

IV. PERSONAL LETTERS TO SALESIANS AND DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

These brief items of correspondence, written in familiar tone, contain simple advice on spiritual life. Don Bosco knew those he wrote to, their character, defects, the circumstances in which they worked. In a practical way he invited them to focus on concrete attitudes essential for nurturing their attachment to their Salesian vocation, constantly keeping their hearts leaning to God and charity.

The holy founder, writing to his Salesians, highlights the primacy of charity. He encourages zeal for souls and the good of their neighbour. He urges them to have confidence in their director and obey generously. In particular he emphasises the importance of temperance and sobriety of life, detachment from self and things. He recommends courage in adversity, mutual support, patience and kindness. He asks them to be exemplary, to observe the rules, have a spirit of piety and union with God. He encourages perseverance at the cost of any sacrifice.

238. To Cleric Giovanni Bonetti

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 591-592.

Sant' Ignazio, 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 deterreat multitudo laborum. Non coronabitur nisi qui legitime certaverit* [2 Tim 2:5]. *Esto bonus miles Christi et ipse coronabit te*" [cf 2 Tim 2:3]. Or sing with St Francis of Assisi: "*So great the good I have in sight/ That every pain is my delight,/ 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.

239. To Cleric Costanzo Rinaudo

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 174.

Venezia, 14 October 1865

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*. God bless you. Pray for me, I am,

Yours affectionately in the Lord,

Fr John Bosco.

240. To Cleric Giulio Barberis

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 187-188.

Turin, 6 December 1865

My dear Giulio,

Here is the answer you asked for:

1. Have a '*gavasso*' for breakfast⁵⁵, at lunch, according to your appetite; afternoon tea—nothing; at supper according to appetite but with temperance.

2. No fasts—only those of the Society.

3. Rest according to the house timetable; as soon as you wake up go quickly over some of your school work.

4. The essential study is for seminary classes; the rest is secondary. So give every effort to the first.

5. Do everything, suffer everything to win over souls for the Lord.

May God bless you, and please pray for,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco.

⁵⁵ *Gavasso*: dialect term used to indicate a loaf of bread.

241. To Fr Giovanni Bonetti

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 616-617.

Turin, 30 December 1868

Dear Fr Bonetti,

Thanks for the New Year gift. It will help me marvellously to settle the liabilities of the House. Thanks also to Fr Provera.

Now let's move on to the strenna.

You and Fr Provera should talk about your defects without offending one another.

For the Society: save on trips and as much as possible do not go to relatives' homes. Rodriguez has excellent material on this.

For the boys: let them promote frequent communion and devotion to Our Lady in word and deed.

Three topics to preach on:

1. Avoid bad conversations and reading.
2. Avoid dissolute companions or those who give bad advice.
3. Avoid idleness and do everything that can contribute to preserving the holy virtue of modesty.

See everything, speak with everyone, and the Lord in his kindness will do the rest.

May all go well for you, and the whole family at Mirabello: Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr J. Bosco

P.S. The director of classes should promote the associations for the Italian library.

242. To Fr Domenico Belmonte

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 137-138.

Trofarello, 22 September 1869

My dear Fr Belmonte,

A man said to the Saviour: *“Domine, sequar te quocumque ieris, sed permitte me primum ire et sepelire patrem meum. Iesus ait: Sequere me et dimitte mortuos sepelire mortuos.”* (Mt 8, 19). *“Tu vade, annuntia regnum Dei (Lc 9, 60). Alius ait: Domine, sequar te quocumque ieris, sed permitte mihi renuntiare his, quae domi sunt. Ait ad illum Iesus: Nemo mittens manum etc.”* (*ibid.*)⁵⁶ 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 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 Director, 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 Director, 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.

⁵⁶ Don Bosco suggests to Fr Belmonte a way of answering relatives who are pressuring him to return to the family.

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* [Phil 4:13].

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

243. To Cleric Pietro Guidazio

Critical ed. in E(m) III, p. 250.

Turin, 13 September 1870

My dear Guidazio,

You will always be restless and I would say unhappy until you put into practice the obedience you have promised and do not entirely abandon the direction given you by your superiors. Up till now the devil has cruelly tormented you and pushed you to do the opposite.

From your letter and discussions we have had there does not seem to be any reason to dispense you from vows. Should there be such I would have to write to the Holy See to whom this is reserved. But *coram Domino* I advise you to consider the *abneget semetipsum* [Mt 16:24] and be sure that *vir oboediens loquetur victorias* [Pr 21:28].

Believe my experience; the devil is trying to fool both of us; he has partly succeeded in your case; but he has completely failed with regard to my attitude to you.

Have full trust in me as I have always had in you; not words but deeds, effective willingness, humble, prompt unlimited obedience.

These are the things that will give you spiritual and temporal happiness and will bring me real consolation.

May God bless you and grant you the precious gift of perseverance in doing good. Pray for me. With fatherly affection I am,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

244. To Sr Maddalena Martini

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, p. 499.

