

# acts

of the General Council  
of the Salesian Society  
of St John Bosco

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OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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## **DON PHILIP RINALDI**

### **authentic witness and interpreter of the "salesian spirit"**

The beatification of Don Rinaldi. - The history of the cause. - The significance of the event for us. - The story of Don Rinaldi's life. - At the vertex midway through the first salesian century. - His wonderful spirit of enterprise. - Promoter of 'salesianità'. - Authoritative interpreter of our apostolic interior life. - Pattern of pastoral kindness through his fatherliness. - Intercessor and Guide for the whole Salesian Family. - Insistent proclaimer of the vital message of "Don Bosco, the Model".

Rome, 5 December 1989  
58th anniversary of Don Rinaldi's death

My dear confreres,

In the midst of our intensive preparations by prayer and study for the forthcoming GC23 I invite you to turn your attention to the witness of "salesian spirit" of Don Bosco's third successor, Fr. Philip Rinaldi. His historic figure, his constant references to the living heritage of Don Bosco, and his considerable influence on the development of the Salesian Family, will shed precious light not only on the important work of the Chapter, but also on the whole of the developing process of our renewal in the Church.

I am writing to you on the anniversary (the 58th) of his death (5 December 1931) at a moment

when we are awaiting news about the date fixed for his Beatification. The necessary steps in the process required by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints are in their final stages, and the only item now missing is the concluding decision of the Holy Father.

Naturally therefore it is not possible as yet to make any definite statements, but we have good grounds for believing that the Beatification may take place in the first half of 1990.

But whatever date may be decided, I am convinced that for us it will be an event with many spiritual repercussions. I am led to think this through the contacts I have had with members of the various Groups of our Family in different parts of the world. At just over half a century from his death, the importance of his figure is growing by leaps and bounds, and the official recognition of his sanctity will surely serve as a stimulus to us to be genuinely salesian.

## THE HISTORY OF THE CAUSE

I am sure that it will be of interest to all of you to have a brief account of the steps that have taken place in Don Rinaldi's Cause for Beatification: it will be an incentive to us to render our common thanks to divine Providence for the great gift we shall soon be receiving.

When Don Rinaldi died on 5 December 1931, he had already acquired a widespread reputation for holiness, and a few years later several persons were asking that the process be begun for his beatification. The General Council of the time preferred not to rush matters; the Rector Major, Fr Peter Rical-



<sup>1</sup> *Summarium of Positio super virtutibus*, 1985 p. 266 n. 927

done, declared: "Let us be guided by the Lord; if he wants his Servant glorified he will let us know in some unequivocal manner."<sup>1</sup> It was equivalent to asking for a sign from heaven, and not long afterwards there came a clear response: the miracle worked in favour of Sister Carla De Noni, of the Congregation of the Passion, at Villanova, Mondovì.

This Sister had been seriously wounded in the mouth by a stray bullet during an air strike on 20 April 1945. It had torn away the chin and all the lower teeth, leaving her tongue hanging down towards her chest and destroying all the functions of her mouth, her voice, and her ability to chew and swallow; everyone believed her death to be imminent.

The Foundress of the Institute, Mother Maria Lazzari (who was later to die in the odour of sanctity herself) had had Don Rinaldi as her spiritual director for 25 years when she had been a teacher in the Turin public schools, and she invited the community to implore his intercession. A handkerchief that had belonged to Don Rinaldi was applied to the Sister's wound; she felt a certain improvement but for nearly fifty days she remained motionless, without being able to say a single word or take anything by way of food and drink. Meanwhile prayers were intensified, and a few days before the feast of St Peter (June 1945) Sister Carla suddenly awoke from a light sleep, rose from the bed for the first time without any help, and began to speak without difficulty, to eat and to swallow: the tongue had gone back to its proper place, the bone of the chin had been rebuilt and all the oral functions had returned to normal. For the feast of St Peter the Sister was able to take a singing class for the local girls.

The fact was widely acclaimed, and the Superiors immediately set about starting the ordinary Process for the introduction of the Cause in the Archdiocesan Curia of Turin (1948-1953), while the ordinary Process for the recognition of the miracle was introduced in the Diocesan Curia of Mondovì (1948-1949).

The subsequent study of the heroicity of the virtues of Don Rinaldi by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome proceeded much more slowly, mainly because of the large number of candidates already on the waiting list, and it was only on 3 January 1987 in the presence of Pope John Paul II that the decree was read recognizing the heroicity of his virtues. The judgement of the theological consultors and of the cardinals was unanimous in each case, with expressions of particularly high regard.

It still remained to examine the miracle. The corresponding Process at Mondovì had been completely positive, and the relevant X-rays had been sent at once to Rome to the Promoter of the Faith. Unfortunately, after an interval of so many years, they could no longer be found in the archives of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. In the absence of these documents the medical experts, at their first meeting, abstained in their conclusions from a positive judgement. Fortunately Sister Carla De Noni, the subject of the miracle, is still alive and was able to present herself for a new medical examination.

The difficulties raised by the medical experts were successfully overcome by the use of modern scientific techniques: CAT (computerized axial tomography), magnetic resonance, and sirognatography. To the medical consultors were added experts in maxillofacial surgery, because the point at issue

was one involving their specific field of specialization.

The results of their detailed examinations led to a declaration by the medical commission (7 June 1989) that there was indisputable evidence that the cure under investigation could not be explained on any natural grounds.

Worthy of special praise in this connection is our Postulator General, Fr Luigi Fiora, for his intelligent perseverance in resolving the various difficulties that arose.

After the positive judgement by the medical experts, the miracle was recognized unanimously by the theological consultants on 13 October 1989; and it seems very likely that the opinion of the theologians and medical specialists will be approved by the Congregation of Cardinals when they meet on 19 December 1989. At a later date will take place the reading of the decree in the presence of the Holy Father, to whom alone it belongs to proceed to the beatification and fix the date for it.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVENT FOR US

Some time ago, when we were making preparations for the centenary of Don Bosco's death, we had hopes that the beatification of Don Rinaldi could be included in the centenary celebrations. It may well be that the delay will prove to have been providential.

In the first place, on the coming occasion the attention of the whole Salesian Family can be better concentrated on the figure of the new Beatus, so as to draw greater profit from its prophetic message; in 1988 it would have been overshadowed to some

extent.

In life he succeeded in concealing behind a dense mantle of humility a whole set of spiritual riches, apostolic creativity, bold initiatives, flexibility in line with the needs of the day, foresight, and even development of the salesian charisma; we may now see his beatification as the finest and most significant outcome of the centenary, disclosing to all just how great a gift the Lord has given to our Family in the person of Don Bosco's third successor.

And then the fact that the beatification will occur in close proximity to the two General Chapters of 1990 (our own and that of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians), which will take place at a significant point in our renewal (six years after the approval by the Apostolic See of our revised Constitutions) provides us with an outstanding possibility of facing the delicate problem of the education of youth to the faith with the heart and driving force of a greater fidelity to the salesian spirit. The guarantee of Don Rinaldi's holiness can have a beneficial influence on the members of the Chapter.

In addition, with the Don Bosco Volunteers we shall all have the opportunity of looking with greater attention at the ever widening fertility of the salesian spirit in the *secular* world, to the great advantage of so many lay members of our Family.

But in this beatification there is still something further, something that adds considerably to its significance and gives it a quite extraordinary importance. The beatification of one our brothers or sisters is always something enlightening and of great value. It helps us to better esteem and love the salesian vocation and emphasize certain of its aspects. But in the case of Don Rinaldi there is an eminent and particularly relevant significance which con-

cerns our charisma *in its overall import*: it presents the third successor of Don Bosco to us as the *guardian and revealer* of the secret of the "salesian spirit", for the guidance and animation of *our whole Family*: he gives a clear indication to each of its constituent Groups of the common bond which unites us in it.

His life is the finest refutation of that spiritual superficiality which threatens us at the present day.

He not only preserved the heritage received from Don Bosco, but interpreted it, explained it, and spread and increased its vitality.

It was said of him that he was a "lamp with many rays of light"; he will help us to walk safely through the dark and delicate period that marks the close of the century.

Without any attempt to present an exhaustive picture, I invite you to reflect on some of his more characteristic aspects.

## THE STORY OF DON RINALDI'S LIFE

Fr Philip Rinaldi's life span extended over 75 years, from 28 May 1856 (at Lu Monferrato) to 5 December 1931 (at Turin-Valdocco). His meeting with Don Bosco gave shape and significance to his whole existence.

The story of the young Philip's vocation includes circumstances which transcend the ordinary vocational process and seem to indicate a special intervention of divine Providence. Eugene Ceria, his first biographer, says quite explicitly: "This case is unique rather than rare; it is the only one of its kind that we know of. In retrospect we may rightly say: 'the finger of God is here'."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> E. CERIA, *Vita del Servo di Dio Filippo Rinaldi*, SEI, Turin, p. 38

Don Bosco first met Philip and heard his confession when he was a student at the recently opened college of Mirabello Monferrato, near Lu, on 9 July 1867, and from then on he never forgot him. Despite the fact that the boy left the college before completing his studies, sent away unjustly after a disagreement with an assistant, the good father used every opportunity to send him greetings, keep in touch with him by correspondence, and frequently invited him to come and stay.

