticising the hidden motives of the command.

6. Let no one be unduly anxious to ask for any particular thing or to refuse it. But on perceiving that such and such a thing is either harmful or necessary, let her respectfully mention the fact to the superior who will make the necessary provision for the need.

7. Let everyone have great confidence in their superior and consider her as an affectionate mother. Let them turn to her in all their doubts, manifest their sorrows and all their difficulties.

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326 Mt 5:8.
327 G. BOSCO, Costituzioni per l’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice, p. 279.
328 Cf Jn 6:38.
The vow of poverty

1. The observance of the vow of poverty in the Institute of Mary Help of Christians essentially consists of detachment from every earthly good, practised through common life with regard to food and clothing, not keeping anything for their own use, without special permission of the superior.

2. It is part of this vow [that the Sisters should] keep their rooms in the simplest possible style, seeking with all their might to adorn the heart with virtue and not their person of the walls of their room.

3. No one should keep, in the Institute or out of it, money as their own property, not even deposited for some reason, without the express permission of the superior.

4. Voluntary poverty makes us true followers of the Saviour who to leave us a great example practised it from his birth until his death.

General Rules

1. Each day the Sisters will commemorate the Seven Sorrows of Mary, on seven occasions, and at the end of each they will recite a Hail Mary with the prayer that they shall also often repeat in the course of the day: Eternal father, we offer you etc. Then from Vespers on Holy Saturday until Sunday in Albis [First Sunday after Easter], and throughout the octave of the Feast of Mary's Assumption into Heaven they will recite the Seven Joys of Mary, one for each occasion to replace the Seven Sorrows.

2. In the quarter of an hour assigned for spiritual reading they will use books that the Superior will indicate. Recommended above all are: The Imitation Of Christ, The Holy Nun, and the Practice Of Loving Jesus Christ by St Alphonsus, Doctor of the Church, the Introduction to the Devout Life by St Francis de Sales adapted for youth, the Rodriguez, and the lives of saints who dedicated themselves to the education of children of a tender age.

3. All the Sisters, from their various houses, should come once a year to the Central House, or if they are a long distance away, to the House on which they depend, to make their retreat. If the work they have does not make it possible for them to come together for the retreat, there will be two or three separate possibilities, as judged by the Superior.

4. Letters to the Sisters, or that they wrote to others, will be opened and read where the superior judges this to be good. She then may pass them on or keep them.

5. However they have permission to write, without requesting it, to the Supreme Pontiff, the Major Superior and Superior General and likewise to receive answers to these letters without them being opened.

G. Bosco, Costituzioni per l’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice, p. 280.
Ibid., pp. 281-286.
Eternal Father, we offer you the blood of Jesus Christ in reparation for our sins and for the needs of the holy Church.
These are two spiritual works by St Alphonsus Maria de Liguori (1696-1787), regularly reprinted throughout the Eighteenth Century and the early part of the Nineteenth: The true spouse of Jesus Christ that is, the holy nun, by means of the virtues proper to the religious (first edition: 1760); The practice of loving Jesus Christ, drawn from the words of St Paul: “Charitas patiens est, benigna est, etc.” ... for the use of souls who desire to accept eternal salvation and walk the way of perfection (first edition: 1768).
6. When they are visited by family members of other people, these will be taken to the parlour accompanied by a Sister who is assigned by the Superior. On other occasions for essential visits it is recommended that the Sisters exercise great prudence and Christian modesty and superiors should take all the necessary cautions to avoid everything untoward. Since the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have many things to do, and when it is not a case of matters of importance, these people should not be allowed to visit more than once a month.

7. Let the Sisters love one another in the Lord, but to be careful about relationships amongst themselves or with anyone in terms of particular friendships which take us away from perfect love of God and end up being a plague in the community.

8. No one is allowed to give commissions, not to school children or family or anyone, except with a prior understanding of the superior, to whom any correspondence should be referred.

9. Each Sister should regard herself as less than all the others, thus no one will be lacking in humility nor will she refuse even the most humble tasks in the house assigned her by the superior according to her abilities and according to what she prudently judges to be good in the Lord.

10. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will always be happy with their Sisters, laughing, joking etc., always, however, as it would seem the angels do amongst themselves; but whenever people of the other sex are present they will deport themselves seriously and with dignity. When out on the street they will walk with great composure and modesty, never staring at people or things they come across, but nevertheless greeting people who greet them, or ecclesiastics who are nearby, with a nod of the head.

11. In the house and outside they will always speak humbly, not maintaining their own point of view, avoiding especially any harsh or biting words, words of reproach, vanity regarding themselves or the good things the Lord has deigned to do for them. All their activities in private and in common will be done solely for God. They will never speak about status, age, wealth, if they had any of this in the world. They will never raise their voice when speaking with someone, even during recreation. When in the presence of people of the other sex, their speech will be serious, because should they be people superior to them, ecclesiastics for example, they will give due respect to their status; if they are lay people, then decorum and good example are required.

12. All their efforts will be to show, in their dealings and whole demeanour, who they need to be, that is, imitators of Jesus Christ Crucified, and servants of the poor. In church they will stand in a composed manner, erect, will make a full genuflection when passing in front of the altar of the Blessed Sacrament.

13. They will take refreshment together in the refectory with the food given them. They will never complain about the food, nor discuss it amongst themselves, but if they have some need will confidently manifest it to the superior. No one may enter the kitchen without permission.

14. So long as the place permits it, each will sleep in a separate room but should not keep it locked; nor should they enter the dormitory outside of hours without permission. They will not use a mattress except because of illness or other similar need.

15. Next to the bed they will keep a holy water font, a crucifix with a wooden cross, a small picture of Mary Help of Christians or the Immaculate Conception with a black frame.

16. Clothing will be uniform, modest and humble as is proper for poor religious. The habit will be black, with long sleeves that reach to the knuckles of the fingers and 46 centimetres wide; the cape will come down to the belt. Shoes will be of black leather, as
befits the poor. They will never carry gloves but when they need to use them they will not be of silk, fine leather, or light colour. The professed will carry a crucifix around their neck, the novices a medal of Mary Help of Christians.

17. Linen will always be appropriate for use by the poor and kept in common after profession. Each Sister will take care of her own habit and other things she uses, keeping them very clean; she will see that the veil, apron, clothes etc are folded whenever these items are not being worn.

18. Cutlery and china will be of durable material as much as possible, but not luxurious.

19. Every Saturday the Sister in charge of the linen, which is kept in a common wardrobe, will bring to each one's bed everything needed for changing and each Sister will then take changed items to the assigned place.

20. Whatever is brought as a gift to the Sisters will be handed over to the superior who will dispose of it as she sees best, without her being obliged to explain her decisions. The Sisters will not give gifts to people outside nor amongst themselves without express permission: nor are they allowed to lend or change anything without the Superior's consent.

21. Each one will look after her health, so when a Sister does not feel well, without hiding or exaggerating her illness, she will advise the superior so her needs can be provided for. At a time of illness she will obey the infirmarian and doctor so they may look after her body as they believe best before God. The Sister will also try to show patience and be resigned to God's will, putting up with the privations that come with poverty, maintaining imperturbable tranquillity of spirit, putting herself in the Lord's hands, for he is a loving Father, whether it be in the matter of health, or whether she is afflicted with illness and pain. To keep up their spirits, the sick confined to bed will be given holy Communion at least once a week, when the kind of illness and the place permits it.

22. The Sisters will always endeavour to remain united by the sweet bond of charity, since it would be deplorable if those who took the imitation of Jesus Christ as their goal were to overlook the observance of the commandment he most recommended, to the point where it is called his commandment. So as well as mutual sympathy and impartial love, it is also laid down that should it happen that someone is lacking in charity to another Sister, she should say sorry as soon as she calmly recognises her fault or at least before going to sleep.

23. For greater perfection in charity each one will give preference to what her Sisters like rather than her own, each one will help and support each other with displays of kindness and holy friendship, nor will they ever let themselves give in to feelings of jealousy of one another.

24. They will desire and will try to do for their neighbour all the good possible, always with the intention of helping and serving Our Lord Jesus Christ in the person of his poor people, especially by assisting, serving, consoling Sisters who are ill and afflicted and by promoting the spiritual good of girls in the villages and towns where they live.

25. Keeping their heart open to the superior will help much in advancing in religious perfection, since, after the confessor she is the one who is destined by God to direct her in the way of virtue. Therefore once a month and even more often, if needed, they will manifest their external activity to her with all simplicity and sincerity, and receive advice and counsel from her in order to succeed well in the practice of mortification and

334 Cf Jn 15:12.
the observance of the holy rules of the Institute. Internal matters are excluded from these manifestations as well as external matters when these are matter for confession, unless out of a spirit of humility one manifests them voluntarily to receive counsel and direction.

26. All the Sisters will be present at the conference that the superior will give each Sunday to instruct them in their duties, as also to correct defects that could diminish fervour and observance in the community.

27. Each will take the greatest care with the practices of piety, from the observance of which comes that inner fervour which moves us to unite ourselves in everything with Jesus Christ our divine exemplar and spouse of faithful souls.

28. The charity then which keeps the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians united during life, should not cease after their death. So when a Sister is called to eternal life, her death will be communicated to all the Houses, so that they may go to holy Communion and recite the Rosary in suffrage for her soul. In the house where she died a Mass will be celebrated in the presence of her body, and the office of the Dead or the complete Rosary will be said. The body will be dressed in her religious habit and accompanied with decorum to burial.

29. On the occasion of the death of the Major Superior and the General Superior, as well as the above suffrages, a Requiem will be celebrated in all Houses of the Institute.

30. May the abundant peace and mercy of God come down upon all who follow these rules.

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3. Circular Letters on religious perfection

Don Bosco’s circular letters to the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are small masterpieces of spirituality. The Saint expresses in them a holistic and total view of religious life: we give ourselves to the Lord through consecration, ready to follow him through tribulations until death, courageously facing up to fatigue and difficulty in order to win souls for God. Seen this way the Salesian and the Salesian Sister are encouraged to remain firm in their vocation, despite everything; to flee worldly spirit; to practise obedience and poverty; to keep their heart constantly tuned to God; to know how to put up with all kinds of inconvenience serenely and generously; to perfectly observe the Rule; to want holiness not by “extraordinary deeds, but common ones”; to aspire to being “able instruments of God’s glory by carrying out the duties and fulfilling the occupations proper to the Institute”.

The first object of our Society is the sanctification of its members

Turin, 9 June 1867, Pentecost Sunday

Perhaps our Society will be definitively approved very soon and therefore I need to speak with my beloved sons more frequently. Since I cannot always do this in person I will try to do it at least through a letter. I will begin then by saying something about the general purpose of the Society and then we will move on to speaking once again of the particular observances of this same Society.


336 E(m) II, pp. 385-387. Don Bosco’s first circular letter to the Salesians.
The first object of our Society is the sanctification of its members. Therefore each one on entering will strip himself of every other thought, every other concern. Whoever enters to enjoy a calm untroubled life, have comfort and pursue studies, be freed from his parents' commands or be exempt from obedience to some superior, would have a twisted purpose and his would no longer be that Sequere me of the Saviour's, since he would be following his own temporal interests and not the good of souls.

The apostles were praised by the Saviour and were promised an eternal kingdom not because they abandoned the world, but because by abandoning it they showed themselves ready to follow him along the way of tribulation, as in fact happened, consuming their life with fatigue, penance and suffering, and eventually suffering martyrdom for the faith.

Nor is it a good reason for one to enter or remain in the Society believing he is essential to it. Let each one have this firmly etched on his mind and in his heart: beginning from the General Superior down to the least of the members: no one is essential to the Society. God alone is its head, its absolutely necessary master. Therefore its members must turn to their head, their true master, the one who will reward them, to God, and let each one join the Society out of love for him; out of love for him let him work, obey, abandon whatever he possesses in the world in order to be able to say at the end of our life to the Saviour whom we have chosen as our model: ecce nos reliquimus [omnia] et secuti sumus te, quid ergo dabis nobis?337

So while we say that everyone ought enter the Society led only by his desire to serve God with greater perfection and to do good for himself, that means doing what is truly good for himself, for his spiritual and eternal good. Whoever seeks an easy and comfortable life does not enter our Society for a good purpose. Our basis for this are the words of the Saviour who says: “Whoever wants to be my disciple, let him sell what he owns in the world, give it to the poor and follow me”.338 But where do we go, where do we follow him, if he did not even have a place to lay his head? Whoever wishes to be my disciple, says the Lord, follows me in prayer, penance, and especially by denying himself, accepting the cross of daily tribulations and following me: abneget semetipsum, tollat crucem suam quotidie, et sequatur me.339 But how far does he follow him? Until death, and if necessary, even death on a cross.

That is what someone does in our Society who wears himself out in sacred ministry, teaching or other priestly activity, until death, even a violent one in prison, in exile, by the sword, water, fire; until the point where having suffered or died with Jesus Christ on earth he can rejoice with him in Heaven.

This seems to me to be the meaning of those words of St Paul who tells all Christians: Qui vult gaudere cum Christo oportet pati cum Christo.340

Once a member has entered with these good dispositions he must show that he is without pretence and accept with pleasure any task that might be entrusted to him. Teaching, study, work, preaching, confession, in church, outside church, the humblest

337 What about us? We have left everything and followed you; what are we to have then? (Mt 19:27).
338 Cf Mt 19:21.
339 Let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me (Lk 9:23).
340 Whoever wishes to rejoice with Christ must suffer with Christ. Quotation inspired by Rm 8:17: “…coheredes autem Christi, si tamen compatimur, ut et conglorificemur” (…coheirs with Christ, if we really do share in his sufferings to also share in his glory).
tasks have to be taken up happily and willingly because God does not look at the task but at the intention of the one doing it. So all duties are equally noble because equally worthy of merit in God's eyes.

My dear sons, put trust in your Superiors; they have to render a strict account to God for their works; therefore they get to know your abilities, your tendencies and they make arrangements that are compatible with your strength, but always in a way that they can redound to the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls.

If only our confreres were to enter the Society with these dispositions our houses would certainly become a true earthly paradise! Peace and harmony would reign amongst individuals in every family and charity would be the everyday clothing of the one who commands; obedience and respect would precede the steps, works and even the thoughts of the Superiors. Yes, we would have a family of brothers gathered around their father to promote the glory of God on earth, to then go one day to love him and praise him in the immense glory of the blessed in Heaven.

May God reward all your efforts with blessings, and may the grace of the Lord sanctify your actions and help you to persevere in doing good. Amen.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ

Fr John Bosco

Unity of spirit and unity of administration

[Turin, end of April 1868]

To my beloved sons and confreres of the Society of St Francis de Sales.