[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;
3. Whoever leaves home, family, friends and follows the Divine Master is assured of a treasure in Heaven that nobody can take away;
4. The great reward prepared in Heaven should encourage us to put up with any kind of pain on earth.

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

245. To Fr Domenico Tomatis

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 84-85.

Alassio, 7 March 1876

My dear Fr Tomatis,

I received your news and was very pleased you had a good journey and that you are willing to work. Continue.

A letter you wrote to Varazze has let me know that you are not completely in harmony with some of your confreres. This has made a bad impression, especially since it was read publicly.

Listen to me, dear Tomatis, a missionary must be ready to give his life for the greater glory of God; so should he not be able to put up with a bit of antipathy by a companion, even if his defects are quite noticeable? So listen to what St Paul says to you: *“Alter alterius onera portate, et sic adimplebitis legem Christi”* [Gal 6:2]. *“Charitas benigna est, patiens est, omnia suffert, omnia sperat, omnia sustinet”* [1 Cor 13:4-7]. *“Et si quis suorum et maxime domesticorum curam non habet, est infideli deterior.”* [1 Tm 5:8] etc.

So, dear friend, give me this great consolation, indeed this great pleasure, since it is Don Bosco who is asking you, that in the future Molinari will be your good friend, and if you cannot love him because he has some faults, love him for love of God, love him for love of me. You will do that, won't you? For the rest I am happy with you, and every morning at Holy mass I recommend your soul and your efforts to the Lord.

Don't forget the translation of the arithmetic, adding the weights and measures for the Argentine Republic.

Tell worthy Fr Ceccarelli that I have not been able to receive the catechism of the archdiocese and I would like to have it, the little one, to include the acts of faith in the *Companion of Youth* so it conforms to the ones in the diocese.

May God bless you, dear Fr Tomatis, and do not forget to pray for me. I will always be yours in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

246. To Fr Giulio Barberis

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 112-113.

Rome, Easter 1876

Dear Fr Barberis,

I am the bearer of good news and you are the first to receive it. Yesterday at 7 in the evening I had an audience with the Holy Father and was able to spend around an hour with him. He spoke much of the Congregation and our dear novices; then he read their letter from beginning to end. He asked if someone [name] had special qualities and if some had extraordinary virtues. I endeavoured to satisfy him. He was very satisfied and said that the fact that they are so many is a special kindness of the Lord.

Then he added these words: “They are new olives that have to be cultivated, but there is a need for these little plants to allow the farmer to prune the roots, cut off useless and harmful shoots. Remove the weeds and worms that could harm them. You understand me but you can explain it differently. These tender plants have to grow by themselves then produce fruit for their owner. Woe if the plant remains idle and produces no fruit: it will be useless for its owner.

May God bless these little plants. May God guide them and may they bear fruit for his greater glory.”

Then he took a pen and wrote in his own hand at the bottom of the letter: *Dominus vos benedicat* etc., as you see from the letter that came back to you that it was signed by the Holy Father.

In a special way greet Peloso, Schiapino, Tosello etc. I will write again at some other time.

May God bless everyone. I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. I received your letter and what you wrote is fine. It would be good if you could give the novices some outings.

247. To Fr Luigi Guanella (Saint)

Critical ed. in E(m) V, p. 342.

Turin, 10 April 1877

Dear Fr Luigi,

I have received your several letters and was very pleased with them.

I thank the Lord that in such a short time he has helped us do what has already been done and that I hope can be more in the future.

Since I have not been able to see and speak with you often, here I will offer you some rules that we usually give to the directors of our houses.

1. Keep an eye on the morality of the Salesians and the pupils entrusted to them. Try to call them in once a month for manifestation and see that everyone does the exercise for a happy death once a month.

2. *Age quod agis*. All business affairs are secondary; forget external things and see about perfecting things, affairs, individuals and helping them as much as possible in their problems and sicknesses.

3. Set up material administration in such a way that every House can run of its own accord, indeed if possible send some help to the mother house that has to support so many expenses to support the Congregation as a body.

4. Prepare sermons, write to them, help the Salesians in their studies, give them or indicate appropriate books.

5. Read, meditate, practise and see that others practise the rules of the Congregation.

Do what you can to follow up these friendly suggestions. Greet all our Salesians dearly in the Lord, Traversino, Depert, Liduani and Boassi.

Ask them all to pray for me. I am always, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

248. To Salesian Brother [Coadjutor] Bartolomeo Scavini

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 516-520.

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

249. To Fr Luigi Guanella (Saint)

ASC A1820305 *Photocopies of orig. aut.*; ed. in E III, pp. 311-312.

Rome, 8 March 1878

Dear Fr Luigi Guanella,

I have received your letters over time and they gave me great satisfaction. Before anything else we must thank the Lord with all our heart that in his infinite mercy he has restored the health of Mr Dupraz, and that now he can carry on with the hospice he had begun. I believe very much that the number of pupils will be large and you will gain results for the greater glory of God.