It may be that in that first talk Don Bosco had already seen the path to the priesthood opening before the boy, who on his side had no aspirations in that direction because he felt he did not have the necessary qualities, and was in any case unworthy of such a calling. And this remained his state of mind for some ten years: "a religious, yes; the priesthood, no".

Finally, at the age of 21, in another meeting arranged by Don Bosco at the college of Borgo San Martino on 22 November 1877, he said he was willing to try and he became a member of the original community of the *Sons of Mary* (adult vocations) which had been set up by Don Bosco, not without some difficulty, at Sampierdarena. Its rector was Fr Paul Albera, whom Philip had had as an assistant at Mirabello, and with whom he was on terms of close friendship.

Many years later, he referred to the occasion in a note in his personal diary, and wrote with humility: "May our Lord and Mary most holy grant that after offering so much resistance to grace in the past, I may never fail to comply with it in the future. Yes, holy Mother, let me rather die than not correspond with my vocation. Help me to make reparation for the past by my present and future."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> CERIA, o.c. p. 24

Two years later, after completing an accelerated course of studies, he was able to make the novitiate at San Benigno, where he had Fr Giulio Barberis as his director of novices.

In his subsequent progress towards the priestly ministry we find once again the extraordinary intervention of Don Bosco, who followed him with an interest which at first sight seemed difficult to understand, and which urged him on by fatherly obedience and conviction in the various steps towards ordination, with the result that on 23 December 1882 he was finally ordained priest. "It was Don Bosco", he said later, "who directed my steps, who sent me forward to receive ordination without my saying anything about it or making any request either to him or anyone else."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Summarium*, p. 548, doc. XIV

We may ask what lay behind this unusual procedure? What made Don Bosco so sure that he felt able to take so exceptional a course? Without any doubt, in the vocational vicissitudes of Philip Rinaldi and in the way Don Bosco acted throughout the time they were in personal relationship, there was something singular which eludes external observation but which carried Don Rinaldi to a precise goal which to us seems clearly providential.

He said as much himself later with sincere conviction; he told the Major Superiors in fact (but asked them not to repeat it during his own lifetime) that on two occasions, at Mirabello and Borgo S. Martino, he had seen Don Bosco's countenance shining with a bright light, brighter than that of the sun. And later it happened a third time, about 1886).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> cf. CERIA, o.c. p. 23

Only nine months after his priestly ordination, when he was 27, Don Bosco appointed him director of the work for the "Sons of Mary", which had

been transferred from Sampierdarena to Mathi (for a year) and then to Turin – St John the Evangelist. The young rector had the good fortune of being able to go along to the aging Don Bosco each week to let him know how the house was progressing, and to make his confession to him; sometimes he was invited to meetings of the General Council (called in those days the “Superior Chapter”). He enjoyed an extraordinary confidence on the part of the Founder, particularly in his closing years when Don Bosco was in pain but perfectly lucid in mind. One day he had asked the good father if he could go to the missions. “He replied,” as he told his own community afterwards, “that I would not go to the missions myself, but that I would stay here to send others. And then he added something else that I am not going to tell either you or anyone else.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p. 46

When we consider the special relationship between Don Rinaldi and Don Bosco, it brings spontaneously to mind the extraordinary graces with which the Lord accompanies the work of a Founder. At the time of our salesian beginnings there were circumstances concerning persons surrounding Don Bosco that cannot be explained from a human point of view. We may think of the decisive role played by St Joseph Cafasso, that of Pope Pius IX, the meeting with and formation of certain youngsters, e.g. Michael Rua, John Cagliero, Paul Albera, and also Mary Domenica Mazzarello, not to speak of others. We find ourselves face to face with an outstanding group of different collaborators, among whom we may now include in his own way also Philip Rinaldi, in virtue of his work for ensuring the permanence of the Founder’s heritage.

Soon after the death of Don Bosco, Don Rinaldi was sent in the autumn of 1889 to Spain as Rector at Sarriá, where for two years he knew the widow



Dorothea Chopitea, an outstanding and holy Co-operator. In the summer of 1892 he was appointed Provincial of the Spanish peninsula, a task which for some ten years he carried out so well as to arouse the surprise and admiration of all, both in the Congregation and outside it.

In 1901 Don Rua called him to be his close collaborator as Prefect General, as the Vicar of the Rector Major was then known; he was 45 years old at the time. It should be noted that until 1923 the Prefect General was also in charge of the central administration. Don Rinaldi filled this office, first with Don Rua and later with Don Albera, until 1922, a period of twenty years during which he had in two periods to take the place of the Rector Major who had died.

In one of his letters which is undated but was presumably written after the death of Don Albera, he wrote: "I earnestly request the Chapter to elect a young Prefect. This is an office which involves much activity and a great deal of work. As one gets on in years it becomes difficult to sustain the responsibilities of a Prefect General of the Salesians. The office was created in this manner by Don Bosco and it must not be changed. But at my age Don Alasonatti, Don Rua, Don Durando and Don Belmonte had all laid down the job, and this in times when the Congregation had less complex work to administer than is the case today. And we may add also that a new Rector Major needs a new man who will adapt himself easily to new requirements and personal needs. As well as this, we need in the Superior Chapter (i.e. the now General Council) some younger men, who can benefit from our advice if they want it."<sup>7</sup>

But as things turned out, the 12th General

<sup>7</sup> ASC 9.132 Rinaldi

Chapter on 24 April 1922 elected him Rector Major, at the age of 66. He was to remain in office until near the end of 1931.

## AT THE VERTEX, MIDWAY THROUGH THE FIRST SALESIAN CENTURY

It will be useful to review Don Rinaldi's years of high responsibility in his activities on the General Council during the first decades of the century. For some thirty years he was at the vertex of salesian life, especially from 1922 to 1931, as the 3rd successor of Don Bosco, a period when (as he used to say) a new era of salesian life was beginning.

As we try to interpret his mission in history, it is fair to say that he played a role of particular significance, and that he was in some way aware of this; a few months before his death he wrote: "I have the impression that for quite a long time Don Bosco has been saying to me: 'Press ahead, and never tire of repeating to my sons, now entrusted to your care, the things I said and did, so that they may become true Salesians in the mould shown me from on high for the training of our Society'." <sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> ASC 56, p. 933

In one of his circulars of 1925 there are some significant passages which bring to mind the famous text of John the Evangelist, where he speaks of "that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands"; <sup>9</sup> he tells the confreres in fact that he had had "the good fortune to be on familiar terms with Don Bosco for many years, during which we may say that we breathed the holiness of even the least of his glances, works and actions; ... and we could never forget his loving

<sup>9</sup> cf. 1 Jn 1,1

voice as he spoke words of a kind that up-ended our earlier immature ideals and bound us inseparably to him for our whole future lives!"<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> ASC 28, p. 344-5

For a better understanding of the figure of Don Rinaldi we must look back, albeit briefly, at the environmental context of his time. It was a cultural context that preceded by nearly ten years the second world war (1939-1945), which brought about so many changes; in the ecclesial context the period was characterized by methods and structures still very far from those of Vatican II.

We may recall, in passing, some of the salient features: the burning social question, the ticklish modernist crisis, the colonial upheavals, the fluctuation in economic values, the scourge of the first world war (1914-1918), the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law (27 May 1917), the appearance of ideologies and nationalism, the political struggles, the slow reawakening of Catholic participation in social questions, oppressive party tactics, the long desired realization of the Lateran provisions through the Concordat between the Church and the Italian State (1929), and finally the already dangerous development of totalitarianism.

Factors with a strong and direct influence on salesian life included the following: first and foremost the decree of 24 April 1901 concerning the Rector as confessor, which caused such anguish in the Congregation; then there were the famous "*Normae secundum quas*" which gave autonomy to the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1901); then there were the years of the world war which saw some 2,000 confreres under arms (just about half of our total membership at the time); and there was the gradual elaboration, through various General Chapters, of a more de-

tailed regulation of the Congregations's life, with the overall restructuring of the Constitutions so as to bring them into conformity with the new Code of Canon Law published not long before he became Rector Major.

And to these must be added the appearance of numerous vocations after the first world war, and the need to provide adequately for their formation.

To Don Rinaldi too, between 1922 and 1931, fell the task of making the most of a series of golden jubilees which he used to centre attention on vital elements of salesian life; many of them figure in his circulars. We may recall some of them, which prompted meditation on 50 years of memories and the formulation of plans for the future!

Examples were the jubilee of the foundation of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1922), that of the approval of the Constitutions (1924), of the Missions (1925), of the Work of Mary Help of Christians (1926), of the Cooperators (1926), of the dream of the Personage with the ten diamonds (1931) to which Don Rinaldi ascribed particular importance,<sup>11</sup> and also of the centenary of Don Bosco's dream at the age of 9 years, which calculations had placed in 1825 and whose significance Don Rinaldi wanted to have a central place in salesian reflections, because it contained in embryo the spirit of the Constitutions themselves.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> ASC 300

<sup>12</sup> cf. ASC 23, ASC 26

To these events we may also add two important beatifications: that of Fr Joseph Cafasso (1925); and above all that of Don Bosco himself (1929). The two 'Beati' had been close friends for twenty years, both of them of eminent holiness, but a holiness of two kinds with different missions: one of them marked by reserve and the formation of the clergy, the other characterized by apostolic creativity and

<sup>13</sup> cf. ASC 29

christian education of needy youth of the poorer classes.<sup>13</sup>

In the light of these brief references to the context of his life as a Superior, we can see today that Don Rinaldi has a highly prominent place in the history of the Salesian Family on which he has had a most incisive effect. It was during his period as Rector Major that, little by little, the transition took place to new generations who had not known the Founder directly, and who had therefore not received their salesian formation from him through direct relationship. And yet they had nevertheless to assimilate, preserve and develop Don Bosco's heritage.

