

ADMA (The Association of Mary Help of Christians) was founded on April 18, 1869, at the Basilica of Mary Help in Valdocco (Torino), Italy. It offers a path of personal sanctification and of apostolate according to the Salesian charism. The main purpose of the Association is to spread devotion to the Eucharist and to Mary Help of Christians. Praying a daily rosary, joining with the other members once a month to honor Mary Help of Christians and to learn about true devotion to Her, adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, living the Ten Commandments, supporting the evangelization efforts on behalf of poor and abandoned youth, and giving service to others are the commitments one assumes on making his/her promise. ADMA is one of the original four branches of the Salesian Family founded by St. John Bosco himself. Today it is widespread throughout 50 countries in the world, with 600 associations that work in communion with the Church and with the other Groups of the Salesian Family. ADMA for families and ADMA for adults is now augmented by ADMA Young for teenagers and ADMA for children.

## HISTORY

### The Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians

A born organiser, Don Bosco did not leave the cult to Mary Help of Christians simply to spontaneous devotion. He gave it stability with an Association that took her name. First-hand witnesses saw in this institution one of the initiatives dearest to Don Bosco and the one with the widest impact after that of the two religious Congregations and the Association of the Cooperators<sup>91</sup>.

He himself traced out the origins in the leaflet *Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians canonically erected in the Church dedicated to Her in Turin with history information about this title* by the priest John Bosco<sup>92</sup>. Following the presentation *To the reader*, some short chapters describe the history of the title of *Help of Christians*, from the Bible to the battle of Lepanto (1571), to the liberation of Vienna in 1683 and, finally, to the institution of the feast by Pius VII in 1814<sup>93</sup>. A few pages were dedicated to the *Devotion to Mary Help of Christians at Monaco and at Turin* and to the spiritual favours granted by Pius IX to the sanctuary in Turin<sup>94</sup>. This is followed by documents concerning the canonical approbation of the *Association*. The first was from April 1869, the *Supplica* by Don Bosco to the archbishop of Turin, "requesting the canonical approbation of the Association.". In this he asked him to "take in gracious consideration" the "pious project" and to examine the Statutes and – expressing the usual total readiness - "to add, remove, change " whatever he judged appropriate, "with all the conditions" "he might judge suitable to promote the glories of the August Queen of Heaven and the good of souls," The approbation of Archbishop Riccardi dated 18 April was gracious and generous, in harmony with the brief of 16 March with which Pius IX had granted to the new Association ample indulgences for ten years<sup>95</sup>. The last part of the leaflet contained the text of the statutes, a long series of prayers and devout practices with an indication of the relevant indulgences attached, a short catechetical explanation *about indulgences* in general, the decree of 22 May 1868, with which Pius IX granted a plenary indulgence to all those who "in a religious spirit " visited "the church dedicated in Turin to Mary the Immaculate Virgin under the title of Mary Help of Christians, on the titular feast of this church or on one of the preceding days "<sup>96</sup>.

As he was accustomed to say in presenting important documents, Don Bosco attributed the origin of *the Association* to "repeated requests," coming "from all parts and from people of all ages and every condition" during and after the construction and the consecration of the church. He referred to the associates as "those united in the same spirit of prayer and piety paying homage to the great Mother of the Saviour invoked with the beautiful title of the Help of Christians"<sup>97</sup>.