The month of May that we usually consecrate to Mary is about to begin and I wish to profit from this occasion to speak to my dear sons and confreres and put some things before them that I could not do in the Conference of St Francis de Sales.

I am convinced that you all have the firm desire of persevering in the Society and so acting with all your strength to win souls for God and firstly saving your own. To succeed in this great endeavour as a general basis we must have the general concern of putting the rules of the Society into practice. Because our Constitutions would be of no help to anyone if they were like a dead letter just to be left lying on the desk. If we want our Society to go ahead with the Lord's blessing it is essential that every article of the Constitutions is a norm for our activity. Nevertheless there are some practical and very effective matters for achieving the purpose proposed and amongst them I note unity of spirit and unity of administration.

By unity of spirit I mean the firm, constant decision to want or not want those things that the Superior considers to redound to the greater glory of God. This decision should never waver however serious the obstacles that oppose spiritual and eternal good, according to the teaching of St Paul: *Caritas omnia suffert, omnia sustinet*. 342 This decision leads the confrere to being punctual in his duties not just because of the command given him, but for the glory of God it is his intention to promote. This is where his readiness comes from to put the established time in for meditation, prayer, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, examination of conscience, spiritual reading. It is true

341 E(m) II, pp. 529-531.
342 Charity is ready to endure all things; cf 1 Cor 13:7.
that the Rule prescribes these things, but unless there is a supernatural motive for observing them, our rules are forgotten.

What contributes powerfully to preserving this unity of spirit is making frequent use of the holy Sacraments. Let priests do whatever they can to celebrate holy Mass regularly and devoutly; those who are not priests should try to go to Communion as often as possible. But the fundamental issue lies in frequent Confession. Let everyone try to observe what the Rule prescribes in this regard. Then, special confidence is necessary with the Superior of the house in which each one lives. The great defect is this: many people seek to misrepresent the dispositions of the Superior, or judge them to be of little importance, and meanwhile they waver in their observance of the Rule, damaging themselves, causing annoyance to the Superiors, and omitting or at least neglecting things that would have powerfully contributed to the good of souls. So let each one strip himself of his own will and renounce thinking of his own good; seek only what redounds to the greater glory of God and then go ahead.

The following difficulty then arises: in practice we encounter cases where it seems better to do differently from what was commanded. That is not true. The best thing is always to be obedient, never changing the spirit of the Rule as interpreted by the respective Superior. Henceforth, let each one try his best to interpret, practise, recommend the observance of the Rule amongst his confreres; and do for his neighbour everything the superior judges to be for the greater glory of God and the good of souls. I regard this conclusion to be the fundamental basis of a Religious Society.

Unity of administration must go with unity of spirit. A religious proposes to put into practice the Saviour's saying: it means renouncing what he has or could have in the world in the hope of a better recompense in Heaven. Father, mother, brothers, sisters, house, all kinds of things, all offered for the love of God. Except that even if the soul is united with the body it still needs the material means for being nurtured, covered and to act. Therefore while he renounces all he had, he tries to join a Society in which he can provide for the necessities of life without having to worry about temporal administration. So how should a Society arrange matters to deal with temporal things? The rules of the Society provide for all; so by practising the Rule every need is satisfied. One garment, a slice of bread are enough for a religious. When there is need for more, he indicates this to the superior and it will be provided. But this is where everyone's efforts have to focus. Whoever can procure some advantage for the Society should do so, but never make himself the focus. Efforts should be made to see that there is a single purse, just as there should be a single will. Whoever seeks to sell, buy, change or keep money for his own use... whoever does that is like a farmer who is throwing wheat away and tossing it amongst the husks while the threshers are threshing it. In regard to this I must urge you never to keep money under the false pretext of it being useful for the Society. What is most useful for the Society is observance of the Rule.

Clothes, your room, its furniture should be far from being amongst the finest. The religious must be ready at any moment to leave his cell and appear before his Creator without anything that might accuse him once he has left it and without giving the Judge any reason to reproach him.

Let everything proceed then, guided by obedience, but humbly and confidently. Nothing should be hidden from the Superior, nothing. Let each one be as open as a child is to his father, with complete sincerity. this way the Superior himself will be able to know the state of his confreres, provide for their needs and take the decisions which will make it easier to observe the Rule and that will be of advantage to the whole Society.

343 Volva, in old Piedmontese means chaff, husks, the outside covering of wheat, cf V. DI SANT’ALBINO, Gran dizionario piemontese-italiano, Torino, Unione Tipografico Editrice 1859, p. 146.
One could say many things about this. That can be done in another letter, through appropriate conferences and especially in the next retreat at Trofarello, if God in his great mercy preserves us, as I hope he will. This will help us next September to bring all this together.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always and grant us the spirit of fervour and the previous gift of perseverance in the Society. Amen.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ

Fr John Bosco

Ways of cultivating vocations and preserving the spirit of piety

Turin, 12 January 1876

My dear sons in Jesus Christ,

Having completed my visit to our houses, I feel the need to spend some time with you, my dear sons, on matters that could be for the greater glory of God and to the advantage of our Congregation.

Before anything else I am happy to be able to reassure you that I have been very happy with the material and moral progress, both in what refers to internal administration and in our external social relationships. There is work being done, the Constitutions of the Society are observed, discipline is being maintained, people are frequenting the holy Sacraments, the spirit of piety is being fostered and vocations cultivated amongst those with the good fortune to show signs of being called to the ecclesiastical state. Thanks be to God for all this. It is to his goodness and mercy that we owe the little good we are achieving amongst us.

I also have the consolation of sharing with you how our Society is growing day by day. The year just finished a number of new houses were opened; others will be opened this year, 1876. Personnel is growing in number and in approach, but as soon as someone becomes suitable to take up a responsibility, Divine Providence immediately presents an opportunity to put him to work.

What can we say of the requests to open houses in so many places? In many cities in Italy, France, England; in North, Central and South America and especially in the Empire of Brazil and in the Argentine Republic; in Algeria, Africa, Egypt, in Palestine, India, Japan, China, Australia there are millions and millions of reasonable beings still buried in the darkness of error, but from the brink of perdition they raise their voices and cry: “Lord, send us workers of the Gospel who can come and bring us the light of truth and point out the only way that can lead to salvation”. A few of our confreres, as you well know, have already given ear to these moving voices and have left for the Argentine Republic, where they have gone amongst the savage tribes of Patagonia; but in all the letters written on their journey and from their places of mission the same voice resounds: “Send us workers”. Amongst other things they note how the Archdiocese of Rio Janeiro, Brazil, has two million inhabitants with very few priests and just five seminarians in the seminary.

My dear sons, I am distressed when I reflect on the abundant harvest that presents itself at any time and anywhere, and that we have to leave unharvested because of lack

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344 E(m) V, pp. 41–44.
of workers. However let us not lose courage, and for now apply ourselves seriously to work and with prayer and virtue prepare a new army for Jesus Christ. We will achieve this especially by cultivating religious vocations; and if needs be in time we will even offer ourselves for those sacrifices that God deigns to ask of us for our salvation and that of others. Meanwhile, in the desire to come to matters which will be helpful in cultivating religious vocations and be effective for preserving the spirit of piety amongst Salesians and the boys entrusted to us, I am recommending some things that experience has taught me as being very necessary.

1. In every house, and especially in the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, let each one take great care to foster small groups such as the Altar Servers, Sodalities of the Blessed Sacrament, St Aloysius, Mary Help of Christians and the Immaculate Conception. Let no one be afraid of speaking about them, recommending them, encouraging them and pointing out their purpose, origin, and the indulgences and the other advantages that can be gained. I believe that these groups called be called the key to piety, preserver of morals, support of ecclesiastical and religious vocations.

2. Be careful of relationships, friendships or ordinary or particular conversations whether in writing, talking, through books or gifts of any kind. Taking someone's hand, caresses on the face, kisses, walking arm in arm or with your arms around someone else's neck are all strictly prohibited, not only amongst yourselves and yourselves and your pupils, I say, but including amongst the pupils themselves. Let's keep our thoughts firmly fixed on what St Jerome says: “affection for no one or equal affection for everyone”.

3. Keep away from the world and its maxims. The root of sorrows and disorder are our relationships with the world we have abandoned and which wants to attract us back to it again. Many who seemed to be models of virtue while living in the religious house, once they went elsewhere, with family or friends, soon lost their good will and after returning to the Order could no longer recover [their former stance], and some have even gone as far as losing their vocation. Therefore never go back to the family except for serious reasons and when there are serious reasons never go without due permission and, as far as is possible, accompanied by a confere chosen by the superior. Taking on commissions, recommendations, business affairs, buying or selling for others are things to be constantly avoided because they can be ruinous for vocations and morality.

4. In the evening after prayers, let each one retire immediately for rest. Stopping to take a walk, chat or finish work, is dangerous for spiritual and also bodily health. I know that in some places, thanks be to God not in our houses, they were forced to lament painful abuses and when they sought the reason for them, they were found to be conversations begun or continued at the time we are talking about.

Punctuality in taking rest is tied in with getting up promptly in the mornings something I equally insist on. Believe it, my dear sons, fatal experience tells us that spending longer in bed in the mornings without need for it was always found to be a very dangerous thing. On the other hand getting up promptly, as well as being the principle for having a good day, could also be called an ongoing good example for everyone. In this regard I could not fail to warmly recommend that Superiors act in such a way that everyone, especially Coadjutors and service personnel, are given time to be at holy Mass every morning, the opportunity to receive holy Communion frequently and go to the Sacrament of Penance regularly, according to our Constitutions.

This letter that I am addressing to everyone in general I would like you to consider also as written for each of you in particular, and that its every word be spoken, repeated a thousand times in everyone's hearing, so it will never be forgotten.

But I hope, out of the affection you have for me, and for the commitment you show
to your duties, especially by putting into practice the advice of your father and spiritual friend, you will give me the great consolation of not only being faithful to these recommendations, but even more will interpret them in ways that can best contribute to the greater glory of God and of our Congregation.

And with such persuasion I ask God to bless you all and grant you good health and the precious gift of perseverance in doing good. and finally, pray for me. I remain yours always, in Jesus Christ our Lord,
your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

We have put our hand to the plough: let us remain steady

Turin, 6 January 1884

My dear and beloved sons,
My dear and beloved daughters in Jesus Christ,

I experience great consolation every time I hear words of homage and affection from you, my dear sons and my good daughters. But the affectionate expressions of Season's Greetings and Happy New Year which you have given me personally or by letter, reasonably demands a special thanks from me in answer to the filial affection you have shown me.

First of all let me tell you that I am very pleased with you, with your solicitude in every kind of work, even taking on heavy work in order to promote the greater glory of God in our houses and amongst the boys and girls Divine providence entrusts to us every day, so that we may lead them along the path of virtue and honour on the way to Heaven. You have thanked me an many ways and with different expressions for what I have done for you. You have offered yourselves to work courageously with me and to share the labours, the glory and honour on earth, in order to obtain the great reward that God has prepared for us all in Heaven. You also told me that you desir nothing except to know that which I think best for you and which you would carefully listen to and practise. I am also pleased with these precious words. as a father I simply reply that I thank you from the bottom of my heart, and that the best thing you can do for me is to help me save your souls.

You know well, my beloved sons and good daughters, that I have accepted you in the Congregation and that I have always taken great care of your spiritual well-being in order to assure your eternal salvation. Therefore if you help me in this great undertaking you do what my paternal heart expects from you. You can easily guess, then, the things you must practise in order to succeed in this great project. Observe the Rule, the Rule that holy mother Church destined to be your guide, for the good of your soul and for the spiritual and temporal advantage of your pupils. We have read and studied this Rule, and now it forms the object of our promises and the vows with which we have consecrated ourselves to the Lord.

Therefore I recommend with all my heart that not one of you let words of regret escape you, or worse still, of sorrow for being consecrated to the Lord. This would be an act of deepest ingratitude. All that we have are either in the spiritual or temporal order

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belongs to God. Therefore when we consecrate ourselves to him by our religious profession, we do nothing more than offer to God what he himself has so to say lent us, but which is his absolute property. Moreover by withdrawing from the observance of our vows, we commit theft against God, and before his eyes we take back, we despise, we profane that which we have offered him and which we have placed in his holy hands. Some of you may say: "But the observance of our Rule is burdensome". The observance of the Rule is burdensome to those who observe it unwillingly, to those who transgress it. But to the diligent, who love the good of their soul, this observance becomes, as the Divine Saviour says: *Jugum meum suave est, et onus meum leve*.

And then, my dear sons and daughters, do we wish to go to Heaven in a carriage? We became religious not to enjoy ourselves but to suffer and to earn merit for the next life. We consecrated ourselves to God not to command but to obey; not to attach ourselves to creatures but to practise charity towards our neighbour, moved solely by the love of God; not to live a comfortable life but to be poor with Jesus Christ, to suffer with Jesus Christ on earth, to be made worthy of his glory in Heaven.

Courage then, dear and beloved sons and daughters; we have put our hand to the plough - be firm; let no one of you turn back to admire the false and treacherous world. Let us go on. it will cost us fatigue, hunger, suffering, thirst and perhaps even death. We shall always answer: 'If the greatness of the reward delights us, the fatigue we must bear to merit it should not dishearten us: *Si delectat magnitudo praemiorum, non deterreet certamen laborum*.'

There is one other thing I believe I should mention. Our confreres are writing to me from everywhere, I would be very happy to give everyone due answer. But that not being possible, I will try to send out letters more often; letters that, while they make it easier for me to open my heart, could also serve as an answer, even a guide for those who for holy reasons are living in distant lands and therefore cannot be around to hear the voice of the father who loves them so much in Jesus Christ.

The grace of Our Lord and the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary be always with you, and help you to persevere in the Divine service until the last moment of your life. Amen.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ

Fr John Bosco

**Attitudes and virtues of a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians**

Turin, 24 May 1886

Most beloved Daughters in Jesus Christ,

While we are celebrating the most solemn Feast of Mary Help of Christians in Turin today, with an extraordinary gathering of people who have come from all parts as children to the feet of their most tender Mother, it is very consoling for me to turn my

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346 My yoke is sweet and my burden light (Mt 11:30).
347 If the rich reward attracts you, do not be afraid of the many hardships (cf GREGORIUS MAGNUS, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, XXXVII).
thoughts also to you and to the Institute that bears her name. Yes, I have also remembered the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians this morning at holy Mass, and I have prayed for them.

Among others I have asked the grace that you remain faithful to your holy vocation, that you should be religious with a love of perfection and holiness; that by the practice of the Christian and religious virtues, by an edifying and exemplary life, you shroud give honour to Jesus Christ your Heavenly Spouse and honour to Mary, most loving Mother. I hope that you have also prayed for me and that Mary Help of Christians will hear our prayers and obtain for us from God the grace of living in the holy fear of God, of saving our own soul and that of many others.