Don Rua had been its faithful guardian, and had wisely and courageously avoided the risks which some people (outside the Congregation and even in high places) had foreseen after the death of the Founder. But despite the wonderful work of his first successor times were changing and new challenges were beginning to appear.

The salesian patrimony had to be preserved in all its authentic elements, and for its transmission to the new generations there was need of a mediator solidly attached to Don Bosco in an attractive manner. Precautions also had to be taken against the dangers that could arise from the very expansion of the Salesian Family and its contact with ever more widely differing cultures. The times called for the ability to develop the riches contained in the Founder's charisma, some of which still remained in embryo, not having yet been completely manifested in the first stages of development.

It was necessary too to consolidate the structures which were becoming necessarily more complex, but which could not be allowed to suffocate the authentic simplicity of the spirit. In particular

the vast problem of formation had to be faced; it was a sector which called for an increasing number of men who were faithful and specifically qualified for the purpose, and who could staff valid study and formation centres.

Involved in this passage from one generation to another were many confreres eminent for their intense spirituality and apostolic zeal; men of praiseworthy fibre were never lacking; and on the other hand, despite defects that have existed, the Congregation has fortunately never suffered a grave crisis so far. But of the well deserving people who have brought this about, I think it true to say that no one else played so important, efficacious and historic a role as Don Rinaldi.

In addition to the intimate contact he had had with Don Bosco, he had been a direct collaborator of Don Rua and Don Albera for twenty years, and both of these had left to his personal responsibility many highly difficult and delicate tasks, which enabled him to gain a wide experience in all sectors of salesian life. Albeit with humility, kindness and simplicity, he was at the vertex of the Congregation in a period of deep change, and he led it in sure and certain attachment to the Church. He won over the confreres by the radiance of a holiness which reproduced the essential elements and characteristics of that of Don Bosco: apostolic interior life, pastoral enterprise, fatherly kindness. He reproduced in the eyes of all the figure of the Father to such an extent that he became called his "living image"; or, as Fr John Baptist Francesia put it, "he lacked only Don Bosco's voice; all the rest of him he already had."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> CERIA, o.c. p. 5

The delicate task of rewriting the text of the Rule of life after the publication of the Code of 1917, led him to reflect with the confreres on the

close linkage it has with the Founder's heritage. He dwelt on the point on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the approval of the Constitutions. In connection with the re-elaboration of the text (which had become somewhat juridical in nature) he insisted on the particular role of the Constitutions as the bearer of the Founder's spirit: "They are the soul of our Society, and this in turn was the soul of Don Bosco's whole life; their story is the story of his life;... he wrote the articles first of all in the minds and lives of those he had chosen as his first sons. ... Our Constitutions, modified as they come to be from time to time in secondary points, will not only lose nothing of their primitive light but will become ever more the source of good."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> ASC 23, p. 177-187

It is true that he had written in another circular a year earlier that our Constitutions "will have to undergo in the course of time several changes, either at the suggestion of the Roman Congregations, or because they will be needed for the development of our Pious Society, or imposed by the positive law of the Church... This flexibility in adapting to every form of good continually arising among humanity *is the spirit proper to our Constitutions*. The Salesian who observes them exactly becomes, almost without being aware of it, another Don Bosco."<sup>16</sup> "Substantially they are the same as they were before," "they are imbued with the breath of that vitality that stems from the Gospel, which for this very reason belongs to all times and eras and is always the rich new source of life."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> ASC 17, p. 41 ff.

<sup>17</sup> ASC 40, p. 573

He insistently recommended to the confreres to consider attentively the circulars of Don Rua and Don Albera (this was in 1923) for a correct interpretation of the spirit; he wrote: "In Rodriguez," the text most commonly used for community spiritual reading at the time, "we often find linked with ad-

mirable ascetical teaching many things which for us are not important. Why then not read our own things, written with such affection and simplicity by our Fathers?"<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> ASC 17, p. 45

He was the great guardian and interpreter of the true "salesian spirit"; he saw in it the source of future vitality; and so he was concerned to analyze it more deeply, to comment on it and have it studied and documented, thus ensuring its function as a launching pad for the process of the coming of age of our whole Family.

### HIS WONDERFUL SPIRIT OF ENTERPRISE

The third Successor of Don Bosco is little known among us. For me at least it was a kind of revelation when I set about reading and reflecting on his life and activity. I think it will be useful in the first place to point out the quantity and importance of his activities so as to deepen our understanding of his message.

His task was to guard and guide to full growth a charisma that we might call "adolescent". It was therefore necessary to cultivate and nourish it with the most genuine lymph of the Founder.

Don Rinaldi was started on this course quite early, first as the one responsible for the formation of the adult vocations ("Sons of Mary"): an original task that looked to the future, and one in which he was followed up personally by Don Bosco; then he was sent to Spain where he became the first one to transplant the spirit into a different culture; and finally he found himself at the vertex of everything, first as Vicar General and then as Rector Major.

Let us pause for a moment to look at what he did. We find unrolling before our eyes a panorama



<sup>19</sup> D. T. DONADONI, *La bontà si è fatta uomo*, LDC Turin, 1963, p. 46

we never suspected. In it all he appears, in the words of one writer, as an "almost covert apostle".<sup>19</sup> A clear idea about this will prevent us from distorting his figure and help us to understand his mission in history.

Behind a facade of kindly simplicity, Don Rinaldi was in fact a dynamic and creative person; he was calm and strong, daring in his initiatives without overstepping the bounds of prudence. He was a jealous defender of the legacy he had received, but he had no fear of innovations when he felt instinctively that Don Bosco's spirit could be applied to them as they developed. He was endowed with a particularly keen and practical intelligence. He was reserved and recollected in his external deportment, but he had a sharp eye for what was happening in the surrounding environment and the situations in which he lived, and he had the intuitive ability to adapt himself to them and to exploit them for his own purposes. The changing face of the times, for better or for worse, did not escape him, and he had the ability to respond to the new requirements inherent in them. He was respectful of all with whom he worked and never imposed himself in an authoritative manner, but was able to attract them by his kindness and make them his collaborators. He never paraded his erudition and specialized competence; he had a low opinion of himself, but was rich in penetrating observation, creativity and common sense, and thus in fact he was able to promote successfully works of daring originality for the time in which he lived, but which anticipated future requirements.

To sum up, he was a real go-getter, not impulsive but with calm and wise enterprise, and his work and teachings still endure.

When sent to Spain he made the country his adopted homeland. He loved it, testified Mgr, Marcellinus Olachea – Salesian Archbishop of Valencia, “as though he had been born there.”<sup>20</sup> It was an indication of his special ability to adapt, together with his esteem for individuals, culture and local environment.

<sup>20</sup> *Summarium*, p. 365, n. 1238

He applied himself seriously to learning Castilian and also Catalan; once he was sufficiently at home with the language of Cervantes he read (and re-read more than once) the story of Don Quixote, because “it taught him a good deal of practical philosophy and especially the art of understanding and dealing with others and governing them, as well as being a means of getting away from problems for a while and feeding on a little good humour.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> R. FIERRO, *El Siervo de Dios Don Felipe Rinaldi*, 2nd ed., SEI Madrid, 1960, p. 76

In the space of nine years, as Fr Peter Ricaldone recalled during the Processes, he founded no fewer than 21 houses: almost a miracle of activity and shrewdness in promoting vocations and selecting persons. When he left to return to Turin, four provinces were erected in the Iberian peninsula: that of Portugal, and in Spain those of Barcelona, Madrid and Seville respectively.

He also gave a lot of thought to the establishing and growth of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the same region. He guided them in their expansion, especially in the Andalusian area. Originally they had a single house at Sarriá; through his prompting and help they made a further nine foundations. “When he arrived in Barcelona there were 4 Sisters and 3 novices; when he left, the Sisters had increased to 63 with 31 novices, nearly all of them Spanish.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> L. CASTANO, *Don Rinaldi*, LDC Turin, 1980, p. 78-9

It is no exaggeration to say that he was the great trail blazer in the beginnings of salesian work in Spain and Portugal, and that he sowed in those

parts a solid and faithful tradition of the spirit of Don Bosco – a significant point.

Rightly could Mgr. Olacchia declare with genial enthusiasm: "If at some future date the infallible voice of the Church should raise Don Rinaldi to the honours of the altars, there will be great rejoicing throughout the Congregation, but it will be felt especially in Spain – the Spain for which he maintained a soft spot in his heart to the end of his life, and whose anguished future he foresaw as a prophet."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> FIERRO, o.c. p. 5

— When he found himself at the vertex of the Family as the *Vicar of Don Bosco's Successor*, he did not limit his activities solely to the administrative duties of the Prefect General of the Congregation. His was certainly an onerous life of administration which involved heavy responsibilities in some very difficult cases. We may think, for instance, of the events of Varazze (1907), and later of those of Marsala (1909). The long and delicate judicial process that followed the incidents of Varazze were all in his hands.