I also took no little consolation from knowing that the Salesians at Trinità are enjoying good health and are exemplary in their duties. *Deo gratias*. Let us be courageous in continuing with the task we have begun; God has helped

us and his help will not be lacking in the future. Let us simply endeavour to cooperate from our part.

With this in view I recommend to you and all our dear Salesians to pay attention to three things:

1. Great vigilance in observing each and every rule of ours and to make a day of recollection each month to examine the progress or backsliding in observing them.

2. Mutual charity in putting up with each other's defects, giving good advice, good counsel any time there is an opportunity. That should be practised especially in anything to do with the members' health, domestic economy and each one's duties of state.

3. Agree in common to give good example in external conduct and see that no lay people can complain about the way any confrere acts or speaks.

When calling them to the monthly manifestation, hold to this basics and insist until you see the practical results.

This year the Congregation is in financial straits, and we cannot depend, at least for now, on the help we have had from the Holy Father, so let each one try to be economical in things to do with our state, unless necessary for maintaining health. At any rate, maximum economy, but in case of sickness or whatever is needed for health do everything you can.

I would like you to communicate this letter to our confreres and tell them I love them all in Jesus Christ, and I pray for them. Tell them that Leo XIII loves them and sends them all his holy blessing.

I hope to be able to leave Rome within a few days. I recommend myself to everyone's prayers, especially Traversino who they tell me has become a real model of virtue. That's right, isn't it?

May God bless everyone and may the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with us. Amen.

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

250. To Fr Francis Bodrato

ASC A1880305 *Simple copies*; ed. in E III, pp. 323-324.

Turin, 31 December 1878

Dear Fr Francis Bodrato,

Over time I have received your letters and those of my dear sons resident in Buenos Aires. I will endeavour to answer with some words for each one. You can then distribute the letters you receive by giving them to some of our confreres or sisters.

Let us bless the Lord who favours us in such a clear way.

Of particular recall for you, see that you:

1. Make every sacrifice to preserve charity and unity amongst the confreres.
2. When you have to give corrections or particular advice never do so in public but always *inter te et ille solum* [Mt 18:15].
3. When you have given a correction, forget the fault and show good will to the one who failed.

This is the testament of your friend and father Don Bosco.

There will be more news from our dear confreres who are coming to offer their work to relieve you.

Give my greetings to our boys at the hospice, telling them I bless them and love them very much in the Lord.

May God bless you, your work. I am, completely in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

251. To Fr Taddeo Remotti

ASC A1900610 *Simple copies*; ed. in E III, p. 425.

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 others' 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* [Gal 6:2].

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

252. To Fr Domenico Tomatis

ASC A1740705 *Orig. aut.*; ed. in E III, pp. 524-525.

Alassio, 30 September 1879

My dear Fr Tomatis,

I have always been up to date with matters at San Nicolas College; it seems that you want to begin a new phase under your *dukedom!* That's good. We have placed much faith and hope in you. I note here some advice I always give directors so try to see their value.

1. Take great care of your health and that of your subjects; but do so in a

way that no one works too much or is idle.

2. Try to be better than the others in piety and observance of our rules, and see the others observe them, especially meditation, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, weekly confession, Mass well celebrated, and for those who are not priests, frequent Communion.

3. Be heroic in putting up with others' weaknesses.

4. Be very kind to the pupils, and give them much freedom and possibility of going to confession.

May God bless you, dear Tomatis, and with you may he bless all our other confreres and boys, my friend Ceccarelli who I must write to. May he grant you all health and the grace of a holy life. Warm greetings to everyone.

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

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

253. To Salesian Coadjutor Carlo Audisio

ASC A1600166 *Orig. aut.*; ed. in E IV, p. 12.

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.

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

254. To Cleric Luigi Calcagno

ASC A1700303 *Photocopies of orig. aut.*; ed. in E IV, p. 13.

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

255. To Mother Caterina Daghero

ASC A1790401 *Photocopies of orig. aut.*; ed. in E IV, p. 75.

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

256. To Fr Nicola Fenoglio

ASC A1890276 *Simple copies*; ed. in E IV, pp. 152-153.

Turin, 13 July 1882

My dear Fr Fenoglio,

I praise your desire to do and suffer something for the greater glory of God. But before coming to the work I would like us to talk about something personal for a moment. We will do this at the retreat at a time that suits you.

In the meantime try to exercise the virtue of charity, patience and kindness of St Francis de Sales.

Accept heat, cold, thirst unpleasant things as gifts from the Lord.

The rest can be when I share some thoughts about yourself with you.

May God bless you and help you to walk on the way to heaven. Pray to the Lord for me. I will be always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

257. To Sister Eulalia Bosco

ASC A1790226 *Photocopy of original.*; ed. in E IV, pp. 289-290.

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.

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 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