Meanwhile I announce to you that this year finishes the six year term since the election of the members of the Superior Chapter of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Therefore according to Chapter VII of the Constitutions, new elections will be held.

Please God this will take place toward the middle of August on a day within the Octave of the Assumption of Our Blessed Lady into Heaven. For this reason I invite all the superiors who can, to be at the Mother House of Nizza Monferrato, where the elections will probably take place, before the 15th of the appointed month.

Since the good of the whole Institute and the glory of God depends in large measure upon a good Chapter, and above all on a wise Superior General, the Sisters eligible to vote need particular enlightenment in their choice and in giving their vote to those who are considered most capable for the important office.

Therefore it is necessary that Our Lord enlighten them and guide them to fulfil this duty according to his holy will, so that great advantage might come from it.

For this reasons I recommend that from the day on which this letter is received, every Superior shall have recited or sung in common by the Sisters, the *Veni Creator* in the morning and in the evening the *Ave Maris Stella*.

I also exhort every Sister to add special prayer privately, particularly after holy Communion, and to make some acts of virtue or mortification to obtain all the help which is necessary for the superiors.

Besides prayers, the voters should reflect on the present needs of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. It seems to me that the Institute needs Sisters who, formed with the spirit of mortification and sacrifice, greatly desire to work and suffer for Jesus Christ and for the salvation of their neighbour. It needs Sisters who are well persuaded that exact obedience, without comment or complaint, is the way which they must walk with courage in order to reach perfection and holiness quickly. It needs Sisters who know how to master their affections, and how to keep their heart turned to God only, so as to be able to say with St Francis de Sales: “If I knew that one fibre of my heart were not for God I would tear it out”. It needs Sisters who regret neither the world nor its goods, nor the comforts which they have renounced; Sisters who regard it as glory to live in poverty and privation like their Divine Spouse, Jesus, who being rich, made himself poor in order to enrich souls by his grace and make them heirs of paradise; Sisters who have no other ambition on earth than to follow Jesus Christ, humiliated, crowned with thorns and nailed to a cross, in order to surround him exalted in glory among the splendours of the Angels and the Saints.

It needs Sisters of good physical constitution, of good disposition, of a cheerful spirit, desirous above all of becoming saints, not by extraordinary means but by ordinary actions, so that they may be a means of stimulating and encouraging their neighbours and especially youth to the practice of Christian virtues. In short it needs Sisters who are and can make themselves fit instruments for the glory of God,
discharging those offices and fulfilling those duties which are proper to the Institute.

Now, to have such Sisters, it is important to have at the head of the Institute, Superiors who have sound judgement to test and discern the vocations of young girls before admitting them to Clothing and Profession. It is also important to have superiors who themselves possess and practise those virtues which they have to inculcate in their subjects. It is important that the superiors love all the Sisters impartially like their own sisters, like Daughters of Mary, like spouses of Jesus Christ. To a kind and patient charity, however, they must unite that firmness of soul which in due time will prevent abuses and transgressions of the Constitutions without violence and, moreover, without human respect. Superiors should possess a prudent and discrete firmness of soul which, while preserving piety and regular observance, does not endanger the health of the Sisters.

Let each Superior reflect which of her Sisters possess these gifts more or less, and in due time vote for those who, before God and according to her own conscience, seem most suitable for the position they must occupy.

In the hope of being able to be present for the forthcoming General Chapter, I pray God to preserve you all in his holy grace and to grant that all may love him and faithfully serve him - superiors and subjects, the healthy and the sick, in whatever place or occupation obedience assigns you, so that when that day and the hour comes for Our Lord Jesus Christ to call you to eternity, you may be able to reply: “I am ready, O my God; let us go to the enjoyment of that happiness which you have prepared for me in your infinite mercy”.

Pray for me, and believe me in the Lord,

Yours very affectionately,

Fr John Bosco

4 Spiritual advice in personal correspondence with Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

These brief letters, written in a familiar and unassuming style, contain precious advice on spiritual life. Don Bosco knows those whom he is writing to and advises them to focus on practical attitudes, but ones that are essential for them to nurture fidelity to the Salesian vocation and remain constantly in tune with God’s heart.

To cleric Giovanni Bonetti

St Ignatius, 20 July 1863

Bonetti, my dear friend,

Don’t be the least concerned about what you have written to me. The devil sees that you want to escape his clutches absolutely, so he is trying to trap you. Follow my advice and go ahead in all peace of mind. Meanwhile you can overcome sadness by singing this hymn from St Paul: *Si delectat magnitudo praemiorum, non deterreit multitudo laborum. Non coronabitur nisi qui legitime certaverit. Esto bonus miles Christi et ipse*
coronabit te.\textsuperscript{350} Or sing with St Francis of Assisi: So great the good I have in sight/ That every pain is my delight,\textsuperscript{351} / Sorrow gives me great contentment, / Every trouble true enjoyment, / Every anguish thrills my heart.

Furthermore, pray for me and I will never cease praying for you too and will do everything I can to make you happy now and in eternity. Amen.

Yours most affectionately in Jesus Christ

Fr John Bosco

\textbf{To cleric Costanzo Rinaudo}\textsuperscript{352}

\textit{My dear Rinaudo,}

You can and should look carefully at ways to inflame the hearts of all our confreres in the Society with the holy love of God, and do not stop until everyone is one heart and one soul in loving and serving the Lord with all our strength for all of our life. And certainly give them the example verbo et opere.\textsuperscript{353} God bless you. Pray for me, I am,

Yours affectionately in the Lord

Fr J. Bosco.

\textbf{To Fr Domenico Belmonte}\textsuperscript{354}

\textit{My dear Fr Belmonte,}

A man said to the Saviour: \textit{Domine, sequar te quocumque ieris, sed permitte me primum ire et sepelire patrem meum. Jesus ait: Sequere me et dimitte mortuos sepelire mortuos.} (Mt 8:19). \textit{Tu vade, annuntia regnum Dei} (Lk 9:60). \textit{Alius ait: Domine, sequar te quocumque ieris, sed permitte mihi renuntiare his, quae domi sunt. Ait ad illum Jesus: Nemo mittens manum etc.} (ibid.).\textsuperscript{355} Therefore write the letter, then pray. I will do the same. Now let's move on to something else.

You added some words that demonstrate, or better, confirm the filial affection you have always felt for me, and that I have always strongly felt for you. I have always sought and endeavoured to offer you things that seemed to me to be in line with your character and would bring greater glory to God. With this in mind I would have been hesitant about entrusting you with the office of prefect at Mirabello. As you can see it is

\textsuperscript{350} If the rich reward attracts you, do not be afraid of the many hardships (cf GREGORIUS MAGNUS, \textit{Homiliae in Evangelia}, XXXVII)). He cannot win the crown unless he has kept the rules of the contest (2 Tm 2:5). Be a good soldier of Christ (2 Tm 2:3) and he will give you the crown of victory.


\textsuperscript{352} E(m) II, p. 174.

\textsuperscript{353} Through word and deed.

\textsuperscript{354} E(m) III, pp. 137-138.

\textsuperscript{355} Quotation adapted from the Vulgate: “Lord, I will follow you wherever you go, but first let me go and bury my father. Jesus replied: Follow me and let the dead bury the dead” (Mt 8:19. 22). “Go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (Lk 9:60). “Another said: I will follow you Lord wherever you go, but first let me say goodbye to those at home. Jesus replied: No one who has put his hand to the plough, etc.” (Lk 9:61-62). Don Bosco suggests to Fr Belmonte how to answer relatives pressing him to come back to the family.
a huge step: today a simple subject, tomorrow superior and arbiter of an institute with almost 200 individuals in it! Nevertheless you will succeed:

1. By seeking God's glory in whatever you do. Doing good for whoever you can but evil to nobody. Vigilance in everything.
2. Filial dependence on your Rector, trying to support his ideas and helping him in his efforts. Many things will be beyond you, so some tasks will be reserved for the Rector.
3. Money will be kept with the Rector, payments he will do or you can with his consent.
4. Try to reconcile the economy of the house with the contentment of those under you. Let everyone have what they need; but be fearless in opposing abuses and wastage.

Something else I would advise you for peace of mind; send your brother to Turin. That will spare you worries and regrets. Let us put ourselves in the Lord's holy hands; he is with us, and let us say with St Paul: Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat.356

May God bless you and your efforts; greet Fr Provera and all our other confreres, and believe that I remain 
affectionately yours in Jesus Christ

Fr John Bosco

To Sr Maddalena Martini357

[Turin, 8 August 1875]

My beloved daughter in Jesus Christ,

Your going to Mornese gave such a blow to the world that it has sent the enemy of our souls to disturb you. But listen to God's voice. He is calling you to save you with an easy and flat road, so put aside every suggestion to the contrary. Indeed, be happy with these disturbances and worries you are experiencing, because the way of the cross is the one that leads to God. If on the other hand you had been immediately happy and content, you would need to fear that the evil one was tricking you.

So consider the following:

1. We do not achieve glory without effort;
2. We are not alone, but Jesus is with us and St Paul says that with the help of Jesus we are all-powerful;358

3. Whoever leaves home, family, friends and follows the Divine Master is assured of a treasure in Heaven that nobody can take away;359

4. The great reward prepared in Heaven should encourage us to put up with any kind of pain on earth.360

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356 There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength (Ph 4:13).
357 E(m) IV, p. 499.
358 Cf Phl 4:13.
359 Quotation adapted from Mt 19:29; 6:19-20
360 Cf 2 Cor 4:17.
So take courage: Jesus is with us. When there are thorns, add them to the thorns in Jesus Christ's crown. I will pray to God for you at holy Mass. Pray for me. I am always, in Jesus Christ,

Your most humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

To the first missionaries

Keepsakes given to Salesian religious on 11 November [1875] as they were departing from the church of Mary Help of Christians to undertake the journey to the Argentine Republic.

1. Seek souls, but not money, honours, or rank.
2. Use charity and the greatest courtesy with all, but avoid conversations and familiarity with persons of the opposite sex, or persons of questionable life-style.
3. Do not go visiting, except for motives of charity or out of necessity.
4. Never accept invitations to dinner except for the most serious reasons. In these cases arrange for two of you to go.
5. Take special care of the sick, of the children, of the aged, and of the poor, and you will win for yourselves the blessings of God and the good will of people.
6. Pay due respect to all civil, religious, municipal and government authorities.
7. When meeting a person in authority in the street, be sure to greet him respectfully.
8. Do the same for ecclesiastics and religious.
9. Stay away from idleness and disputes. Great sobriety in food, drink and rest.
10. Love, revere, respect the other religious Orders, and always speak well of them. This is a way to gain the esteem of all, and to promote the good of the (Salesian) Congregation.
11. Take care of your health. Work, but only to the extent your strength allows.
12. Let the world know that you are poor in clothing, food, dwelling, and you will be rich in the sight of God and you will win people's hearts.
13. Love one another, counsel one another, correct one another, but do not give in to either envy, or resentment; on the contrary, let the good of one be the good of all; the pain and suffering of one be considered the pain and suffering of all, and let each one try to eliminate, or at least ameliorate them.
14. Keep your Rules, and never forget the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death.
15. Every morning recommend to God the work of the day, in particular Confessions, classes, religious instruction, preaching.
17. To the young people recommend frequent Confession and Communion.
18. To cultivate vocations to the priesthood and religious life instil 1) love of chastity; 2) horror of the contrary vice; 3) the avoidance of undisciplined companions; 4) frequent Communion; 5) charity, by means of special signs of kindness and goodwill.
19. In disputed matters, listen to both sides before coming to a decision.
20. Amidst toil and suffering never forget that a great reward awaits us in Heaven - Amen.

361 E(m) IV, pp. 547-548.
To Salesian Coadjutor Bartolomeo Scavini\(^{362}\)  

Turin, 1 December 1877

My dear Scavini,

Word has come to me that you have been tempted to leave the Salesian Congregation. Do not do this. You are consecrated to God with perpetual vows; you are a Salesian missionary, you were amongst the first group to go to America; you are a great confidant of Don Bosco's, and you want to return to the world where there are so many dangers of perversion? I hope you will not take this serious step.

Write down the things that are bothering you and as a father I will give advice to my beloved son that will help make you happy now and in eternity.

May God bless you. Believe that I am always, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend

Fr John Bosco

To Fr Taddeo Remotti\(^{363}\)  

Turin, 31 December 1878

My dear Fr Remotti Taddeo,

I am so happy with the straightforward way you have so often written to me. Continue to do so like this. But keep some advice that are my testament for you, as a basis:

1. Put up with others' defects even when they harm us.
2. Cover over other's faults, never ridicule someone when he might be offended.
3. Work, but work for love of Jesus; suffer everything but never be uncharitable.

*Alter alterius onera portate et sic adimplebitis legem Christi.*\(^ {364}\)

May God bless you, dear Fr Remotti; goodbye here on earth, if this is the divine will; for heaven has been prepared and may divine mercy grant it to us. Pray for me. I am now and will always be in Jesus Christ

Most affectionately

Fr John Bosco

To Salesian Coadjutor Carlo Audisio\(^{365}\)  

Turin, 31 January 1881

My dear Audisio,

An old friend of your soul sends you a greeting and recommends that you never forget your eternal salvation. Work, work, but for Heaven.

Exactness in practices of piety is everything. Obedience, then, is the key to all virtues.

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\(^{362}\) E(m) V, pp. 516-520.

\(^{363}\) E(c) III, p. 425.

\(^{364}\) Carry each others' burdens, that way you will fulfil Christ's law (Gal 6:2).

\(^{365}\) E(c) IV, p. 12.
may God bless you, my dear Audisio, may he preserve you in his holy grace. Pray for me. I will always be, in Jesus Christ,
Your most affectionate friend

Fr John Bosco

To cleric Luigi Calcagno366

Turin 31 January 1881

My dear Calcagno,

Are you always good, my dear Calcagno? I hope so. But never look back. Let us look to Heaven which awaits us. We have a great reward prepared for us there.

Work, win souls and save your own for me. Sobriety and obedience are everything for you.

Write to me often. may God bless you and keep you always in his holy grace. And pray for the one who is always, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend

Fr John Bosco

To Mother Caterina Daghero367

Nizza Monferrato, 12 August 1881

Reverend Mother Superior General,

Here are some more sweets to distribute to your daughters. Always practise kindness, with everyone; but always be ready to receive bitter things, or better, bitter mouthfuls when it so pleases God to send them your way.