Evidence of the sense of responsibility and efficiency with which he discharged the office of Prefect General is provided by the fact that he was re-elected three times and served two Rector Majors who were somewhat different from him in character and mentality.

The number of his activities, the variety of his interests, and the far-reaching initiatives he put in hand and followed up, are all of them quite startling.

And all this was done in full accord and exemplary submission to the Rector Major, whether Don Rua or Don Albera. Concerning the latter, Don CERIA has an enlightening passage in his biography:

"Don Rinaldi, with his positive and practical approach, maintaining to the end what in modern terminology would be called his dynamic personality, i.e. a man of courageous initiative, had to come to terms with a Superior (Don Albera) whose ideas we might describe as prevalently general in nature and tending to the static side, hesitant to undertake anything new, in which he tended to seize on the difficult and uncertain aspects;"<sup>24</sup> moreover he was easily influenced negatively in the face of his able but humble collaborator. <sup>24</sup> CERIA, o.c. p. 137

Let us now dedicate a few words in each case to the main fields of his interventions at the vertex of the Congregation.

#### As "*Prefect General*"

A. A first field of interest was certainly that of the christian laity. Here Don Rinaldi was a man before his time.

- He reinvigorated and promoted the association of the *Cooperators*. At the time the custom was for the Rector Major to take a personal interest in the *Cooperators* through a delegate. Don Rinaldi saw that things were not going as well as they should through the lack of suitable organization; he insisted with Don Rua that a central office be set up, presided over by the Prefect, with three councillors and one or more secretaries as the needs might require. He chose the personnel, stimulated the activity of Provincials and Rectors, set on foot various initiatives for formation and apostolic involvement, drew a clear distinction between *Cooperators* and *Benefactors*, encouraged the incorporation of youngsters once they reached the age of 16, and later (in 1917) published a new edition of

the Regulations which simplified the enrolment of new members; he also saw to it that local centres were up and doing, and formed and completed the animating structures; in this connection he gave special importance to the "Salesian Bulletin".

Between 1903 and 1930, he was the moving spirit behind nine international Congresses, four in Italy and five in Latin America; and it is worth noting that the Congress of 1920 marked a turning point in the organization and activity of the Salesian Cooperators. His fundamental preoccupation was always that of seeing to it that the true spirit of Don Bosco underlay their activities.

- With the *Past-pupils* Don Rinaldi's action was of a still more original kind, and rich in results with an international and worldwide perspective. I have already spoken of this in a circular letter;<sup>25</sup> here I briefly recall the various points.

We have documents in our archives which show that he studied this argument with the lay people themselves. He convoked the International Congress at Valsalice in 1911, which proclaimed the International Federation of the associations and created a directive organization: it was the first international federation of this kind among all Catholic institutions! His too was the idea that the Past-Pupils should erect a monument to Don Bosco in the Square of Mary Help of Christians in Turin – an idea that reached happy realization in 1920. For its inauguration he had organized three International Congresses: of the Cooperators, men past-pupils and women past-pupils respectively.

Don Rinaldi, in fact, was the inspirer and organizer of the *FMA Past-pupils*: "from the first moment he became connected with the Oratory for girls he had toyed with the great idea of gathering

<sup>25</sup> AGC 321

the FMA past-pupils into a world Union, certainly a daring innovation but at the same time one that caused him no fear.”<sup>26</sup> As leader of the first association he appointed Felicita Gastini, daughter of the Carlo Gastini who had gathered together the first group of former pupils of Don Bosco.

- Another group in the female sector which was the object of his special care was that of the *Zealous Promoters* of Mary Help of Christians, which later developed into the present Secular Institute of the “*Don Bosco Volunteers*”. In 1908 he chose from among the Children of Mary the group he called the “Zealous Promoters of the Oratory”. In the first congress of the FMA past-pupils (1911) some of those present proposed the setting up of an association of Children of Mary “in the world”; later (3 October 1916) he prepared a draft statute for them with seven points; on 20 May 1917 he called their first general meeting – it was the official beginning! After overcoming more than a few difficulties and misunderstandings, the new association was given the ‘all clear’ with the approval of its first Regulations in 18 articles (July 1918); on 26 October 1919 Don Rinaldi was present when the first seven made their profession, and not long afterwards (November 1920) he had them elect from among themselves a Council for the admission of new members (lay autonomy! 29 January 1921). In October 1922, when receiving the renewal of the vows of some of them, he insisted on their salesian spirit, considering them the first consecrated women dedicated to the following of Don Bosco in lay society.<sup>27</sup>

At first sight it appears a humble start, as are all beginnings, but it contains an ecclesial novelty. “Here”, writes his biographer, “Don Rinaldi had

<sup>26</sup> CERIA, o.c. p. 223 ff

<sup>27</sup> cf. CASTANO, o.c. p. 118 ff;  
CERIA, o.c. p. 216 ff

conceived and realized a new form of consecrated life in the world, and had begun an Institute which at the present day recognizes and honours him as its inspiration and father. It could be said that this was the most inspired of all his personal work."<sup>28</sup> No one suggests that he had explicitly thought of a "Secular Institute" as the term is understood at the present day; that would be an anachronism. But what seems certain is that he instinctively perceived and followed a path that led to consecrated secularity, and in so doing "intended to take up an ideal that Don Bosco had not had time to realize, and give it form."<sup>29</sup>

- Another lay initiative we should recall is the "*Don Bosco Union for Teachers*". A group of teachers, who had Don Rinaldi as their spiritual director, had suggested at the beginning of the '20s the formation of a non-political association of christian inspiration for teachers and professors. He saw at once the benefit this would bring both to the members themselves and to their educational activity in the state schools. He took up the suggestion and gave life to a new kind of "Union", of which he became the first animator with his great prestige.<sup>30</sup> The initiative had three aspects that were very dear to him: it was an association of lay people, it aimed at the moral education of the young, and it intended to work according to Don Bosco's preventive system. This association too was the first of its kind in Italy in the field of christian inspiration: not that Don Rinaldi sought to be the first with everything, but his apostolic zeal led him to take up willingly avant-garde positions.

- Another field in which his creative zeal was followed by positive results was that of *social com-*

<sup>28</sup> CASTANO, o.c. p. 118

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 127

<sup>30</sup> cf. CERIA, o.c. p. 331 ff

*munication*. There would not have been many who expected Don Rinaldi to be concerned about founding a big publishing house, and yet that is precisely what happened. He is the founder of the International Publishing Society (SEI). Don Bosco had already launched various publishing activities at Valdocco, but decades later they had not yet been organized in a systematic way. Don Rinaldi provided such organization for the sector and created the SEI, having recourse for its financial support to Cooperators and Benefactors of various countries of Europe and America. Like the holy Founder himself, he too had a flair for enterprise in certain apostolic works.

In addition he promoted various publications and reviews; in Spain, for instance, there was the news-sheet "El Oratorio festivo", and then later he gave a lot of attention to the "Bollettino Salesiano", he founded "Voci fraterne" and "Unione" for the SDB and FMA Past-pupils respectively, the periodical "Maria Ausiliatrice" for the basilica at Valdocco, and the review "Gioventù Missionaria" for the missions. He equipped libraries for the young; he founded cultural groups; he fostered the "schola cantorum", cooperative associations, free medical services, etc.

He had the idea also of founding a Review for women,<sup>31</sup> and it is interesting to consider the sense of relevance with which he approached this plan for a women's periodical.

<sup>31</sup> *Plan for a periodical for women* (Archives, 2971 I Ms of D.Rinaldi 1909) Purpose of periodical. Unite the internal and external forces of the FMA for the formation of women, especially of the poorer classes. It should provide a forum for teachers to practise dealing with social questions, to educate readers and form writers. It should point the way to be followed by a woman who can bring moral, intellectual and material influence to bear in carrying out a christian and social educational apostolate among the daughters of people of the poorer classes. How to realize such a concept through the programme of the publication: 1. leading article; 2. brief profiles of modern women of action; 3. Domestic economy; 4. Work for women; 5. Chronicle of women's social movements at international level; 6. Various items; 7. legislation regarding working women; 8. Review of similar publications; 9. hygiene of the workplace; 10. an explanation of points of christian doctrine to refute prevalent errors.



B. But one of his most significant, valid and fruitful commitments was without any doubt his fatherly dedication to the *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*.

It fell to him to act at a particularly delicate moment when the Apostolic See decreed the juridical and administrative autonomy of the Institute, which had until then been aggregated to the Society of St Francis de Sales. Communion of spirit and mission had to be intensified while the autonomy was being organized.

He won general esteem by making a sound and equitable division of material goods between the two Congregations, as appears from the Acts of the Processes; but above all he gained the confidence and trust of the members of both when he worked so hard in a continual fatherly and deeply spiritual manner to make sure that the common charismatic heritage of the Founder was preserved. The depositions in the Processes are unanimous and enthusiastic in this respect: the testimonies given by members of the FMA are the most valid as regards both his personal holiness and his work for spiritual and apostolic communion between the now two institutions of Don Bosco. This is a subject which needs exhaustive study to provide a better documented idea of the spiritual unity of our Family – I hope some qualified person will undertake such a work.

