

## SECTION SIX

### SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT

#### Presentation

*The sixth part contains most of what, in Salesian tradition, is known as the “Spiritual Testament”. It is a handwritten notebook entitled Memories from 1841 to 1884-5-6 by Fr John Bosco to his Salesian sons<sup>122</sup>, where the saint, on different occasions, especially in the final years of his life, wrote exhortations and reminders for his disciples, friends, benefactors and Cooperators.*

*In the early pages of the notebook are resolutions which Don Bosco wrote down for his priestly ordination (5 June 1841) and during the retreat in summer 1842 (no. 298): this is a rare and interesting document of the initial steps the young priest took before choosing his definite field of action.*

*Seven texts follow of notable significance (nos. 299-305), where we can catch an overall view of the vocation and mission of the Salesian, together with an indication of the prospects deemed relevant for a dynamic fidelity: the determination to stand firm in one’s vocation until death; the importance of the exact observance of the Constitutions; avoiding triumphalism in the knowledge that every success is a gift from God; the link between the Salesian mission and Marian devotion, with a commitment to cultivate and spread this devotion; the care of vocations, forming young people to the desire “to consecrate themselves to the Lord in their youth” and detachment from the world and its allurements; the mission of the Salesian Rector as model and soul of the community with a primarily formative function; seeing to fraternal charity; avoiding “comfort” and “ease” as they are lethal dangers to the survival of the Congregation; attention to the privileged “children who are poorest, most at risk in society”; the wise administration of Houses and goods; the primacy of working for the salvation of souls; the sense of gratitude to benefactors, the “Cooperators and collaborators without whose charity we could do nothing, but with whose collaboration the Salesian work will be secure in history.”*

<sup>122</sup> Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 a’ suoi figliuoli Salesiani*. By Francesco Motto, in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 391-438.

**297. Resolution of the young Don Bosco  
on the occasion of the retreat**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 a' suoi figliuoli Salesiani*.

By Francesco Motto, in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 399-401.

I began the Retreat at the House of the Mission on 26 May, Feast of St Philip Neri, 1841.

Priestly ordination was conferred by Luigi Fransoni our archbishop, in his church on 5 June that year.

The first Mass was celebrated at St Francis of Assisi assisted by my well known benefactor and director Fr Joseph Cafasso from Castelnuovo d'Asti on 6 June Trinity Sunday.

The conclusion I drew at the end of the retreat in preparation for my first Mass was: The priest does not go either to heaven or hell alone. If he does well he goes to heaven with the souls he has saved through his good example; if he does badly, gives scandal he goes to perdition with the souls damned through his scandal.

*Resolutions*

1. Never go for walks unless seriously necessary: visit the sick etc.
2. Use time well.
3. Suffer, act and accept humiliations in everything and always if it is a case of saving souls.
4. The charity and kindness of St Francis de Sales will guide me in everything.
5. I will always be happy with the food that is put in front of me unless it is harmful to my health.
6. I will water down my wine and drink it only as a remedy: meaning only when and as much as is needed for my health.

7. Work is a powerful weapon against the soul's enemies, therefore I will not give my body more than five hours of sleep every night. During the day, especially after lunch, I will not take a rest. I will make some exception if ill.

8. Every day I will give some time to meditation and spiritual reading. During the day I will make a brief visit or at least a prayer to the Blessed Sacrament. I will give at least a quarter of an hour to preparation and another quarter of an hour of thanksgiving to Holy Mass.

9. I will not engage in conversations with women outside of confession or some other spiritual need.

These memoirs were written in 1841.

#### *1842 - Breviary and confession*

I will try to say the Breviary devoutly and preferably in church so that it becomes a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

I will approach the Sacrament of Penance each week and will try to put into practice the resolutions I make in confession each time.

When I am asked to hear the confessions of the faithful, if there is a need I will interrupt the Office and also shorten preparation and thanksgiving at Mass so I can exercise this sacred ministry.

### **298. Adieu, my dear and beloved sons in Jesus Christ**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 410-411.

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.”*

### 299. Special advice for everyone

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 414-415.

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 Blessed 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.

### **300. Aspirants to the Salesian Vocation**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 418-419.

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 *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 the one who consecrates himself to the Lord in his youth blessed. “*Beatus homo cum portaverit iugum ab adolescentia sua*” [Lam 3:27]. The world then, with all its flattery, parents, friends, home, needs to be abandoned and left entirely and forever sooner or later, either through love or per force.

### **301. The Rector of a house with his confreres**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 426-428.

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 try to overcome or better correct the negligent, those lacking in trust or suspicious. *Vince in bono malum* [Rm 12:21].

### **302. Basic recommendations for all Salesians and Salesian Sisters**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 435-436.

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*", [Mt 6:12] 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.

### 303. The future

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 437-438.

Divine Providence has prepared a happy future for our Congregation and its glory will endure as long 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 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.

### **304. A final greeting to benefactors and cooperators**

Critical ed. in *Lettere circolari di DB*, pp. 46-49.

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 achieved through the effective help of your charity, I feel the need to thank you and so before 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. 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,

Fr John Bosco.