May God bless you and give you virtue and courage to sanctify yourself and all the communities entrusted to you. Pray for me. I am, in Jesus Christ

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

To Sister Eulalia Bosco368

Pinerolo, 20 August 1884

My good Eulalia,

I blessed the Lord when you made the decision to become a religious; now I thank him with all my heart that he preserved your good will to break definitively with the world and consecrate yourself totally to the good Jesus.

Make this offering willingly, and reflect on the recompense of a hundredfold in this present life and the true reward, the great reward of future life.

366 Ibid., p. 13.
367 Ibid., p. 75.
But, my good Eulalia, that is no joke; it is true. And remember the words of the father of Chantal when she found herself in a similar situation: “Whatever you give to the Lord, never take it back again”. Believe that religious life is a life of constant sacrifice and that every sacrifice and that God gives great recompense for every sacrifice. Only obedience, only observance of the Rule, only hope of a heavenly reward are a comfort in our mortal life.

I have always received your letters with pleasure. I have not answered because I lack the time.

May God bless you, Eulalia; may Mary be your guide, your comfort until Heaven. I hope we will still see each other again in this life; otherwise, goodbye: we will see each other and speak of God in a blessed life. Amen.

Please wish every blessing to Mother General and all the Sisters, novices and postulants of Mary Help of Christians.

I owe Mother an answer, and I will give it. Pray for me and for all our family. I am always, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate Uncle

Fr John Bosco

To Fr Domenico Tomatis

My dear Fr Tomatis,

Since I rarely get letters from you, I must suppose you to be very busy, and I believe it. But letting your dear Don Bosco know how you are getting on surely merits being one of the matters you should not overlook. You will ask, “What should I write about?” Tell me about the state of your health, and that of your confreres; whether the Rules of the Congregation are faithfully observed; whether the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death is made, and how well; how many pupils you have, and what hopes you hold for their success. Do you do anything to cultivate vocations, do you have any hopes in this regard? Is Archbishop Ceccarelli always a friend to the Salesians? I am looking forward with great pleasure to your replies to these matters.

Given that my life is racing at speed to its conclusion, so things I want to write to you in this letter are those I would want to recommend to you in the last days of my earthly exile, that is, my testament to you.

Dear Fr Tomatis, keep firmly in mind that you became a Salesian to save your soul. To all our confreres preach and recommend the same truth. Remember it is not enough to know things, they must be put into practice. May God help us so that the Lord's words, “Dicunt enim et non faciunt”.\(^{370}\) not be addressed to us.

Try to see the things that concern you with your own eyes. When some one is lacking, or negligent, warn him promptly, without waiting for evils to multiply.

Through your exemplary manner of life, by your charity in speaking, in giving orders, in putting up with the defects of others, many will be won over to the Congregation. Constantly recommend attendance at the sacraments of Confession and Communion. The virtues that will make you happy in time and in eternity are humility and charity. Always be a friend and father to our confreres. Help them in every way you can both in

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\(^{370}\) They do not practise what they preach (Mt 23:3).
spiritual and secular matters. Know how to make use of them for every thing that will bring glory to God.
Each of the thoughts expressed on this page need something of an explanation. You can do this on your own behalf, and for others.
God bless you, my ever dear Fr Tomatis. Give my warmest greetings to all our confreres, friends and benefactors. Tell them I pray for them every morning during the Holy Mass, and that I humbly commend myself to the prayers of all.
God grant we might be able to see each other again in this mortal exile, but that in any case we might one day praise the holy name of Jesus and of Mary in a blessed eternity. Amen.
Before long I will write to you, or have others write, on matters of some importance.
May Mary keep us safe and guide us along the path to heaven. Amen
Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr John Bosco.

5. Spiritual conferences to Salesians

These texts have been drawn from notes taken during Don Bosco's conferences. As can be seen, we respect the writer's style (Fr Giovani Bonetti and Fr Giulio Barberis), but we report Don Bosco's thinking. As he does in his circulars, here the saint emphasises things that he believes are characteristic features of consecrated Salesian life, but with a freshness and liveliness more typical of the spoken word. What emerges is a holistic model of the Salesian in his consecration and of one who is aware of the demands of his vocation, to which he commits himself generously and with all his strength.

Address after the first religious profession of Salesians (14 May 1862)371

It is my intention that this vow you have just made does not impose any other obligation than observing what you have already observed up till now, that is, the rules of the house. It is my great desire that none of you be caught up in any fear, or by some concern. If that is the case let each one come to me quickly and open up his heart, letting me know of his doubts and anxieties. I say this because it could be that the devil, seeing the good that you are doing by being in this Society, gives you some temptation, seeking to distance you from God's will. But if you quickly let me know I will be able to look at things, return your hearts to peace, and also release you from your vows if I see that this is God's will and for the good of souls.

Someone might say to me: “Did Don Bosco also make these vows?” Well, while you were making these vows to me, I was making them to the One on the Crucifix, for all of my life, offering myself in sacrifice to the Lord, ready for anything that is for his greater glory and the salvation of souls.

My dear friends we are in turgid times and it almost seems to be a presumption in these unfortunate times to be trying to put into place a new religious community, while the world and Hell are using all their powers to wipe out all those already on this earth. But that does not matter; I have not just possible but certain arguments that it is God's will that our Society begin and continue. Many efforts have been made to prevent it, but all in vain. Indeed some of those who have most obstinately opposed us have paid dearly for it. One distinguished person, who for various reasons I shall not name, maybe out of zeal, was strongly opposed to this Society. He was overcome by serious illness and a few days later left for eternity.

I would never be able to finish this evening if I were to tell you about all the special acts of protection we have received from Heaven since our Oratory began. All this helps us argue that God is with us and that we can go ahead in all our affairs with trust, knowing that we are doing his holy will.

But these are not the arguments that give me hope that all is well for this Society; there are other more important arguments, amongst them being the unique purpose we propose, which is the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. Who knows, but that the Lord may want to use our Society to accomplish much good in his Church? Twenty five or thirty years hence, if the Lord continues to help us as he has until now, our Society, spread everywhere, could even go beyond a thousand members. Some of these preaching and instructing ordinary folk, others educating abandoned youth; some teaching, others writing and spreading good books; and everyone supporting the dignity of the Roman Pontiff and ministers of the Church. How much good can be done! Pius IX believes that everything is already sorted out: and here this evening thins are in order, so let us fight with him on behalf of the Church, which is God's Church. Let us have courage, let us work with all our heart. God will reward us as a good paymaster. Eternity will be long enough for us to take a rest.

Always keep in mind the purpose of the Congregation

12 January 1873

I see with great pleasure that our Congregation is increasing every day…. But if it is my greatest desire that our Congregation should grow and increase the number of sons of the apostles, it is also my greatest desire that the members be zealous ministers, sons worthy of St Francis, just as the Jesuits are sons worthy of the courageous St Ignatius of Loyola. The whole world marvels at it and more than anyone else, the evildoers. Out of devilish hatred they would like to see this most holy seed crushed. Persecutions, the most horrendous events will not discourage these magnanimous individuals. They are split up in a way that one does not know about the other, and far from one another they perfectly fulfill the Rule given them by their first superior, just as if they were in community. Wherever there is a Jesuit, I say, there is a model of virtue, an exemplar of holiness: wherever he preaches, hears confessions, proclaims the Word of God. Is there more? When evildoers think they have crushed them, that is precisely when they begin to increase in number; and it is then that the result in terms of souls is greater.

So may it be for you, my sons, so think seriously about the state to which God is calling you; think and pray, and when entering this Congregation mirror in yourselves those magnanimous sons of Christ, and work as they do. Whether you have embraced the ecclesiastical state or remained a layman and whatever office you are given, always

372 ASC A0250202: Conferenza di D. Bosco, anonymous ms (cf MB X, 1061-1063).
see to exact observance of the Rule. Whether you live here, at Lanzo, in one of the other houses, or in France, in Africa, in America, whether you are alone or with others, always keep in mind the purpose of this Congregation, the education of youth and our neighbour in general, in arts, sciences and religion; in a word, the salvation of souls. And if I should say what is currently going through my mind, I would describe a huge number of Oratories spread over the world, some in France, some in Spain, some in Africa, some in America and in so many other places where our confreres are working tirelessly in the vineyard of Jesus Christ.

Right now it is simply a thought I have, but it seems to me I could already assert it as an historical fact. But since the Holy Father, Pius IX, has urged us to take up only Italy as our field of work for now, since, as he says, it is extremely in need, we will put our forces to work here in Italy. However Heaven should dispose things, always remember the purpose of the Congregation you will join or have already joined. Let us encourage one another and work tirelessly together so that one day, in company with all the souls we have won for God, we will enjoy the beatific vision of God with them for all eternity.

Through our vows we are all completely consecrated to God (17 September 1876)\footnote{ASC A0000409: Prediche di don Bosco - Esercizi Lanzo 1876, Quad. XX, ms di Giulio Barberis, pp. 14-19 (cf MB XII, 451-454). Fr Barberis introduces the text this way: “On 17 September [1876] it was profession day for those who had not yet made vows and wanted to make them. … When the professions were over, Don Bosco, already seated on the celebrant's chair, began a wonderful sermon. I have reproduced here that part of it which I recall” (ibid., p. 14).}

When an army general sees all his ranks of soldiers, he is happy because he hopes he can more easily destroy his enemy with them, without any fear. So right now I am happy seeing the ranks of my sons increase, soldiers who want to fight the devil; soldiers who will help me destroy, as much as we can, his kingdom on earth and prepare a nice place for ourselves in Heaven.

Do you know what it means to make these holy vows? It means being put in the first ranks of the Divine Saviour's army and to go into battle under his command. But what I would like to say to you right now is this, that it is not enough to make vows, but we must make every effort to do what we have promised God to do by vow. Through our vows we are all completely consecrated to him; let us never take back what we have given him. We have consecrated our eyes to him: so let's leave aside useless and insignificant reading, vain or bad looks. We have all consecrated our ears to God: so let's not pause any longer to listen to people complaining and sowing discontent, no longer want pleasures or be found in conversations, gatherings where, even if there is no bad talk, it is all very worldly and secular just the same. We have consecrated our tongue to the Lord: so no more biting or rude words to our friends, answering superiors back, no more sowing discontent; no, now that we have consecrated it to him, let us not stain it any more; instead give it completely over to singing the divine praises, talking of good examples to encourage others to do good. We have consecrated our throat [appetite] to the Lord, so away with all kinds of immoderate delicacies in food; much abstemiousness with wine; never let our greedy appetite lead us to accept dinners, drinks or the like. These hands of ours have been especially consecrated to the Lord, so let them no longer remain idle; let them not regret doing work which seems to be filthy
work, so long as everything is for the greater glory of God. All these feet are consecrated to God: what a field I am entering here! So let's not use these feet to return to the world which we have abandoned. Yes, I think I should stay with this idea for a moment to deal with it.

The Lord has given us a great grace by calling us to follow him: this world is too perverse and perverting. So let us follow the grace and not return to perversion. See, the Holy Spirit clearly tells us that the world is completely set on evil: *mundus in maligno positus est totus*. So let us see that our feet never turn back again to where we have escaped from. The principle hurdle, the biggest difficulty we find is our parents. But the Lord said that if they become a hurdle to our greater good we do not need to listen to them, nor heed them, he even goes to the point of telling us to hate them. So we need to really detach ourselves from them, since God has done us the great favour of calling us to follow him. Through our vows we have detached ourselves from them to bind ourselves especially to God, so why put ourselves back in danger of detaching ourselves from God by going to listen to their miseries, needs or desires? …

I see that I have digressed somewhat from what I was talking about, that since we are especially consecrated to God we should give him our whole life, all our works, our entire selves. We have to really try hard so that the fact, our works, corresponds to this purpose. Believe me also that here has never been anybody who was discontent at the moment of death for being consecrated to God and for having spent his life in his holy service. There are countless numbers, instead, who at that point regret that they have not loved him and served him. They weep over their miseries but time has run out. Since the Lord in his great mercy has wanted to warn us in time and call us to himself, let us surrender to him and do things worthy of his call.

**Patience, hope, obedience: retreat reminders (18 September 1876)**

We are at the point of going our own way and each one will be going back to where the Lord has destined him to exercise his sacred ministry. What can I tell you at this moment that can serve as a watchword for each one to recall as fruit of this retreat wherever and whenever? There are three simple words that I believe are of the greatest importance possible right now. So it would be good to heed them with all the effort possible. Here they are: *Patience, Hope, Obedience.*

1. **Patience** - Firstly I would like to suggest much patience. The Holy Spirit himself admonishes us: *Patientia vobis necessaria est,* he tells us somewhere in Holy Scripture. *In patientia vestra,* he says elsewhere, *possidebitis animas vestras.* I do not intend here to speak of the patience required to put up with fatigue or extraordinary persecutions; nor of the patience needed to suffer martyrdom nor that which we need to practise when seriously ill. Patience is certainly necessary in these cases and to an heroic degree; but they are cases that rarely have to be put into practice, and God in these cases gives us extraordinary graces. The patience I intend speaking of is the patience needed to fulfil our duties well, the patience we need

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374 The whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19).
375 Cf Lk 14:26.
376 ASC A0000409: *Prediche di don Bosco - Esercizi Lanzo 1876*, Quad. XX, ms di Giulio Barberis, pp. 1-11 (cf MB XII, 454-460).
377 You will need endurance [patience] (Heb 10:36).
378 Your endurance [patience] will win you your lives (cf Lk 21:19).
379 but patience too is to have its practical results (Jm 1:4).
to practise all of our Rule, discharge our duties exactly. This is what I intend to speak to you about. Both superiors and inferiors need it, and it could be needed in a thousand instances, therefore we need to have it in abundance.

Someone will be overburdened with tasks and someone else wants to give him one more. He could be angry with the one who wants to do this, either because that persons seems unaware of the other things he has to do or because he just believes he can do it. Patience is needed.  

Or there could be someone else who wants to teach, but they ask him to assist; or there might be someone instead who wants to go to school but they ask him to teach, or he'd like to be in one place but they send him to another. Patience is needed in all these cases.

Or there is someone who believes the Superior has something against him, does not view him favourably, always gives him the worst jobs to do. Without patience he immediately begins to complain, show his discontent, and what will happen?

Or someone else has a job he does not like, or he can't do well where he is; he feels like complaining a thousand times over about everything there and going who knows where to. Take this kind of response slowly: here patience is needed more than ever.

Or it will happen one day that someone says: the Superior hates me; it might be imagination more than anything else; but even so, is it legitimate to complain, speak badly of him, show publicly how offended he is? No. This is why I was saying that we need to have patience as our inseparable companion.