One of the works to which Don Rinaldi gave particular attention, in collaboration with the FMA, was the girls' oratory at Valdocco, where he had begun to work as Director (as it was then called) in 1907 when he succeeded Don Francesia in the office. For years this was the scene for the expression of his priestly zeal and his new educational and

apostolic initiatives. It is difficult to understand how he managed to get through so much work in addition to his duties as Prefect General; but the depositions are so detailed, concordant and authoritative that they ensure the objectivity of what we have said. He left to the Sisters whatever was theirs to decide, but he provided animation, suggestions, guidance and encouragement with fatherly optimism and enlightened wisdom. In an atmosphere of shared fervour hundreds of girls and young women came together; groups were formed according to age and cultural level, with apostolic, social, cultural and recreational aims, which some texts list and explain with a wealth of facts. Manifestations of different kinds kept the Oratory at a sustained festive level; vocations multiplied (Don Rinaldi was one of the regular confessors in the basilica for two hours every morning). From the girls the work extended, and the effects were found in families, in the neighbourhood, in places of work, and in Catholic associations of the diocese. The Oratory was not a world closed in on itself but a place with doors open to all; it was a seedbed of good, into which Don Rinaldi inserted also elements of the Catholic laity to guide it to true life.

This was a great salesian lesson, not only for the FMA but for the confreres too. Don Rinaldi in fact saw the Oratory as an active centre of cultural, social and religious initiatives. He wanted to see such oratories in the suburbs of the big cities (as later were those of S. Paolo and Monterosa, for which he had a special affection as Rector Major). In the boys' Oratory at Valdocco, for example, he it was who founded the "Auxilium" Circle, which was later to become famous in Piedmont. (In its first year of foundation, 1906, the members wanted Don Ri-

naldi as their president; he accepted, but on condition that they prepared lay leaders who would guide the association under their own responsibility).

As well as his oratorian activities he was unstinting in his valuable spiritual direction of the Sisters, and in the pedagogical conferences he used to give at the FMA Generalate at Nizza Monferrato, where they had a flourishing educational institute: he spoke to the Sisters, to the students of the higher classes, to the teachers, to mothers. Quite surprising was his ability to understand women's problems: as well as purely educational matters, he dealt with problems of engagement, marriage and married life, with a truly pastoral outlook. He was able to transfer to the woman's world the knowledge and practice of the preventive system, whose application had been interpreted until then largely from the standpoint of work for boys.

But Don Rinaldi's greatest contribution to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was realized as interpreter and defender of their common spiritual patrimony. Sister Clelia Genghini declared in the Processes: "The period between 1905 and 1913, and especially between 1905 and 1907, was a crucial one. There was the fear of being completely cut off from the direction of the Superiors of the Salesian Society, and then little by little from Don Bosco's spirit... In this period Don Rinaldi, with his fatherly kindness and his wise and enlightened advice, was a source of great help and reassurance to our Institute. Proof of this are the letters he wrote at that time. In one of 5 September 1905, he said: 'May the Lord enlighten you. You are passing through the most solemn moment of your life. All you need at present is God's grace and to preserve your equanimity. I have great hopes for the success

of the new arrangements, provided you are able to imbue everything with Don Bosco's spirit'.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Summarium*, p. 218-9, n. 756 ff

His message therefore was: welcome a proper autonomy, but in the full communion of the same spirit. "To this end", declared Sister Teresa Graziano, "Don Rinaldi visited by preference and with a prudent frequency our Major Superiors who, during his first years as Rector Major, were still resident at the Mother House at Nizza. He was instrumental in getting it transferred to Turin, alongside the sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians, from where the Superiors could participate more intensely and with greater ease in salesian life and could absorb more spontaneously and efficaciously the spirit of Don Bosco."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p. 113, n. 338

He was concerned to a quite extraordinary extent to ensure the closest possible communion in the identical and precious heritage.

In these delicate circumstances his presence was providential, with his constant and enlightened delicate and fatherly wisdom; he seemed to have received from the Holy Spirit the special gift of being able to perceive the traits of the female mind: he was able to influence their hearts in a truly wonderful manner but with great tact. His spiritual direction, personal letters, advice given to the Superiors, multiple forms of guiding contacts and even corrections, all served to intensify fidelity and union.

It is interesting to note the sincerity and candour with which he spoke or wrote to the Superiors. In a letter of 1915, for example, to the well-deserving Superior General, Mother Catherine Daghero, he said with familiar sincerity: "My desire has always been to foster among you ideas which seem to me to be truly those of Don Bosco. I have the impression that to a certain extent we

have said too often: 'They are Sisters, they are women, not everything can be adapted to their situation'. And so things have been allowed to run on, and without being aware of it you are becoming religious like all the others. In that case there was no need for another religious Institute of women; there are so many of them already!"<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Letter to M. Daghero, 28.12.1915, ASC 9.31 Rinaldi

These are expressions which refer to a cultural climate of other days, especially on the part of priests and confreres. But what is remarkable, and I would even say prophetic, is the fact that he never tolerated on the part of the confreres with respect to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (and for that matter to women religious in general) any less delicate behaviour or attitude stemming from a certain superiority complex, and at the same time he exhorted Mother Daghero to guard jealously the common salesian identity of which the venerated Co-foundress, Mother Mazzarello, had always been the zealous interpreter and transparent exemplar.

If the two Institutes, in their lawful juridical autonomy, have been able to maintain relationships of intense spiritual communion, mutual understanding, practical solidarity, and fruitful reciprocal collaboration, the merit is due especially to Don Rinaldi.

And this is a prophetic warning for us at the present day in a Church characterized by "communion" and involved in the apostolic search for a "new evangelization".

When Don Rinaldi was elected Rector Major he considered one of his most serious obligations to be his pontifical appointment as "Apostolic Delegate" for the Institute of the FMA, that had been obtained for the first time from Pope Benedict XV in 1917 through the good offices of Cardinal Cagliero.

Among the many instances of service and guidance particular mention must be given to the special New Year "Strennas" that he gave to the Sisters in 1922, 1929, 1930, 1931, and 1932. (It was Don Rinaldi's custom to give a different Strenna to each group, and sometimes even different ones for the Salesian Priests and Brothers). All his interventions were aimed at the keeping in vigour of the character and form given to each group by the Founder, without ever becoming closed to the needs of the times.

#### *As Rector Major*

Don Rinaldi, as successor of Don Bosco, left many obligations of an organizational and executive kind in the hands of the dynamic Prefect General, Fr Peter Ricaldone, so that he could devote his own time pre-eminently to his role as guide and animator: he wanted to be above all else a "father".

But this is not to say that there was any lessening of his enterprise. Reading through the "Minutes of the Superior Chapter" during his period of office it is quite clear that he was at the centre of government: many initiatives started from him and all were agreed with him, even though in his humility he willingly left to others the credit for their realization.

— What he had most at heart was *the formation of the confreres* and the organization of *formation communities* and *study centres*. During the ten years the number of confreres rose from 4,788 to 8,836, with an average growth of 450 a year, while the houses went up from 404 to 644.

— *Don Bosco's beatification* (1929) was an occasion he exploited for a whole plan of practical spiritual and apostolic renewal.

— There was the *grandiose and courageously down-to-earth missionary enterprise*. He may be said to have mobilized the Congregation in this sense: he opened no fewer than seven missionary aspirantates and prepared expeditions of exceptional proportions, sending to the missions even very young men (novices and post-novices!). We may safely say that the missionary impulse of those years gave real consistency and a worldwide dimension to the Founder's charisma, demonstrating the truth of what Don Bosco had said to him: "You will not go to the missions, but you will send others."

There was also another important initiative which Don Rinaldi as Rector Major was not able to carry through to its conclusion, but is nevertheless a further demonstration of his wonderful enterprise: *the plan for the enlarging of the basilica of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco*. He it was who wanted the project studied and carried through, and his too was the kindness, skill and constancy that enabled sharp disagreements between the Superiors themselves to be overcome before the decision was made.<sup>35</sup> "We must prepare in the mother church of all salesian work," he wrote in a letter to the Cooperators, "a worthy reception for the Venerable Don Bosco on the day when, as is our hope, he will be raised to the honours of the altars." The enlargement took place after his death, but by then he had fully convinced all who had opposed the plan, among them the Economist General (Fr Fedele Giraudi) whom he had called to be a member of the General Council. Thus the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco, the living centre of the Salesian Family throughout the world, presents to everyone not only the Madonna

<sup>35</sup> cf. CERIA, o.c. p. 341 ff

but also Don Bosco, through both the monument in the square outside and his altar in the basilica itself. This we owe to Don Rinaldi's filial love and his bold foresight.