In these circumstances, too Don Bosco quickly drew up the statutes which were not a masterpiece of doctrinal or juridical presentation but which shone for their spontaneity and practical nature. He mentioned again the close links that he usually indicated between devotion to Mary and to Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. The material was divided into three sections, the first without heading: the purpose and the means, the *spiritual advantages, reception*. Enrolment was open to all without any special conditions (*Reception*, art. 1-3)<sup>98</sup>. The following were proposed to the Associates as the *aims*: zeal for the increase in piety, spirituality, worship: "to promote the glories of the divine Mother of the Saviour" (art. 1); "to spread devotion to the Blessed Virgin and veneration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament" (art. 2), to make use "of words, of advice, good works and influence to promote dignity and devotion in the novenas, feasts and solemnities that occur during the year to honour the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Most Holy Sacrament" (art. 3); in addition, to encourage "the spreading of good books, pictures, medals and leaflets, taking part in processions in honour of Mary most holy and the Blessed Sacrament and encouraging others to do likewise, frequent Communion and presence at Holy Mass, the accompaniment of Viaticum to the dying" (art. 4); to make great efforts "never to use blasphemy or engage in talk contrary to religion, and to do their utmost to prevent those under their charge from doing likewise; they will also do all they can to remove obstacles in the way of the sanctification of Sundays and Feast-days" (art. 5). The *means* were basically an intense life of personal piety: "to approach the Sacraments of Confession and Communion once a fortnight or once a month, and assist at daily Mass if one's duties permit." (art. 6); for the ordinary faithful, suitable brief prayers were suggested in the morning and evening, and for priests, having the intention of praying at mass for all the members of this pious Association: "These prayers," he pointed out, "will serve as a bond to unite all the members so that they form a single mind and soul to give due honour to Jesus hidden in the Eucharist and his august Mother, and participate in all the good works done by each member." (art. 7)<sup>99</sup>. Regarding the spiritual growth of the members in "putting in common all their good works," prayers and indulgences, the eight articles under the heading *Spiritual advantages*<sup>100</sup> dealt at length.

To increase the expansion of the Association Don Bosco managed to have it erected as an Archconfraternity, with the faculty of aggregating to it similar associations already in existence or later to be erected. This was granted by Pius IX with the brief *Sodalitia Fidelium* of 5 April 1870, which, however, limited the aggregation to the archdiocese of Turin. With a subsequent brief, *Expositum Nobis*, of 2 March 1877 the faculty was extended to all the dioceses of Piedmont. After the death of Don Bosco, Leo XIII, first with the brief *Admotae Nobis preces* of 25 June 1889, granted the faculty of aggregation to all the similar associations "erected or to be erected in any church or public oratory belonging to the Salesian Society wherever they may be"; then with the brief *Cum multa* of 19 January 1894 he conferred *in perpetuo* on the Rector Major of the Salesians and his successors the faculty of being able "to validly and lawfully erect other associations of the same name, and institute in any place where houses and churches of the Congregation existed and aggregate the associations erected to the above mentioned Archconfraternity"; two years afterwards with the brief *Sodalitas* of 25 February 1896 he granted the Rector Major and his successors the faculty of "aggregating to the same Archconfraternity", established in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, other associations with the same aims and of the same kind canonically erected in any church or diocese". Finally, the Sacred Congregation for Religious with the rescript of 31 July 1913 granted the privilege that the Rector Major might canonically erect the Associations of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians also in the houses of the Institute of the FMA and aggregate them to the Primary Centre in Turin<sup>101</sup>.

(PIETRO BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, LAS, Roma 2003, Vol I pp. 526 - 528.)

- 91 Cf. The testimony of Fr Gioachino Berto and Bishop. Giovanni Cagliero at the canonical process of beatification and canonisation: S. C. SS. *Rituum, Positio super Introd. Causae, Summarium* (Romae 1907), pp. 384s e 412.
- 92 Torino, tip. dell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales 1869, 96 p., OE XXI 339-434.
- 93 G. Bosco, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 3-24, OE XXI 341-362.
- 94 G. Bosco, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 24-31, OE XXI 362-369.
- 95 G. Bosco, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 32-47, OE XXI 370-385.
- 96 G. Bosco, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 48-95, OE XXI 386-433.
- 97 G. Bosco, *Associazione de' di voti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, p. 3, OE XXI 341.
- 98 G. Bosco, *Associazione de' di voti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 54-55, OE XXI 392-393.
- 99 G. Bosco, *Associazione de' di voti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 48-50, OE XXI 386-388.
- 100 G. Bosco, *Associazione de' di voti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 50-53, OE XXI 388-391.
- 101 Cfr. A.STICKLER, *L'Associazione dei Divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice*, NEL VOL. *l'Immacolata Ausiliatrice...*, PP.301-304.