And the Superior? How much patience is needed here! Because if he knows how to get others to practise it, the others can say: there's many of us, he is just one, and we are practising a bit of patience towards each one. The Superior though is alone and apart from all the others and has to be patient with everyone. So although he might be young, sometimes it is very tough work. Sometimes has to chew on things for a while a little out of regard for one or some other, either because they are not capable, or because he does not see good will and spontaneity in things, or even sees ill will. But is this good enough to cut off relations with someone regarding that matter and complain about everything? I know that there will be a thousand temptations to offer a harsh reproach or send someone away or something like that, but it is precisely here that much patience is needed or, to put it better, much charity with that condiment of St Francis de Sales added in: kindness, meekness.

The teacher, or an assistant could cut the matter off with a blow here, a kick there; but I maintain that although it might stop an occasional abuse, it never does good and never helps people love virtue or get something to sink in. Of course, let there always be true zeal. Try your best to do things well, yes. But always calmly, kindly, patiently.

Someone will say: well said, but it costs something not to get angry when you see... It costs. And I know it costs as well; but do you know where the word patience comes from? From [the Latin word] patior, pateris, passus sum, pati, which means: to suffer, put up with, endure. If it did not cost some effort it would no longer be patience. And it is precisely because it costs effort that I recommend it so much and that the Lord encourages it so much in the Holy Scriptures. I am also aware that it costs. I am sure you don't believe that it is the most enjoyable thing in the world to be 'nailed' to giving audiences or stuck at a table all evening to do what has to be done, letters and the like. I can assure you that many times I would like to get out for some fresh air and maybe I really need to; but patience is needed. If I didn't do these tasks many things wouldn't happen; so much good would be left undone; so much important business would be left

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380 “Far secche parrucche” (act like dry wigs?): a saying in dialect that means giving a harsh reproach.
stranded: therefore, patience.

Don't believe that it doesn't also cost me, that after having given someone a job to do, entrusted him with something important or delicate or urgent, and I find it not done or badly done, it doesn't cost me something to regain my calm. I assure you that sometimes my blood is boiling in my veins; I get pins and needles all over. So? Lose my patience? That won't get the job done; and the confere will not be corrected by my anger. Calmly advise, set appropriate rules, encourage; and if there is a need to shout a bit, then do it, but think for a moment: what would St Francis de Sales do in this situation? I can assure you that if we act like this we will obtain what the Holy Spirit told us: In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras.\(^{381}\)

And then? It also takes patience, constancy, perseverance to carry out our Rule. The day will come when you feel tired, bored or, let's say there will be be a day when you don't want to make meditation, say the rosary, go to the sacraments, continue on with your boring assistance. This is the right moment to ask the Lord and the Blessed Virgin, constantly and perseveringly, for patience.

Look how much care a gardener takes to get a little plant to grow. You might say it is effort thrown away. But he knows that over time that little plant will give him so much back, so he does not worry about the effort and begins to work and sweat to prepare the ground: digging here, hoeing there, then manuring, weeding, then planting or putting in the seed. Then, as if this were not enough, how much effort he makes seeing that nobody tramples the ground that has been planted, or that birds or hens don't come and eat the seed. When he sees it sprout he looks at it with pleasure: oh! It's sprouting, it's got two leaves, three... Then think of the grafting, how much care he takes looking for the best plant in the garden, cutting a branch, binding it, covering it, seeing that cold or wet don't destroy it. When the plant grows and begins to bend over, he immediately provides a support so it can grow straight, and if he is afraid that the stem or trunk is too weak, that wind or storms could flatten it, he puts a stake next to it, ties it and binds it will not run that risk. So why, my good gardener, so much care for a plant? Because if there wasn't it would not give me fruit. It is good that it is done this way: if I want it to give me plenty of good fruit then I need to look after it in very way possible. Unfortunately, note that despite this, often the graft fails, the plant is lost; but in the hope that it can be brought back to life, so much effort is made.

We too, my dear sons, are gardeners, farmers in the Lord's vineyard. If we want our work to produce results, we have to show so much care for the plants we are cultivating. Unfortunately, despite our efforts and care, our grafts dry up and the plant goes bad; but if we really do make these efforts, most times the plant succeeds... Even though there might not be success, the master of the vineyard recompenses us, for he is so good! Bear in mind then, getting up set is not worth it, nor giving in to impulse: continual patience is needed, constancy, perseverance, effort.

[2. Hope] - The farmer at least hopes to be paid, be recompensed. And us? Who will pay us? So I begin with the second point I want to talk to you about: hope. Yes, what supports patience must be the hope of reward. We work so that the hope of reward may smile so consolingly upon us. We are lucky that we have such a good master. Note how consoling these words are: Quia super pauc\(sa\) fui\(s\)it fid\(el\)is, super mult\(a\) te constit\(tu\)\(am\); because you were faithful in small things, I will put you in charge of greater things.\(^{382}\) We poor people know so little, have so little strength, ability. It does not matter, we are faithful in doing the little we can and the Lord will give us a great reward. When, as a

\(^{381}\) Your patience [endurance] will win you your lives (Lk 21:19).

\(^{382}\) Mt 25:21.
teacher, you are tired and you would like to let your job go, careful! Be faithful in little things if you want the Lord to give you greater things. Or the Rector! He has advised, spoken, recommended...; he is about to lose patience or just let everything go as it wants or get angry... Careful that you be faithful in little things, if you want to be in charge of greater things.

A point where we must practise so much patience still, looking to hope, is overcoming ourselves. I mean overcoming our habits, our bad inclinations, the temptations that constantly bother us. How much it costs to leave those habits behind, our very ordinary lukewarmness, weakness, carelessness with the little practices of obedience or piety. Here too we need constant patience, extraordinary tolerance, not allowing the devil to win and, day or night, awake or asleep, playing or working, always endeavouring to overcome our bad inclinations. This is what we call patience or being long-suffering. And if we need to struggle so much to obtain victory, we will want to look to the great reward, the great prize prepared for us and we will not fail to win out. *In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras.* 383 St Paul adds: *Si vos delectat magnitudo praemiorum, non vos terreat magnitudo laborum.* 384

I am not here to tell you how well our hope is founded. You know that it is our most merciful Lord that has made the promise, and for the little we are faithful in he has promised us much; 385 he calls those who have observed his law 'blessed', 386 because he knows how great the reward is. Elsewhere he tells us that even a glass of cold water given in his name will be compensated. 387 Courage then: may hope sustain us when our courage fails us.

[3. *Obedience*] - Now, there is need for a virtue that includes these first two and keeps them together. This virtue is *obedience*. I will only say a few things, given that we have tackled obedience in Rodriguez at length in this retreat and that there have also been sermons on it. I really recommend that you practise patience in obeying and when this obedience does not come easily, when our thinking is far from being obedient, let us look up to Heaven, hold onto hope.

Well kept obedience is the life and soul of religious Congregations; it is what keeps them united. How much good can be done when many members depend absolutely on one, who by reason of his position has a broader view of things, can see clearly what needs to be done and tells someone: stay here, and he stays; do that, and he does it; go there, and immediately he sets out. Good is increased and it is a good that cannot be achieved unless there is absolute obedience.

What other great things obedience can bring! All your actions become more meritorious; I speak of manual activities. There might be someone who is good at little or nothing, but he puts himself under obedience and the Superior asks him to sweep or be the cook, and he can have the same merit as someone who is busy all day, labouring away in the pulpit or confessional or teaching. This great good comes to us through obedience. Let everyone be patient in the task he has, do it well as far as he can, and not give thought to anything else except that the Lord will welcome him and bless him.

I have one more idea I would very much like to recommend to you today. This

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383 Your patience [endurance] will win you your lives (Lk 21:19).
384 If the rich reward attracts you, do not be afraid of the many hardships (cf GREGORIUS MAGNUS, Homiliae in Evangelia, XXXVII).
385 Cf Lk 16:10.
386 Cf Lk 11:28.
387 Cf Mk 9:41; Mt 10:42.
thought ties the other three together. It consists in making the exercise for a happy death well each month; putting aside one day a month to leave aside, as much as is possible, all other occupations, to think about matters concerning our soul.

It will help to make comparisons month by month: did I improve this month? Or did I go back somehow? Then come to details: how was I in this virtue, that other one? And make a special review of matters to do with the vows and the practices of piety: How was I with regard to obedience? Did I make progress? - Did I carry out the assistance I was given well, for example? How did I do it? - Was I busy at school? - Regarding poverty, be it clothing, food, my cell: do I have something that is not really poor? Was I greedy? Did I complain when I lacked something? - Then come to chastity: have I given any room for bad thoughts? Have I detached myself still more from love of family? Did I practise mortification in eating, looking, etc.? - Then move on to practices of piety and note especially any lukewarmness, or if these practices were done without enthusiasm.

This examination should always be made, whether it be a long or a short one. Since some of you have occupations that do not allow you time apart any day of the month, they are legitimate occupations, but on that day let each one do what he can to follow up these indications and make particular resolutions.

Just one more little thought. When the young man asked the Lord what he had to do to be saved, he gave him the law and said: Fac hoc et vives. Do this and you will live. So I say to you: you have the Rule, it is the Lord who gave it to you; fulfil it and you will live. Let each one study it and at the same time study how to put it into practice. Let each one for his own part, superior, inferior, priest or coadjutor, try to put it into practice. How happy and consoled we will be at the moment of our death, for having practised it! We can be certain, as I was saying, that our hope will not be confounded. The Lord is faithful to his promises and he will give us whatever it is we hope for. Indeed, he is full of kindness and mercy. He will give us far more than we could imagine.

Let us have courage then. If we have to suffer something, put up with something to do everything the Lord asks of us, let us not pull back. He knows how to reward our every effort and will make us content now and in eternity, and will give us the reward that exceeds all expectation.

6. Dreams relating to Salesian religious perfection

Unlike the dreams he told the boys, which were more didactic in nature and which emphasised the fantastic and fabulous aspects more, those meant for the Salesians more immediately mirrored Don Bosco’s state of mind, his charism as Founder. His images and metaphors served to highlight the virtues of the good Salesian and some practical aspects that he considered to be decisive. The texts you find here are taken from original documents: either originals of Don Bosco’s or notes taken down by his listeners.

Roses and thorns in our work for the salvation of the young

8 May 1864

Someone led me to a place where there was a beautiful road all covered in roses, not

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388 Lk 10:28.
only on the ground, but also above like an arch, and all around there were roses but so beautiful that I had never seen anything like them. The person told me to walk. I did not want to trample on those beautiful roses so I took off my shoes. But I took a step or two and then, ouch, I soon had to step back because I trod on a thorn which gave me terrible pain, and I saw that under these beautiful roses there were many prickly thorns, not just underneath but everywhere. So I said: “We need shoes here”; and the other person, looking at me replied: “You certainly do need shoes”. So I put them back on. There was a great number of priests and other people with me who walked beside me. I began walking; despite all my concerns, occasionally getting pricked by one or other of those huge thorns, I nevertheless got to the end of the avenue. Then I looked back and I saw not one of my many walking companions. I was very upset and I immediately turned back to see what they were doing or where they were, but I saw no one. I began to weep copiously and was saying: “Is it possible that they all have abandoned me and that I have to be alone on this road?”. But while I was there complaining and weeping I saw a huge crowd of priests and clerics and others coming towards me. And when they reached me they said: “Here we are ready to follow you; tell us what to do and we will obey”. I was consoled and I told them: “Well then, if you are ready to struggle along this road with me, let's begin walking”; and they all took to the road and I followed behind. A few lost courage and turned back. A great number were happy and courageous and reached the end. I did so too.

In front of us was a huge and magnificent hall where there were other beautiful roses, and I looked: they were all without thorns and gave off such a sweet perfume.

Then the person who was accompanying me spoke to me saying: “Have you understood all this?”. “No”, I told him “Could you please explain it all to me”. So he said: “Know then that this road stands for the care that you must take of young people. You need to walk along this road with shoes on, meaning mortification. The beautiful roses are symbols of burning charity that has to distinguish you and your helpers in educating young people. The thorns stand for all the obstacles, sufferings, annoyances you have to put up with in this task. But do not lose courage: with charity and mortification you will win out. At the end you will find roses without thorns, as you saw in that rich hall you arrived at”. And then I found myself in my room of course, awake like I am now.

Humility, work and temperance

28 September 1876

They say we should take no notice of dreams; and I must tell you truthfully that in most cases I am also of this opinion. However sometimes, though not telling us about the future they serve just to same in letting us know how to resolve intricate affairs and in showing us how to proceed prudently in certain matters. So they can be taken for what is good in them. Right now I would like to tell you about a dream that has preoccupied me throughout this retreat and tormented me especially last night. I wil tell it to you as it happened only shortening things a bit here and there so as not to be too long, because it seems to me that it was full of many and serious lessons.
It seemed to me that we were all together, going from Lanzo to Turin. We were all in some kind of vehicle, but I couldn't say if we were on a train or an omnibus, but we weren't walking. When we got to a certain point along the road, I don't recall where, the vehicle stopped. I got off to see what was wrong and found myself face to face with someone whom I cannot really describe: he looked both tall and short at the same time, fat and thin, and he also looked red and white; he walked on the ground but also in the air. I was dumbfounded and could make no sense of it, but plucked up courage and asked: “Who are you?” Without giving me an answer he said: “Come”. I wanted to know who he was first of all, what he wanted, but again he said: “Come quickly; let's get the vehicles moving into this field”.

The marvel was that he spoke loudly and softly at the same time and in many voices, and I was just left marveling at it all. The field was very big, as far as you could see, all flat, not dug up but all flattened down like a farmyard. Not knowing what to say, and seeing him so resolute, we turned the vehicles around so that they entered that huge field and then we shouted out to everyone inside to get off. They all got off in very quick time and as soon as they had, the vehicles were seen to vanish, without our knowing where they had gone to.

— “Now that we have got down”, I whispered to myself, “you will ask why you made us stop in this place”. He answered: “The reason is serious; it is to avoid a terrible danger”.

“Which danger?”.

“Danger from a wild bull that will leave no one alive if he comes through: Taurus rugiens quaerens quem devoret”. 391

“Slow down, my friend, you are attributing to the bull what St Peter says about the bull in Holy Scripture: Leo rugiens”. 392

“That doesn't matter: there it was leo rugiens, here it is taurus rugiens”.

“The fact is that you have to be very much on the alert. Call everyone to come around you. Then solemnly and urgently announce that they be careful, very careful, and as soon as they hear the bull bellowing, A loud and extraordinary bellowing, to immediately throw themselves on the ground and stay face down, faces pressed to the ground, until the bull has passed through. Woe to the one who does not listen to you, for whoever does not lie flat on the ground face down as I have said will be lost, because we read in the Holy Scriptures that the one who is humble will be exalted and the one who exalts himself will be humbled: Qui se humiliat exaltabitur et qui se exaltat humiliabitur”. 393

Then he said once more: “Quickly, quickly: the bull is about to come; shout, shout out loudly for them to get down”.