To conclude this brief survey of his activities we may formulate an overall judgement by quoting the opinion of a very competent confrere who at first was somewhat critical of him. He is Fr Bartholomew Fascie who lived alongside him for no less than 15 years as a member of the General Council; he declares: "There were quite a number who thought that because of his delayed vocation Don Rinaldi was a man of limited culture and no more than ordinary intelligence. They evidently did not know him. Don Rinaldi was one of the truly great minds of our Congregation, a born leader, who could have become a great statesman had he chosen a political career... The last of Don Bosco's successors to have been on intimate terms with the Founder, he was called to reproduce in himself the spirit of Don Bosco, his fatherliness and sanctity, so as to better instil them into his spiritual sons."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> P. RINALDI, *Sospinto dall'amore* LDC Turin 1979, p. 90-91

## PROMOTER OF "SALESIANITÀ"

The term "salesianity" (Italian: "salesianità") has been in use for some years to indicate a collection of aspects inherent in the spiritual, pedagogical, pastoral, religious and historical patrimony of our life as Salesians of Don Bosco. Don Rinaldi did not use the word; he spoke instead of "salesian spirit" in a wide and concrete sense which, in fact, referred to the living out of an uninterrupted tradition. It is a reality inserted into daily salesian life as an "experience of the Holy Spirit" transmitted



from one generation to the next.

Don Bosco left us the Constitutions and other writings of great significance, but above all he forged living witnesses capable of preserving and passing on his patrimony. The Founder's Successors and the General Chapters have added other writings which are certainly important. We may recall, among others, the "Vademecum" of Don Barberis for the novices. Then came the "Biographical Memoirs" which have enriched our knowledge of what happened in the early days.

Despite these, the literature on salesianity in the first thirty years of the present century was rather scarce. You had to dig up the material for yourself, so to speak. It is symptomatic of Don Rinaldi that he was aware of this, and he took it upon himself to remedy the situation as far as he was able.

We refer to him as the "cultivator" rather than "master" of the salesian spirit, so as to reserve this second term, so rich and fundamental, to Don Bosco himself, even though it may be applied in a derived and dependent manner to him too.

He had assimilated the Founder's spirit in an eminent form; it was something congenial to him and he expressed it with a natural spontaneity. And he deepened it constantly with original reflections of his own.

When we remember that the kind of reading he preferred was of a spiritual and ascetical nature, and that the resolutions he made at his first Mass included that of reading each year the life of a Saint, because (as he said) he found in all of them some aspect that served to throw light on Don Bosco's spirit,<sup>37</sup> we have to recognize the fact that he had the gifts, and made use of efficacious means, to be an extraordinary and authoritative promoter of salesianity.

<sup>37</sup> cf. CERIA, o.c. p. 43

For four years, as Prefect General, he went to Foglizzo to give a series of conferences to the students of theology on points of pedagogy, spirituality and salesian life.<sup>38</sup> For many years he did the same for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. In this he showed himself to be not only a valid witness, but also a deep thinker with "a great mind and a great heart"; to the objectivity of his analysis he added "a modern approach to concepts, and a perfect assimilation of Don Bosco's system and spirit."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> cf. E. VALENTINI, *Don Rinaldi maestro di pedagogia e di spiritualità salesiana*, Turin-Crocetta, reprinted 1965

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p. 4-5

He was not only concerned about being genuinely faithful to our origins, but at the same time he was solicitous to keep himself aware of the needs of the times; he was simultaneously a defender of both "tradition and modern application." He did not feel himself hidebound by what was written, but followed its true spirit with strength and conviction: "Let us never forget that our mission is not to be drawn along by others but to draw them with us, not to absorb the impressions of people and places we go to but to impress our own salesian spirit on the christian formation of the young and on the surrounding environment."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> ASC 50, p. 800

And this spirit he constantly asserted, to a great extent drawing what he said from quiet and deep reflection on the lived experience of a living tradition. He did not limit himself to particular aspects but ranged over the whole panorama. His was perhaps the first general reflection made on the substance of salesianity. Both confreres and Sisters esteemed his conferences, so much so, in fact, that they have come down even to us through being preserved in the notebooks of many of his listeners. It was he too who prevailed on Don Ceria to write on St Francis de Sales,<sup>41</sup> and especially on the Founder with his valuable book "Don Bosco con

<sup>41</sup> *La vita religiosa nell'insegnamenti di San Francesco di Sales*, cf. ASC 34, p. 445

Dio" ("Don Bosco with God"); and he asked Don Albert Caviglia to take in hand the collating of the published and unpublished works and writings of Don Bosco.

It could be said that the dominant note running through all his circulars, letters, strennas, conferences, sermons, etc. was that of "Don Bosco the model", and that the theme of "family life" together with that of the "preventive system" represent the translation into practice of the salesian spirit. "If it were possible to gather together and put in order all the teachings of Don Rinaldi on different occasions," wrote Don Ceria, "we should have a treasure trove of ascetical doctrine."<sup>42</sup>

The vital point on which he always insisted was the particular interior quality which must characterize the salesian spirit; he regretted that in this Don Bosco was not sufficiently known: "Note it well," he once said in his later years to the students of theology at the Crocetta, "that the true physiognomy of our Father is not to be found in his works; the true greatness, the exact physiognomy of Don Bosco, can and must be found only in his interior life."<sup>43</sup>

It would take too long to dwell on all the various aspects of Don Rinaldi's teachings. We shall consider just two of his *more characteristic themes*; that of the interior spirit, and that of kindness.

#### AUTHORITATIVE INTERPRETER OF OUR APOSTOLIC INTERIOR LIFE

Don Rinaldi had understood in the intimate contact he had had with Don Bosco and then later through personal experience, that the constant atti-

<sup>42</sup> CERIA, o.c. p. 422

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p. 439

tude of union with God was the secret of all the industrious life and particular spirit of the Founder. By this time there are many who have concentrated their attention on this interior aspect of Don Bosco, but perhaps there is no one who has done it with the strength, conviction, insistence and authority of Don Rinaldi. This was the principal message he wanted to leave as a testament to our Family. Unless we are fully immersed in God, we cannot be his apostles. "The interior life", he used to say, "might appear as something foreign to us, since as Salesians we are always active and busy. This nevertheless is the one and only thing that will make us true religious."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> P. RINALDI, o.c. p. 91

He considered this attitude the limpid source of all the rest, the first grace, the secret motive force of our spirit; and he declared it courageously, almost as a paradox: "Our holiness," he wrote to the confreres, "lies not so much in the practice of the way of life we embraced by our salesian profession, and not even in the imitation alone of our Father's virtues, but in seeing to it that the salesian life we have embraced and the imitation of his fatherly virtues *be animated by the spirit which Don Bosco himself lived* and with which he practised those virtues."<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> ASC 48, p. 733-4

And in the special Strenna for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians for the year 1931 on the interior life of Don Bosco, while exhorting the Sisters to realize in themselves, as the Founder had earlier told them, the activity of Martha and the contemplation of Mary, he said that they were speaking of "an interior life that is simple, evangelical, practical and hard-working;" Don Bosco, one reads in the Strenna, "unified to perfection his external activity, tireless, absorbing, and wide-ranging as it was with such great responsibility,

with an interior life which took its rise from the sense of the presence of God (Oh! the power of that 'God sees you' of Mamma Margaret!) and slowly became so actual, persistent and alive as to become perfect union with God. In this way he realized in himself that perfect state in which contemplation is united with activity, the *ecstasy of action*, in which he wore himself out to the last in ecstatic peace of mind for the salvation of souls."

And so the secret of our spirit is a fundamental union with God which surpasses everything else; creative and dynamic apostolic commitment springs constantly from the ardour of the love of God; thence proceeds the famous "grace of unity" of our pastoral charity!

But let us try to delve further into the way in which Don Rinaldi analyzed more deeply this secret of salesian apostolic interior life. We shall look at three of its aspects: *thirst for souls*, tireless apostolic work, and fidelity to daily prayer.

— First then, *care to live in truth the motto "da mihi animas"*: Don Bosco chose it to characterize our spirit for all.

Union with Christ leads us straight to the heart of God the Father, rich in infinite love for "souls", i.e. for men, and especially for the young, with a view to their evangelization and salvation. This is the attitude we may refer to today as a "pastoral heart": it is that union with God which is expressed in a burning and practical love for souls!

I think it important to understand the term "souls" in our motto, not as an outdated expression somewhat remote from the reality of life's vicissitudes, but rather as our ability to detect in the reality what is most characteristically human in it with the transcendent values of the individual and the de-

mands of the Gospel, and to dedicate ourselves to their practical cultivation so that they may have an efficacious influence on the future of society and help to realize Christ's saving mission. The term "soul", in our tradition, emphasizes the more significant and valid traits of the human person and his social environment.

The "*thirst for souls*" is a "Rinaldi" expression of the pastoral zeal stemming from union with God. The Founder used often to say to his boys: "Do you know why Don Bosco loves you so much? It is because you have a soul which is so precious that I am already doing what I can to save it, but our Lord has done much more."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p. 735

Truly that "*Da mihi animas*" is a motto which sums up the whole of his pastoral work for the young and the poor.

It is worth our while here to quote an entire page of a circular of Don Rinaldi, written almost on the eve of the beatification of our Father.