I was shouting and he was saying: “More, more, louder, shout, shout”. I was shouting so loud that I think I even frightened Fr Lemoyne who sleeps in the room next to me, but I couldn't shout any louder.

Then immediately we heard the bellowing of the bull: “Careful, careful!... Line them all up straight next to each on both sides, with a space in the middle for the bull to run through”.

I'm shouting and giving these orders; in the blink of an eyelid they are all prostrate on

391 A roaring bull, seeking to devour.
392 Reference to the Vulgate: “Adversarius vester diabolus tamquam leo rugiens circuit, quaerens quem devoret” (1 Pt 5:8): Your enemy the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to eat.
393 Whoever humbles himself will be exalted and whoever exalts himself will be humbled (Lk 14:11).
the ground and we began to say the bull coming from way off, enraged. Although most were lying face down, some wanted to stand up and watch the bull to see what it was and they were not lying down. Just a few of them. The individual said to me: “Now you will see what happens to them; you will see what they get for not lowering themselves”. I wanted to warn them again, shout at them, run to them. The other would not let me. I insisted that he let me go to them. He told me firmly: “Obedience is for you too, get down”. I was still not lying down when we heard this tremendous, fearful bellowing. The bull was already close to us; we were all shaking and asking: “What the... what the...”. “Don't be afraid: down on the ground!”. And he kept shouting: “Qui se humiliat exaltabitur et qui se exaltat humiliabitur… qui se humiliat… qui se humiliat”.

A strange thing that really made me wonder was this, that although my head was on the ground and I was completely prostrate with my eyes in the dust, nevertheless I could see everything that was happening around me very well. The bull had seven horns, almost in the shape of a circle: there were two in place of his nose; two in place of his eyes; two where the horns would ordinarily be and one above; but the marvellous thing was that these horns were so strong, flexible, bending in whichever direction, so that to strike or knock someone to the ground the bull didn't have to run here or there; it just need to move ahead without twisting and turning itself, to strike whoever it encountered. The horns at the nose were the longest and these caused surprising damage. The bull was already very close; then the individual shouted: “watch the effect of humility”. And then suddenly, what a marvel it was! We all found ourselves lifted up in the air to a considerable height so it was impossible for the bull to reach us. The handful who had not got down were not lifted up. The bull came and tore them to pieces in an instant; not one was saved. We meanwhile, lifted up in the air, were terrified and said: “If we fall down we're done for; poor us! What will become of us!”. Meanwhile we could see the enraged bull trying to get to us. He was leaping up terribly trying to gore us, but he was not able to do any damage to us. So more enraged than ever, he made it clear he wanted to go and find some fellow bulls; almost as if he were saying: well, we'll help each other, we will climb up… and so habens iram magnam, 394 he went off. Then we found ourselves back on the ground and the person was shouting: “Face the south”. Then, without our understanding what was going on, the scene in front of us changed. Facing south we saw the Blessed Sacrament exposed: there were many candles lit on both sides and the field was no longer there, but we seemed to be in a huge, ornately decorated church. While we were all there in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, many enraged bulls arrived, all with horrible horns and terribly frightening in appearance. They came, but since we were in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, they could do no harm to us. Meanwhile we were saying the chaplet to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. After a while, I don't know how long, we looked and the bulls were no longer there. Looking back towards the altar we found that the candles were extinguished, the Sacrament no longer exposed, the church had gone... “But where are we?”. We found ourselves in the field where we had first been. You understand well enough that the bull is the enemy of our souls, the devil that is so enraged with us and constantly seeks to do us harm. The seven horns are the seven capital vices. What can free us from this bull's horns, from the devil's assaults, from not falling to vice, is principally humility, basis and foundation of the virtues.

[Part 2] - Meanwhile we were dumbfounded, amazed, looking at one another. No one

394 Full of fury. Reference to the Vulgate: “Descendit diabolus ad vos habens iram magnam” (Rv 12:12).
was speaking, no one knew what to say. They were waiting for Don Bosco to speak or for that individual to tell us something when, taking me aside, he said: “Come, I want you to see the triumph of the Congregation of St Francis de Sales. Climb up on this rock and you will see”. It was a huge boulder in the middle of the boundless field so I climbed up on it. What an immense view confronted me! The field, that I could never have believed could be so large, looked to me as if it covered the entire earth. People of every colour, dress, nation were gathered there. I saw so many people that I did not know if the world could have that many. I began by looking at the ones in front as I looked at them: they were dressed like us Italians. I knew the ones in the front rows and there were so many Salesians there who were leading groups of boys and girls by the hand. Then there were others with other groups; then still more and more that I no longer knew and could not make out, but there was an indescribable number of them. Towards the south there were Sicilians, Africans and an endless crowd of people I didn't know. They were all being led by Salesians; those in the front rows I knew and then no more.

“Note”, the person said to me. Then an endless crowd of other people appeared before me, dressed differently from us. They wore skins, kinds of mantles that looked almost like velvet, all in different colours. I turned to the four points of the compass. Amongst other things, to the east I saw women with feet so tiny that they struggled to remain standing and almost could not walk. What stood out was that everywhere I saw Salesians leading groups of boys and girls and with them a huge crowd of people. I always knew the ones in the front rows, then going on further, no longer, not even the missionaries. There are many things here that I cannot tell you at length because it would take too long.

Then the one who had led me and advised me up to this point about what I had to do, spoke again and said: “Look, Don Bosco; for now you will not understand everything I say, but pay attention: everything you have seen is all the harvest prepared for the Salesians. See how huge this harvest is! This huge field you find yourself in is the field in which the Salesians must work. The Salesians you see are the workers in the Lord's vineyard. many are working and you know them. The horizon then broadened before your eyes with people that you do not yet know, and this means that not only in this century, but in the next and in future centuries the Salesians will work in their field. But do you know on what condition what you see will happen? I will tell you: look, you need to print the Rule and on the first page, in large letters, remember, print the words that will be your coat of arms, your rallying cry, your badge. Note well: Work and temperance will see the Salesian Congregation flourish. You will explain these words; repeat them, insist on them. You will have a handbook printed that explains them and makes it well understood that work and temperance are the legacy you leave the Congregation and at the same time will also be its glory”.

I replied: “I will do this willingly enough; all this is according to our purpose and what I am already recommending every day and insisting on, every occasion I can”.

“Are you convinced then? Have you understood it well? This is the legacy you will leave them; and say clearly that while your sons follow this, they will have followers from the south, north, east and west. Now leave the Retreat and send them off to their destinations. These will follow the rules, then others will come”.

Then the vehicles appeared once again to take us on to Turin. I was looking and looking: they were omnibuses, but sui generis, strange as could be. We began to get on; but the omnibuses had no supports of any kind and I was afraid they would fall off, so I didn't want to let them leave. But the person said to me: “Go, go: they don't need
support, they just need to carry out these words: *Sobrii estote et vigilate*. Whoever carries out these two things will not fall, even though there is no support and the carriage is running fast.

The carriage set off fast and I was with the individual. “Come”, he soon said to me, “Come, because I want to show you the most important part”. You have something to learn! So, do you see that large cart?”
“I can see it”.
“Do you know what it is?”
“I can't see it well”
“If you want to see it well, come up close. Do you see that poster there? Come up and look at it: there is an emblem on the poster, and that will tell you the rest”.
I came up and saw four very large nails painted on the poster. I turned to him saying: “I don't understand anything unless you explain it!”
“Don't you see those four nails?” I looked carefully. “Those are the four nails that drilled into and tormented our Divine Saviour so much”
“And by that you mean?”
“They are four nails that torment religious congregations. If you avoid these four nails, meaning, that your congregation is not tormented by them, you keep them far away, then things will go well, you will be saved”
“But as I said before, What do these nails mean?”
“If you want to know better, have a closer look at the large carriage with the emblem on it. See, this carriage has four compartments, each corresponding to a nail”
“But what do these compartments mean?”
“Observe that at each one's entrance there is a poster with an inscription that explains everything”.
I observed the first compartment; I read the poster: *Quorum Deus venter est*. 
“Now I begin to understand something”. Then he replied:
“This is the first nail that torments and sends religious congregations to their ruin. It will also decimate you, unless you are careful. Fight against it well and you will see that things will prosper”.
“Now let's come to the second compartment. Read the inscription for the second nail: *Quaerunt quae sua sunt non quae Iesu Christi*. Here are the ones who seek their own comforts, ease and own interests or perhaps those of their family, and they do not seek the good of the Congregation which is the portion of Jesus Christ. Be careful, keep this scourge away and you will see the Congregation prosper”.
Third compartment. Observe the inscription for the third nail, it says: *Aspidis lingua eorum*. “A fatal nail for Congregations: complaining, gossip, those who seek to criticise rightly or wrongly”.
Fourth compartment: *Cubiculum otiositatis*. “Here are the idle ones in large numbers; when idleness starts to enter, the community will be ruined; instead, as long as it keeps working hard, you will be in no danger”.
“Now observe one more thing in this carriage, which very many take no notice of but I

395 Be calm but vigilant (1 Pt 5:8).
396 They make foods into their god (Ph 3:19).
397 All the rest seem more interested in themselves than in Jesus Christ (Phl 2:21).
398 They have a forked tongue.
399 The room for idleness.
want you to give it very special attention. Do you see that closet that is not part of any compartment, but sticks out a little in all of them? Observe it well: it is like a half compartment or area”

“I see, but there is only a heap of weeds, tall grass, some cut, tangled”

“Good, good: this is what I want you to observe”

“What can I draw from this?”

“Observe well the inscription that is almost hidden”. I did observe it well and I saw written: *Latet anguis in herba*.400 “And what is that about?”

“Look, there are certain individuals who lie hidden; they say nothing but talk amongst themselves. Be careful: *latet anguis in herba*. They are a real scourge, real plagues in the Congregation. Bad as they are, if they could be uncovered, they could be corrected. But no, they remain hidden. We don't notice them and meanwhile things get worse: the poison spreads in their heart and when they eventually become known there is no more time to repair the damage they have already wrought. So learn the things well that you need to keep far away from the Congregation. Keep what you have seen well in mind. See that these things are explained and explained again at length. By doing so you can be at peace about your Congregation knowing that things will thrive, one day being better than the other”.

I asked him then, so I would not forget any of the things he had told me, if I could have some time to write them down. “If you wish to try”, he answered, “then write them down; but I fear you have little time. Be careful”.

While he was saying this and I was getting ready to write, I thought I heard a strange noise, agitation all around me. It seemed that the ground below me was shaking. So I looked around to see if something else was happening again and I saw some young people, who had left just a bit earlier, running back to me terrified from everywhere, and then immediately the bellowing of the bull. It was the same bull following them. When the bull reappeared, I was so scared at the sight of it that I woke up.

I have told you this dream now, before you leave, convinced that in all truth it would be a worthy conclusion to the Retreat if we would decide to keep to our motto: *Work and Temperance*; if we all do our best to avoid the four large nails that destroy Congregations: the vice of greed; seeking an easy life; complaining and idleness; to which we should add that each one must be open, frank and confident with his superiors. This way we will do good for our souls and at the same time can also save those entrusted to our care by Divine Providence.

If we wanted to give a special reminder that can serve throughout this year, it would be: seek every way of preserving the queen of virtues, the virtue that safeguards all others; and if we have it, it will never be alone, in fact it will be accompanied by all the others; if we lose it, the others will either not be there at all or will soon be lost. Love this virtue, love it a lot and remember that to keep it you must work and pray: *Non eicitur nisi in jejunio et oratione*.401

Yes, prayer and mortification. Especially mortification in looks, in rest, food and especially wine. Not seeking comforts for our bodies, indeed I would almost say mistreating them. No special treatment other than what is necessary; when health demands it, yes. Give the body what is strictly necessary and no more; because, as St

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400 The snake hides in the grass (P. VIRGILIUS MARO, *Carmina bucolica*, 3, 93).
401 Only prayer and fasting will drive them out. Quotation adapted from the Vulgate “Hoc autem genus non ejicitur nisi per orationem et jejunium” (Mt 17, 20).
Paul used say: *Corpus hoc quod corrumpitur aggravat animam*. So! What did St Paul do? *Castigo corpus meum et in servitutem redigo ut spiritui inserviat*.

So I recommend here what I recommended at the end of the other Retreats: obedience, patience, hope… The other thing is the humility we need to have and inculcate in our young people and others, virtues that would ordinarily be called the foundation of Christian living and perfection.

**Future matters for vocations**

9 May 1879

A huge long battle between our boys and all kinds of other warriors, various kinds with strange weapons. At the end few survived.

Another more intense and horrible battle took place between gigantic monsters and well-armed, well-practised very tall men. They carried a very high, broad standard at the centre of which, written in gold, were these words: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum*. The battle was long and bloody. It was as if those following the standard were invulnerable and they remained masters of the huge plain. They were joined by the youngsters who had survived the previous battle and together they made up a kind of army, each with a crucifix in his right hand as a weapon, and in his left a small standard of Mary Help of Christians, modelled on the one above.

The new soldiers held many manoeuvres on that vast plain, then they split up and left, some to the West, others to the East, a few to the North, many to the South.

Once they had gone the same battles reoccurred, the same manoeuvres and same departures in the same directions.

I knew many of them from the earlier scuffles; the ones that followed were unknown to me but they let me know that they knew me and they asked me many questions.

Then a shower of bright flames came down; it looked like fire of many colours. There was thunder then the sky cleared and I found myself in a lovely garden. A man who looked like St Francis de Sales offered me a book, without saying anything. I asked him who he was. “Read the book”, he answered. I opened the book but it was difficult to read. However I managed to identify these precise words:

*For the novices*: Obedience and diligence in everything. By their obedience they will deserve the Lord’s blessings and the good will of men. By their diligence they will combat and conquer the snares of spiritual enemies.

*For the professed*: Jealously safeguard the virtue of chastity. Love the good name of the confreres and promote the dignity of the Congregation.

*For the Rectors*: Every care, every effort to observe the Rule and see that the Rule by which everyone is consecrated to God is observed.

*For the Superior*: Total offering of himself to see that he wins both himself and his subjets over to God.

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402 This corruptible body weighs down the soul. The quotation is not from St Paul but from Ws 9:15: “Corpus enim quod corrumpitur aggravat animam”.

403 I treat my body hard and make it obey me so it will serve the spirit. Quotation adapted from the Vulgate: “Castigo corpus meum et in servitutem redigo: ne forte cum aliis praedicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar” (1 Cor 9, 27): I treat my body hard and make it obey me, for having been an announcer myself, I should not want to be disqualified.

Many other things were printed in the book, but I couldn’t read them because the paper seemed as blue as the ink.
— Who are you? I asked the man again as he stood there calmly looking at me.
— My name is known to all the good, and I have been sent to tell you some things about the future.
— What things?
— those written down and others you will ask me about.
— What should I do to promote vocations?
— The Salesians will have many vocations through their exemplary conduct, by treating their pupils with the greatest charity and insisting on frequent Communion.
— What should be observed in accepting novices?
— Exclude the lazy and the greedy.
— And accepting for vows? — See that they have a guarantee of being chaste.
— How do we best preserve a good spirit in our houses?
— Write, visit, receive and deal with people kindly, and very often in the case of the first superiors.
— How should we go about the missions?
— Send individuals who morality is secure; call back anyone who give you cause for serious doubts; work at and cultivate indigenous vocations.
— Is our Congregation going well?
— Qui iustus est, iustificetur adhuc; Non progredi est regredi: Qui perseveraverit salvus erit. 405
— Will it expand much?
— As long as the superiors do their part it will grow and no one will be able to stop it from spreading.
— Will it last a long time?
— the Congregation will last so long as its members love work and temperance. If one of these two pillars is missing your building will collapse around your superiors and inferiors and their followers.

Just then four individuals appeared carrying a bier and walking towards me.
— What is this for? I said
— For you.
— Soon?
— Don’t ask, just remember that you are mortal.
— What do you want to signify by this coffin?
— That you must practise in life what you want your sons to practise after you. This is the legacy, the testament you must leave your sons; but you must prepare it and leave it well accomplished and practised.
— Will flowers or thorns dominate?
— There will be many roses, many consolations but some very prickly thorns are imminent and they will and they will bring much bitterness and sorrow. You need to pray a lot.
— Should we go to Rome?
— Yes, but slowly, with the greatest prudence and exquisite caution.
— Is the end of my mortal life imminent?
— Don’t worry about this. You have the Rule, books, do what you teach others to do.

Be vigilant.

405 Let those who are holy continue to be holy (Rv 22:11). Not progressing means going backwards. The one who stands firm till the end will be saved (cf Mt 24:13).
I wanted to ask other questions, but there was a thunderstorm and lightning, and some men, or I should really say terrible monsters were rushing towards me to tear me to pieces. Just then everything went dark and I could see nothing. I thought I was dead and I began shouting out wildly. I awoke and found myself still alive. It was a quarter to five in the morning.

If there is something there that could be to your advantage, take it.
In everything, honour and glory to God forever and ever.

The ten diamonds

Spiritus Sancti gratia illuminet sensus et corda nostra. Amen

On the night of the 10th of September (1881), the day the holy Church consecrates to the holy name of Mary, the Salesians gathered at S. Benigno Canavese were making their Retreat. On the night of the 10th, while I was sleeping, I found myself in a large and splendidly ornate hall. I seemed to be walking up and down with the Rectors of our houses when a man appeared amongst us of such majestic mien that we could not keep our eyes fixed on him. He gazed at us then without a word began to take a few paces ahead of us.

He wore an imposing mantle with a stole-like collar tied at the neck with a ribbon that hung down in front. On the stole was written in luminous characters: *Pia Salesianorum Societas anno 1881*, and on the ribbon: *Qualis esse debet*. The august personage wore ten huge diamonds of extraordinary splendour which was what prevented us from fixing our gaze on him, except with out great effort.

Three of the diamonds were on his breast and on one was inscribed *Fides*, on another *Spes* and *Charitas* was inscribed on the one over his heart. The fourth diamond was on the right shoulder where *Labor* was inscribed; over the fifth on the left shoulder one could read *Temperantia*.

The other five diamonds adorned the back of the mantle and were arranged thus: one very large and brighter one was in the middle, like at the centre of a square, and it bore the inscription *Obedientia*. On the first on the right one could read *Votum Paupertatis*. On the second a little lower, *Praemium*. On the left higher up was inscribed *Votum Castitatis* with a dazzling splendour all of its own and looking at it attracted and held the attetnation like a magnet attracts metal. On the second on the left lower down was written *Ieiunium*. All four of these directed their rays of light towards the diamond at the centre.

Explanation – To avoid confusion it should be noted that each diamond had rays like flames small tongues of flame on which various texts could be read: *Faith carried the maxim Sumite scutum fidei ut adversus insidias diaboli certare possitis*. Another ray

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406 Original by Don Bosco, published in C. ROMERO, *I sogni di Don Bosco*, pp. 59-71 (cf MB XV, 183-187). Also called the “the San Benigno Canavese dream”; one of the most important texts for the spirituality of the Salesians.

407 May the grace of the Holy Spirit enlighten our minds and our hearts. Amen.

408 As it should be.

409 Take up the buckler of faith and battle against the snares of the devil. Quotation adapted from the Vulgate: “In omnibus sumentes scutum fidei, in quo possitis omnia tela nequissimi ignea extinguire” (Eph 6:16): Always carry the shield of faith so you can use it to put out the burning arrows of the evil one.
read Fides sine operibus mortua est. Non auditores, sed factores legis regnum Dei possidebunt.

On the rays of Hope, Sperate in Domino, non in hominibus. Semper vestra fixa sint corda ubi vera sunt gaudia.

On the rays of Charity, Alter alterius onera portate si vultis adimplere legem meam. Diligite et diligemini. Sed diligite animas vestras et vestrorum. Devote divinum officium persolvatur; Missa attente celebretur; Sanctum Sanctorum peramanter visitetur.

On the word Labor, or Work, Remedium concupiscentiae; Arma potens contra omnes insidias diaboli.

On Temperance: Si lignum tollis, ignis extinguitur. Pactum constitue cum oculis tuis, cum gula, cum somno, ne huiusmodi inimici depraedentur animas vestras.

On the word Labor, or Work, Remedium concupiscentiae; Arma potens contra omnes insidias diaboli.


On the rays of Chastity, Omnes virtutes veniunt pariter cum illa. All virtues come together with her. Quotation adapted from the Vulgate: “Venerunt autem mihi omnia bona pariter cum illa” (Ws 7, 11): In her company all good things came to me.

On the rays of Reward, Si delectat magnitudo praemiorum, non deterreat multitudo laborum. If the rich reward attracts you, do not be afraid of the many hardships (cf GREGORIUS MAGNUS, Homiliae in Evangelia, XXXVII).

On the rays of Fasting, Arma potentissima adversus insidias inimici. Powerful weapon against the devil's snares.

A large red-coloured ribbon hemmed the bottom of the cloak, and above this ribbon was inscribed, Argumentum praedicationis, mane, meridie et vespere. Topic for preaching, morning, midday and evening.

Up till this moment some of the Rectors were standing, others kneeling; but all were astonished and no one spoke. At this point Fr Rua spoke excitedly — We need to take notes lest we forget. He looked for a pen but couldn’t find one; he pulled out his wallet, searched it but there was no pencil. I will remember, said Fr Durando. I want to take notes, added Fr Fagnano, and began to write with the stem of a rose. We were all looking and we could understand what he was writing. When Fr Fagnano stopped writing, Fr Costamagna continued to dictate: Charity understands all things, sustains all things, conquers all things; let us preach this in word and deed.

While Fr Fagnano was writing, we all found ourselves in pitch dark. — Quiet, said Fr Ghivarello, let us kneel down and pray and the light will return. Fr Lasagna began the Veni Creator, then the De Profundis, Maria Auxilium Christianorum etc. to which we responded. When we said Ora pro nobis, a light reappeared, surrounding a placard on which we could read: Pia Salesianorum Societas qualis esse periclitatur anno salutis 1900.

426 All virtues come together with her. Quotation adapted from the Vulgate: “Venerunt autem mihi omnia bona pariter cum illa” (Ws 7, 11): In her company all good things came to me.

427 The pure of heart see God's secrets and will see God himself. Quotation adapted from the Vulgate: “Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt” (Mt 5:8).

428 If the rich reward attracts you, do not be afraid of the many hardships (cf GREGORIUS MAGNUS, Homiliae in Evangelia, XXXVII).

429 Whoever suffers with me will rejoice with me.

430 Whatever we suffer on earth is momentary, the joys of my friends in Heaven are eternal. Quotation inspired by the Vulgate: “Quod in presenti est momentaneum et leve tribulationis nostrae, supra modum in sublimate æternen gloriam pondus operatur in nobis” (2 Cor 4, 17): The troubles which are soon over, though they weigh little, train us for the carrying of a weight of eternal glory which is out of all proportion to them.

431 Powerful weapon against the devil's snares.

432 Guardian of all virtues.

433 Fasting puts flight to all kinds of foes. This recalls the text in the Vulgate: “Hoc autem genus non ejicitur nisi per orationem et jejunium” (Mt 17, 20): This kind of devil can only be got rid of through prayer and fasting.

434 Topic for preaching, morning, midday and evening.

435 See to the details of the virtues and you will build a great edifice of holiness.

436 Woe to you if you despise the little things, for little by little you will sink down. Quotation adapted from the Vulgate: “Qui spernit modica paulatim decidet” (Sir 19, 1): He who despises trifles will sink down little by little.

437 The Pious Salesian Society as it runs the risk of becoming in 1900.
A moment later the light became brighter so that we could see and recognise one another. In the midst of this brightness the personage we had seen before appeared again but looking distressed like someone on the verge of tears. His mantles had become faded, moth-eaten, in tatters. In place of the diamonds there were gaping holes caused by moths and other insects.

*Respicite,* he told us, *et intelligite.*

I saw that the ten diamonds had become grubs that were hungrily eating up the garment.

Therefore the diamond *Fides* had been replaced by *somnus et accidia.*

For *Spes* there was *risus et scurrilitas.*

For *Charitas:* *Negligentia in divinis perficiendis.*

*Amant et quae quaerunt quae sua sunt, non quae Iesu Christi.*

For *Temperantia:* *Gula et quorum Deus venter est.*

For *Labor:* *Somnus, furtum et otiositas.*

In place of *Obedientia* there was nothing but a large, deep hole and nothing written.

For *Castitas:* *Concupiscencia oculorum et superbia vitae.*

For *Povertas* there was: *Lectum, habitus, potus et pecunia.*

For *Praemium:* *Pars nostra erunt quae sunt super terram.*

For *Ieiunium* there was a hole and nothing written.

We were all terrified at the sight. Fr Lasagna fainted, Fr Cagliero went as white as a sheet and leaning against a chair cried out: “Is it possible that things have come to this?” Fr Lazzero and Fr Guidazio and were holding onto each other to stop from falling. Fr Francesia, Count Cays, Fr Barberis and Fr Leveratto were kneeling, rosaries in hand and praying.

Then we heard a sombre voice: *Quomodo mutatus est color optimus!*

But in the darkness something remarkable occurred. We suddenly found ourselves enveloped in darkness, in the midst of which appeared a bright light in human form. We could not look at it, but we could see that it was a handsome young man dressed in a white cloak woven through with gold and silver thread. All around it was hemmed with very bright diamonds. He was of imposing and charming mine and he came towards us and addressed us with these exact words:

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438 Look and learn.
439 Sleep and sloth.
440 Laughter and scurrilous talk.
441 Neglect of the things of God.
442 They seem more interested in themselves than Jesus Christ (Ph 2:21).
443 Greed; They make foods into their gods (Ph 3:19).
444 Sleep, dishonesty and idleness.
445 Concupiscence of the eyes and pride of life (1 Jn 2:16).
446 Bed, clothing, drink and money.
447 Our heritage will be earthly goods.
448 Oh how the old gold has tarnished (Lam 4:1).

These last words were sung, and to the voice of the one speaking were added a multitude of other voices so melodious and resonant that we were left benumbed, and to prevent ourselves from swooning, we joined in the singing. As soon as the singing finished it all went dark. Then I awoke, and I say that it was daylight.

Reminder — This dream lasted almost the entire night and in the morning I was completely worn out. Nevertheless for fear of forgetting I got up quickly and took some notes that served to remind me of what I have spoken of on this day of the presentation of Mary in the Temple.

It was not possible to recall everything. Amongst many other things I could detect with certainty that the Lord shows us great mercy. Our Society is blessed by Heaven, but he wants us to do our part. The threatened evils will be prevented if we preach on the virtues and vices noted there: if we practise what we preach and we pass it on to our confreres the authentic tradition of our past and future works.

I was able to see that there are many thorns imminent, many efforts, but they will be followed by many great consolations. Around 1890 there will be great fear; around 1895 there will be a great triumph. Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis.

449 "Servants and instruments of almighty God, listen and understand. Take courage and be strong. What you have seen and heard is a warning from Heaven, sent to you and your brethren. Take heed and understand well what it is telling you. Forewarned is forearmed and the faults you have seen can be prevented. The texts shown are also topics for preaching. Preach incessantly, in season and out of season. But always practise what you preach, so that your deeds are like light which will build up a healthy tradition and be a light for your brethren and sons from generation to generation. Listen well and understand: — be circumspect in accepting novices, strong in cultivating them, prudent in admitting them [to profession]. Test them all, but keep only the good ones. Send away the ones who are superficial and fickle. Listen well and understand: — Meditate morning and evening on observance of the Constitutions. If you do that then the help of the Almighty will never be lacking. You will be a revelation for the world and the angels and then your glory will be the glory of God. Those who see the end of this century and the beginning of the next will say of you: — This is the Lord's work and is marvellous in our eyes. Then all your brethren and sons will sing: — Not to us, not to us O Lord but to your name give glory".
A FATHER'S FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND A FOUNDER'S CONCERNS

Reported here are some of the salient parts of an original note book of Don Bosco's, known in the Salesian tradition as the “Spiritual testament”:

1. Goodbye my dear and beloved sons in Jesus Christ (pp. 00-00).
2. Special advice for everyone (pp. 00-00).
3. Aspirants to the Salesian vocation (pp. 00-00).
4. The Rector of a house with his confreres (pp. 00-00).
5. Basic recommendations for all Salesians and Salesian Sisters (pp. 00-00).
6. The future (pp. 00-00).
7. A final greeting to benefactors and Cooperators (pp. 00-00).
1. Adieu, my dear and beloved Sons in Jesus Christ

Before leaving this world for eternity, I wish to fulfil a duty towards you and so satisfy an ardent desire of my heart.

First of all, I thank you with the most ardent affection of my soul for the obedience you have given me and for all you have done to sustain and propagate our Congregation. I leave you here on earth, but only for a short time. I hope the infinite mercy of God will enable us all to meet one day in Heaven. There I await you.