He was concerned to identify the spirit which animated Don Bosco in his practice of virtue. To this end he quoted an address of Pope Pius XI and commented on its content: "The Holy Father draws our attention to a *shining fact* we must never lose sight of. From where, the Pope asked us, did Don Bosco get the inexhaustible energy that enabled him to do so many things? There is a *secret* behind it, and he himself has continually revealed it in a motto which is very frequently found in connection with salesian work; it is the phrase that comes from the very heart of our Founder: *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*, "Give me souls and you can take all the rest away". There you have the secret of his heart, the strength and fervour of his charity: love for souls, a true love because it was a reflection of his love for our Lord Jesus Christ and because

it was *the souls themselves that he saw in the thought, heart and precious blood of our Lord*; and so there was no sacrifice or enterprise that he would not undertake to win over those souls so intensely loved.

How fine, attractive and sublime all this is! – commented Don Rinaldi. How it broadens the horizons of our apostolate and religious life! Don Bosco succeeded in losing himself completely in God, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and from that wonderful union he set out in search of souls with the burning love of the divine Redeemer, so that he lived and breathed for no other purpose than to save souls. We who lived alongside him and enjoyed a unique familiarity with him, we can testify that on more than one occasion we have experienced, almost in a sensible manner, this *thirst for souls* that filled his whole life! Here, my dear confreres, lies the secret of the outstanding holiness and wonderful works of Don Bosco; and here too is where we must make all our own efforts converge. I mean that day by day and minute by minute we must grow in our love of God, of our Lord Jesus Christ, until we reach that blessed union which Jesus himself besought from his eternal Father in his priestly prayer: 'That they may be one'!

To achieve this state of *being one with souls*, we must first establish our life in God in such a way that our own thoughts, words and actions, become in a certain sense divine. Then souls for us will be Jesus himself, and we shall be one with souls, after the example of our Father. Then we shall understand in all their depth those words Don Bosco said to us in the last days of his life: 'I cannot do any more myself... but Oh how many souls Mary Help of Christians will save through the Salesians'.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* p. 734-5

And there I end the quotation, but I do not think there has ever been written a more enthralling and more penetrating page on our salesian apostolic internal life. It points out the secret for deserving the name of sons of Don Bosco; all our strength comes from this vital root; here we find the first source of our charisma. We need to take it up again, to meditate on it, to express our reflections on it so that it may reveal to us the true nucleus and fount of our spirit.

Thank you, Don Rinaldi!

Rightly did Albert Caviglia say that we shall never understand Don Bosco the Founder, nor his educational system and apostolate, unless we use as our starting point the assimilation of his spirit.

It was from the aspect of union with God that Don Rinaldi was able to declare: "For me Don Bosco is one of the most splendid personifications of charity at the present day. His life is nothing else but the ardour of divine love in the complete immolation of himself for the good of the young and the salvation of souls. 'He who loves is born of God and knows God': his preventive system is nothing else but love!"<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> ASC 47, p. 714

Of Don Bosco's 73 years of life, says Don Rinaldi again, more than 63 he used in the salvation of souls, especially of the young: "Just as the holy Gospel presents Jesus to us as being intent from the moment of his entry into the world solely on doing the will of his Eternal Father, which was nothing else but the salvation of souls, so the life of Don Bosco shows him to us in an uninterrupted apostolate for that same purpose. Take away this *golden thread* and you find that his life loses all consistency; analyze it in its most minute details and always you find shining through the radiant combination of 'da mihi animas' and 'cetera tolle'! Sum it



<sup>49</sup> ASC 50, p. 798

up in a small space with only its essential points, and you will have in hand a *salesian Gospel*.”<sup>49</sup>

This “golden thread” was the result in him of a continuous listening in faith, or in other words of contemplative love cultivated day by day through various means of living reference to Christ.

— Secondly, as an aspect inseparable from this “thirst for souls”, Don Rinaldi insisted on the salesian concept of “work”. His own was a kind of comment on that “ecstasy of action” which, drawing on St Francis de Sales for inspiration, he described to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the Strenna already quoted as “*the most perfect state of active contemplation*”.

Mgr. Evasio Colli, a close friend of Don Rinaldi who came from the same part of the country, preaching at the ‘month’s mind’ after his death, emphasized that his extraordinary apostolic work had, in fact, been a kind of “ecstasy”: “In these times of superficial and frenetic activity – which sometimes grips even religious life – we need to go back to the idea of St Francis de Sales regarding holiness and christian perfection. The spirit of union with God is like the hidden root, humble but always vibrant, of the mighty tree of the salesian life; it is like the inside of a building, the more artistic part but one often less known to outsiders who can only admire the exterior... In Don Rinaldi, as in Don Bosco, this was the source of his characteristic and unruffled calm that made him strong and confident, and on that account also mild and gentle... ; it enabled him to remain undismayed in the face of the most terrible events, and to be restrained in moments of triumph; he was of an equable temperament, calmly watchful and with a healthy optimism; He would approach from the same supernatural standpoint

and treat with the same care every question from a case of conscience to a financial problem.”<sup>55</sup>

Don Rinaldi had learned from Don Bosco the importance for us of apostolic work; anyone disinclined to sacrifice himself in daily work is not meant for us. Don Bosco is a saint of apostolic and charitable activity: in this field he is an eminent and outstanding figure.

We can understand therefore the expressions of joy – something unusual for him – that Don Rinaldi came out with when Pius XI promulgated the heroicity of Don Bosco’s virtues after all the difficulties and objections raised during the Process. He was deeply moved by the well known magnificent eulogy of the Pope: “One of Don Bosco’s finest characteristics,” Pius XI had said, “was his availability to all; though he was always busy in the midst of a continuous host of pressing affairs with requests bombarding him on every side, his spirit was always elsewhere: it was always on high, where an undisturbed calm reigned always serene; so that in him work became effectively the same thing as prayer, and there was verified in him the *great principle of christian life ‘qui laborat, orat’*.”<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *Homily at month’s mind; in public copy of ordinary Process at Turin, vol. IV, p. 1173 ff*

<sup>51</sup> ASC 38, p. 555

In the first meeting Don Rinaldi had as Rector Major with Pius XI he was courageous enough to ask the Pope for the *indulgence for sanctified work*. It was not a request made without due thought; it was the result of a programme of life he had seen realized in the Founder and made his own, and which he considered an important duty to pass on to the confreres through the singular and authoritative means of an indulgence granted by the Church: and he was asking it of a Pope who had already perceived on his own side Don Bosco’s secret.

The papal audience was granted to Don Rinaldi on 6 June 1922; he had decided to ask for "this singular favour, for all my beloved sons, for the good Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, for the pupils and past-pupils of both sexes, for our zealous Cooperators..., as an efficacious stimulus to help them to be *every day more active and at the same time more united with the Lord*. In my opinion a most effective means of encouraging all of them to do this would be to grant them a special indulgence to be gained every time they used some devout invocation during their work, teaching, assistance, or other occupation.

(The Pope granted the request and touched on the following points in his reply.) For the hard work of the Salesians to be more advantageous, it must go hand in hand with union with God and be always preceded by personal sanctification. In the past, Indulgences have been granted to the faithful on condition that they performed some external devotional practice; but henceforth the Salesians will be able to gain them by their work itself, every time they unite with it some devotional invocation, even of the briefest kind. In this way they will more easily achieve their personal sanctification through an habitual union with God."<sup>52</sup>

This is another page of Don Rinaldi that calls for our careful meditation. His concern for the indulgence attached to sanctified work, as a stimulus to living the identity of the salesian spirit, shows us what kind of concept he had of "work". It was to be an industrious activity that was at the same time a manifestation of an apostolic interior life, i.e. of a deep spirituality or "personal sanctification" which drives out many superficial attitudes; the kind of work that manifests a union with God the Saviour

<sup>52</sup> ASC 15, p. 16-19 The indulgence attached to work was extended by Paul VI (Apost. Const. *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 1.1.1967) to all the faithful who work with a spirit of union with God. We must exploit this extension when working to relaunch the Laity at the present day. The *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* states: «A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful who, in carrying out their duties and tolerating life's difficulties, humbly and trustingly lift their minds to God (even only mentally) by some pious ejaculation» (cf. *Ench. Indul.* 3rd edn. Lib. Edit. Vaticana 1986, p. 33).

as the highest and most spirit-filled attitude. But for salesian interior life to be genuine, it must be translated tirelessly and creatively into pastoral activity for the salvation of souls: a kind of activity therefore which adds a personal and christian dimension to the work, and avoids the simply exterior and automatic motion of a machine.

For this reason he used to insist on the sanctification of the "Present moment", of the daily occupation; we live in fact only in the present and a great part of the present is work. On the occasion of the third centenary of the death of St Francis de Sales, he presented him as the "apostle of the sanctification of the present moment".<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> cf. ASC 17, p. 36

The point lies not in believing that work as such, in its natural objectivity, is of itself an authentic expression of our spirit. *The secret lies entirely in the person working* of whom the work is a fruit, and whose spiritual likeness it takes on. *Only a person who is holy can produce a kind of work which is also prayer.* Only from an individual imbued with pastoral charity can flow that "grace of unity" which realizes the vital synthesis between God and work. In the Strenna for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians already referred to, Don Rinaldi insists: "Work cannot take the place of prayer, but it can in fact *be transformed into prayer* when there exists an inner life of union with God, not just now and again as though the interior life were an article of clothing to be worn only on feasts and during practices of piety and then laid carefully aside before engaging in other occupations." Union with God is the true "*creative cause*" of sanctified work.