Do not grieve over my death. This is a debt we must all pay; but afterwards, every fatigue sustained for the love of our Master, the good Jesus, will be greatly rewarded. Instead of weeping, make firm and efficacious resolutions to remain staunch in your vocation until death.

Watch, so that neither the love of the world, nor the affection of parents, nor the desire of a more agreeable life induce you to make the great mistake of profaning the sacred vows, and so transgress the religious profession by which you are consecrated to God. Let none take back that which we have given to God.

If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions. Your first Rector is dead. But our true Superior, Jesus Christ, will never die. He will always be our Master, our guide, our model. But remember that he, in his own time, will also be our judge and the one who rewards our faithfulness in His service.

Your Rector is dead. But there will be another elected, who will have care of you and of your eternal salvation. Listen to him, love him, obey him, pray for him as you have done for me.

Adieu, dear children, adieu. I wait for you in Heaven. There we shall speak of God, of Mary, the Mother and support of our Congregation; there we shall bless eternally this our Congregation, the observance of whose rules will have powerfully and efficaciously contributed to our salvation. Sit nomen Domini benedictum ex hoc nunc et usque in saeculum. In te Domine speravi, non confundar in aeternum.

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451 May the name of the Lord be blessed, now and forever. In you O Lord I take shelter; never let me be disgraced (Ps 71:1).
2. Special advice for everyone\textsuperscript{452}

1. I warmly recommend that all my sons be careful in never saying or asserting, in speech or writing, that Don Bosco obtained graces from God or performed miracles in some way or other. He would be committing a damaging error. Although the good God has been generous in my regard, nevertheless I have never pretended to know or perform supernatural things. I have done none other than pray and asked other good souls to ask for graces. I have always found the prayers and communions of our youngsters to be effective. The God of mercy and his Holy Mother came to our help in our needs. This was especially true whenever it was a case of providing for our poor and abandoned boys, and even more so when their souls were in danger.

2. The holy Virgin Mary will certainly continue to protect our Congregation and Salesian works if we continue to trust her and continue to foster her cult. Her feasts and more so her solemnities, novenas, triduums, the month dedicated to Her, should be warmly fostered in public and in private; with flyers, books, medals, holy pictures, by publishing or simply telling of graces and blessings that our heavenly benefactress grants to suffering humanity at every moment.

3. Two sources of grace for us are: recommending every occasion we can and in good time that our young pupils approach the sacraments or perform some work of piety in honour of Mary. Hearing Holy Mass devoutly, visiting Jesus in the | Blessed Sacrament, frequent sacramental or at least spiritual communion are highly pleasing to Mary and a powerful means for obtaining special graces.

3. Aspirants to the Salesian vocation\textsuperscript{453}

By aspirants here we mean those young men who want to form themselves in a Christian lifestyle that will then make them worthy in time to embrace the Salesian Congregation either as clerics or as coadjutor confreres.

Particular care should be shown these boys. But only the ones who have an intention to become Salesians or who at least are not contrary to the possibility should this be God's will, should be listed amongst these.

They should be given a conference at least twice a month. These conferences should deal with what a young man should do or should avoid to become a good Christian. The \textit{Companion of Youth} offers the main topics for such talks.

However do not talk to them about our Rule or about the vows, or of leaving home or their families; these are matters that will enter their hearts without making them a topic for discussion.

Keep this great principle firmly: one needs to give oneself to God sooner or later, and God calls him blessed the one who consecrates himself to the Lord in his youth.

\textsuperscript{452} F. MOTTO (ed.), \textit{Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6}, pp. 35-36. 
\textsuperscript{453} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 39-40.
The world then, with all its flattery, parents, friends, home sooner or later either through love or per force, needs to be abandoned and left entirely and forever.

4 The Rector of a house with his confreres

The Rector must be a model of patience, charity with the confreres who depend on him, and therefore:

1. Assist them, help them, instruct them on how to fulfil their duties but never with hard or offensive words.

2. Let them see that you have great confidence in them; treat matters concerning them kindly. Never reproaches or strong words in the presence of others. But try to do this always in camera caritatis, meaning gently, strictly in private.

3. When the reasons for such reproaches or advice are public, it may be necessary to advise publicly, but either in church or in special conferences never make personal allusions. Advice, reproaches or allusions made publicly are offensive and do not bring about change.

4. Never forget the monthly 'rendiconto' [talk with the Rector] as far as possible. On that occasion let each Rector be the friend, brother, father of his dependants. Give everyone the time and liberty to offer their reflections, express their needs and their intentions. For his part, then, let him open his heart to everyone without being the cause of rancour for anyone; he should not recall past faults unless to offer fatherly | advice, or to charitably remind someone who is negligent of his duty.

5. Act in such a way as to never deal with matters that belong to confession, unless the confreres asks for this. In such cases never make resolutions that have to be translated in foro esterno without some understanding with the member concerned.

6. The Rector is most often the ordinary confessor of the confreres. But let him prudently give ample freedom to whoever wishes to confess to another. It should however be understood that such particular confessors are to be known and approved by the superior according to our Rule.

7. Since then whoever seeks exceptional confessors is showing little confidence in the Rector, he, the Rector, should be alert and draw particular attention to observance of other rules and not entrust that confrere with certain tasks that might seem beyond his physical or moral strength.

N.B. What I say here in fact is other than what refers to the extraordinary confessor which the Superior, Rector, Provincial organises for an appropriate occasion.

8. In general then the Rector of a house shall deal with his confreres often and with much familiarity, insisting on the need for uniform observance of the Constitutions, and as much as possible recalling even the very words they use.

9. In cases of illness observe what the rules prescribe and what the Chapter deliberations have established.

10. Easily forget personal offences and annoyances and through kindness and regard

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454 Blessed is he who consecrates himself to the Lord in his youth (Lm 3:27).
455 F. MOTTO (ed.), Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6, pp. 47-49.
try to overcome or better correct the negligent, those lacking in trust or suspicious. *Vince in bono malum*.456

5. Basic recommendations for all Salesians and Salesian Sisters457

Love poverty if you wish to keep the Congregation in a good financial state.

Let no one be able to say: “These furnishings do not suggest poverty; the poor do not eat or dress or have rooms like this. Whoever gives cause for remarks of this kind brings disaster upon our Congregation which must be able to pride itself on its vow of poverty. Woe to us if those from whom we seek alms are able to say that we live an easier life than they do. This should always be practised rigorously when we find ourselves in a good state of health, while in cases of illness we do everything that our Rule permits.

Remember that it will always be a red-letter day when you are able to win over an enemy or make a friend by charity.

Never let the sun set on your anger, nor recall offences already forgiven, or pain caused, or a fault already forgotten. Let us always say from our heart: *Dimitte nobis debita nostra sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris*.458 but with complete and absolute readiness to forget everything that has offended us in the past. Let us love everyone with fraternal love.

Let these things be observed in an exemplary way by those who exercise some authority over others.

6. The future459

Divine Providence has prepared a happy future for our Congregation and its glory will endure as along as the rules are faithfully observed.

When the desire for ease and comfort grows amongst us, our pious Society will have run its course.

The world will always welcome us as long as all our concern is for the under-developed peoples, for poor children for those members of society most at risk. This is our real wealth which no one will envy and no one will take from us.

Do not found houses if you do not have the necessary personnel to administer them.

Do not have too many houses near to each other. There are fewer risks if the houses are far from one another.

Once a foreign mission has begun, let it continue with energy and sacrifice. Our

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456 Resist evil and conquer it with good (Rm 12:21).
457 F. MOTTO (ed.), *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884* 4-6, pp. 56-57.
458 Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us (Mt 6:9-12).
efforts should be always to establish schools and seek some vocations for the ecclesiastical state, or some Sisters from amongst the girls.

Time will lead us to establish our missions in China and precisely in Peking [Beijing]. But let us never forget that we exist for poor and abandoned boys. Amongst those who know little or nothing of the true God you will see taking place wonders formerly thought incredible but which almighty God will make manifest to the world.

Let us not keep any property other than the dwelling places we need.

When we lack the financial means for some religious enterprise, it should be suspended but let the works already begun be continued as soon as our finances, sacrifices permit.

When it happens that a Salesian yields up his life whilst working for souls, you can say that the Congregation has registered a great triumph and that on it will descend in abundance the blessings of Heaven.

7. A final greeting to benefactors and Cooperators

My good benefactors,

I feel that the end of my life is approaching, and the day on which I must pay the common tribute to death and descend into the grave is well nigh. Before leaving this world for eternity, I wish to fulfil a duty towards you and so satisfy an ardent desire of my heart.

The debt I must repay is one of gratitude for all you have done to help me educate so many poor youngsters in a Christian way, putting them on the way to virtue and work, so they could be the consolation of their families, useful to themselves and to civil society and especially so they might save their souls and so be happy in eternity.

Without your charity I would have been able to do little or nothing; with your charity instead, we have cooperated with God's grace, dried many a tear and saved many a soul. With your charity we have founded any number of colleges ([boarding schools] and hospices where thousands of orphans are and have remained, rescued from abandonment, taken out of danger of irreligion and immorality, and by means of a good education, study and learning a trade or art, been made good Christians and solid citizens.

With your charity we have established missions at the ends of the earth, in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, and sent hundreds of Workers for the Gospel to extend and cultivate the Lord's vineyard.

With your charity we have set up printing presses in various cities and towns, published millions of copies of books and broadsheets amongst the people in defence of the truth, to encourage piety and support morality.

Again with your charity we have built many chapels and churches in which, for centuries to come until the end of the world God's praises and the praises of the Virgin Mary will be sung, and many souls be saved.

Convinced that, after God, all this and so many other good things were acheived through the effective help of your charity, I feel the need to thank you and so before

460 Ibid., pp. 60-62. Circular printed and included with the Bollettino Salesiano May 1888.
closing my final days I thank you with the most profound gratitude and from the depths of my heart.

But if you have helped me with so much kindness and perseverance, now I ask you to continue to help my successor after my death. The works I have begun with your support no longer need me, but they continue to need you and all those who, like you, love to foster good on this earth. I entrust and recommend them all to you then.

For your encouragement and comfort I leave it to my successor to see that in the common and private prayers that are said and will be said in Salesian houses, our benefactors will always be included, and that there is always the intention that God may grant a hundredfold for their charity in the present life, through health and harmony in the family, prosperity on their farms and in their affairs and freedom from every disgrace, keeping these far from them.

I also note for your encouragement and comfort that the most effective work for obtaining pardon for sins and being sure of eternal life is charity given to little children: Uni ex minimis, to a little abandoned one, as our Divine Master Jesus assures us.⁴⁶¹ I note how in these times where we feel so much the lack of material means for education and educating poor and abandoned youngsters in the faith and good morals, the holy Virgin herself becomes their protector; therefore she obtains for their benefactors many spiritual graces and even extraordinary temporal ones.

I myself and with me all the Salesians are witness to the fact that many of our benefactors who were earlier down on their luck, became much more well-to-do after they began to lavish charity on our orphans.

In view of this and taught by the experience of not a few of them, who one way or another told me this more than once in these or similar words: I do not want you to thank me when I offer charity to your poor boys; I should be thanking you for asking me. Since I began helping your orphans my own welfare has tripled. Another gentleman, 'Commendatore' Antonio Cotta, who often came to bring alms, said: the more money I bring for these works the more my business progresses. It is a fact that the Lord gives me in this life a hundredfold for what I give out of love for him. He was an outstanding benefactor of ours until he was 86, when God called him to eternal life to enjoy the reward of his kindness.

Although tired and worn out I will never cease speaking about you and recommending you to my boys, whom I am about to abandon; even I have to call it quits and lay down my pen.

Adieu, my dear benefactors, Cooperators, adieu.

I have not got to know many of you personally in this life, but that does not matter: in the other world we will all come to know each other and in eternity we will rejoice together for the good that with God's grace we have done on this earth, especially on behalf of poor youth.

If, after my death, the divine mercy, through the merits of Jesus Christ and the protection of Mary Help of Christians, finds me worthy of being received into Paradise, I will always pray for you, pray for your families, your dear ones, that one day they may all come to praise the Creator's majesty in eternity, and drink of his divine delights to the full, sing his infinite mercies, Amen.

Always your most obedient servant,

⁴⁶¹ Cf Mt 10:42.
Fr John Bosco.
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Active charity (cf love of neighbour)

*Auxilium Christianorum*

Bad companions
Bad talk
Brief prayers (cf. ejaculatory prayer)
Cheerfulness (cf joy)
Choice of state (cf vocation)
Church
Communion (cf Sacraments/Eucharist)
Complaining
Confession (cf Sacraments/Penance)
Confessor
Confidence in superiors
Confidence/trust in God
Constitutions
Contrition
Conversion
Custody of the sense (cf mortification)
Death (be ready)
Detachment from the world (cf *fuga mundi*)
Devil
Devotion
Diligence
Discernment (cf vocation)
Duties of state
Education of youth
Ejaculatory prayer (cf. brief prayers)
Exactitude
Examination of conscience
Exercise for a happy death
Fasting
Fidelity (cf perseverance; observance)
Fortitude
Fraternal charity
Fraternal correction

*Fuga mundi*

General confession
Giving oneself to God
Glory of God
God: loving; creator; merciful
Good example
God's will

*Hail Mary*

Harvest (abundant)
Heaven
Idleness (flee from)
Imitation of Jesus Christ
Incontinence
Jesus Christ
Joy
Keeping busy
Love of neighbour (active charity)
Love of God
Mary (Auxilium Christianorum)
Mary (devotion)
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Meditation (mental prayer)
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Saint John Bosco began his ministry on the outskirts of Turin. To poor boys, all of them needy, attending the Oratory he immediately offered “a short and easy, but sufficient method” of becoming “the consolation of your parents, an honour to your country, good citizens on earth to be one day fortunate inhabitants of Heaven”. A fertile and fruitful school of youthful holiness was born. Twenty years later, when he founded the Salesian Congregation, his horizons broadened; his spiritual teaching became more profound, more radical, more all-embracing. But it is precisely in this movement, where he accentuates the absolute primacy of God and the demands of the 'sequela Christi' that the real substance of this “easy” spiritual proposal offered to young people at the primitive Oratory emerges. In fact the core is the same, even though expressed in unadorned, simple, everyday language.

This anthology aims to bring the reader into close contact with that atmosphere, allow him or her to enter into Don Bosco's horizons, become familiar with his language and spiritual teaching. It is not a systematic presentation of his spirituality, but a collection of authoritative “teachings” on how to live as good Christians and good Salesians in a sound way.

This book has four parts: 1. Don Bosco as a spiritual guide for the young; 2. Indications for a consistent, active Christian life; 3. Consecrated to God for His glory and the salvation of the young; 4. A father’s final recommendations, and a founder’s concerns.