— And there is a third aspect, intimately connected with the two preceding ones, that explains

the secret of the salesian spirit: it is that of personal and community *prayer*.

One day at Valdocco, struck by the hectic activity of some confreres, Don Rinaldi exclaimed: "But that is going too far! How can they pray calmly and draw all the fruit from their practices of piety."<sup>54</sup> And in the GC12 (1922) after the discussion on prayer, he said: "Let us not forget that the spirit is higher than norms and regulations, and that busybodies are always on the go but achieve very little. *With a solid piety miracles can be worked.*"<sup>55</sup>

In the ordinary Process it is recorded that on one occasion he chose a group of confreres so as to work out with them the characteristics of our spirit; one of those present testified that "he expressed it in the following words: *"Tireless industry sanctified by prayer and by union with God."*<sup>56</sup>

It was he who promoted in the Congregation the reading of the works of St Francis de Sales (especially his famous "Treatise of the love of God") and of books conducive to prayer, like Chautard's "Soul of the apostolate", Macourant's "With Jesus in intimacy of life", which he himself caused to be translated from the French (together with other books by the same author on humility, poverty, obedience and chastity, because his doctrine was based on St Francis de Sales), and also some works by Faber.

And then it was clearly evident to all that he was himself a man of prayer. Fr Peter Ricaldone tells us: "He was diligent, and I would even say rigorous, with himself and with others in the matter of religious practices... He read pious works, meditated on them and assimilated their content; and his conversation showed how much he was united with God."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Summarium*, p. 462, n. 1597

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p. 441, n. 1524

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p. 242, n. 842

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p. 286, n. 1001

When we are speaking here of "prayer" we are referring to that indispensable amount of time that is explicitly dedicated to dialogue with the Lord through the practices of piety of the salesian life: meditation on the Word of God, recital of the liturgy of the hours, spiritual reading, celebration of the Eucharist, the exercise of conversion in the sacrament of Reconciliation, etc. It includes a period every morning and evening, with special times every month (the monthly or quarterly retreat) and every year the annual retreat). To these have to be added initiatives of personal prayer, frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, familiarity with God nourished by frequent ejaculations, and the practice of two special devotions which Don Rinaldi tried to promote with conviction and enthusiasm: to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and to Mary Help of Christians Mother of the Church; these we see perpetuated in the two great sanctuaries built by Don Bosco: the Basilica of the Sacred Heart at Castro Pretorio in Rome, and that of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco.

To round off these considerations on the salesian apostolic interior life, it may be useful to quote some reflections from the author of the first biography of Don Rinaldi.

Don Ceria, as we said earlier, was invited by him to write "Don Bosco with God", and gives us every guarantee of being able to interpret his genuine personality. "We see in Don Rinaldi", writes his biographer, "all the characteristics of a man of interior life. He practised it in himself, he preached it to others. He was convinced that if you wanted to live according to Don Bosco's spirit you must never lose sight of his interior life... The interior life is the spiritual sense which must always accom-

pany us, it is the presence within us of God who is remembered, invoked and loved... Keep it well in mind that we do not get the true picture of Don Bosco from his works... Religious life is an interior life, a life of the spirit; anyone who wants to save souls must have God's spirit... There are religious families who devote themselves solely to the contemplative life, but no religious families can possibly exist who do not give themselves to the interior life even though they be consecrated to works of the apostolate... And so he wanted Don Bosco to be studied, so that he could be imitated in his interior life. This in fact is a point frequently recurring in his exhortations, especially towards the end of his life. In an informal talk on 3 March 1930 he declared that the interior life of Don Bosco had not yet been written. There is a difficulty in doing so because he revealed so little of his hidden life. It will have to be deduced from his dreams, his writings and letters, and from tradition... If you want to speak of him you have to do so in the way Chautard spoke of the apostle. And he insisted: Don Bosco is not known as he should be, not even by us who are Salesians. It is all too easy to misinterpret his figure. Don Bosco is entirely of God and with God. If he worked, if he engaged in any activity at all, it was simply and solely for souls: he had nothing in mind but souls."<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> CERIA, o.c. p. 437-442

After this quotation, I don't think it in any way an exaggeration to say that Don Rinaldi stands out in our Family as the most authentic and authoritative interpreter of the interior dimension proper to Don Bosco's spirit. We need do no more than point to the fact that the "grace of unity" which ensures the vital unification of our spirit is wonderfully illustrated by Don Rinaldi by his wonderfully deep analysis of the three aspects we have considered:

the mystical source in "da mihi animas", the incarnation of ascetical commitment in daily "work", and the vitalizing element of personal and community "prayer".

The purview is clear and fundamental. To assimilate it and develop its content remains for us today a matter of the greatest relevance.

### PATTERN OF "PASTORAL KINDNESS" THROUGH HIS FATHERLINESS

The kindness (Italian, 'bontà'), the second aspect of the salesian spirit on which we want to comment, is expressed in Don Rinaldi as fatherliness (Italian, 'paternità').

In the sub-title to this section I prefer to use the first term rather than the second, because it is wider and more comprehensive than the second. In any case Don Rinaldi taught the very novices (some of them still remember it) that even from the novitiate they should learn to be "fathers".

It should be noted that Don Rinaldi was a "Superior" for practically the whole of the 48 years of ministry that made up his priestly life, from 1883 to the end. And so in him the kindness proper to Don Bosco's spirit became realized in the fatherly exercise of authority: a fatherliness that was sincere and constant, strong yet mild and gentle, as an expression of the salesian predilection for the young and of the family spirit in the house. All the depositions that were made in the two Processes at Turin concerning the heroicity of his virtues were warm and unanimous in asserting that "fatherliness" was his most eminent and distinctive attitude, and the deponents spoke as though they felt



themselves still enveloped by the kindness of his loving gaze. Each one remembered a smile, an encouraging word, an affectionate welcome, an understanding encounter of forgiveness and generosity, a gesture of fatherly authority, equal care for all, an enlightening piece of advice, his inexhaustible patience, a chat that removed anxiety, the ability to meet every event with gospel simplicity. His fatherliness too was marked by an affable approach and manner which removed any feeling of distance and went straight to the heart, bringing tranquillity and joy wherever he went. "*The heart of Don Rinaldi*" is the happy title of a biography of him, written with "loving understanding" by Miss L. Larese-Cella.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> L. LARESE CELLA, *Il cuore di Don Rinaldi*, LICE-R. Berruti & C., Turin 1952

In one of his last circulars, almost like a spiritual testament, he wrote: "Our most important and essential tradition is fatherliness. *Our Founder was nothing if not a father*, in the noblest sense of the word; and holy Church in the liturgy invokes him as Father and Teacher." And he goes on in the same high tone: "His whole life is a complete treatise on 'fatherliness', which comes from the Father in heaven, 'ex quo omnis paternitas in coelo et in terra',<sup>60</sup> and which Don Bosco practised here below in the highest and even unique degree, *towards the young and towards all*, in the thousand and one vicissitudes of life, for the relief of every kind of spiritual and temporal hardship, with decision and self-sacrifice in the greatness of a heart extensive as the shores of the sea, making himself all things to all men to gain the souls of the young and lead them to God. And just as his life was nothing else but fatherliness, so his work and his sons cannot continue without that same quality... I seem to be once again in his living company, enjoying once again the wonderful familiarity of his gaze, his voice, his

<sup>60</sup> Eph 3,15

way of acting, his works: '*familiaritas stupenda nimis*', even from on high."<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> ASC 56, p. 933, 939-40

It is evident that the kindness which graced Don Rinaldi in the salesian spirit and which he never tired of recommending to the confreres was not only the expression of a human and natural feeling towards the young and at home. *It was a "pastoral kindness" that came from on high*; in other words it stemmed from the divine fatherhood, it was a fruit of the union with God which translates "*da mihi animas*" into a method of friendship and understanding. Anyone living the salesian spirit becomes pastorally "good and kind" (in the manner of both a mother and father) to the young, to people in general, and mutually with his brothers and sisters in the house, because he had the deep feeling in his heart that God is a "father", that God loves us and gives himself to us, and wants each of us to become a "sign and bearer" of his love.

Whenever Don Rinaldi spoke of God it was his custom to do so always as "Father".

This was certainly the most compelling evidence. Mgr. Marcellinus Olaechea, a forthright Basque, declared in the Processes that he had never met a priest who "had been able to present a higher idea of the loving fatherliness of God."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *Summarium*, p. 363, n. 1230

Some could perhaps be satisfied to simply see this fatherliness only in the relationships of Don Rinaldi with the confreres or with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; and in that sense it would certainly be possible to gather together a plentiful and effective documentation, as can be seen to some extent in the biographies already published.

But here our purpose is to broaden this very characteristic aspect, so as to penetrate more deeply into the "salesian spirit" and see why it implies of its nature for all members of the Family, a true

and perceptible "pastoral kindness" towards those to whom we are sent.

Certainly the fatherliness exemplified and recommended by Don Rinaldi must be considered by all Rectors and Superiors (and the corresponding "motherliness" on the part of Superiors of the Sisters) as the particular way in which authority is exercised among us. He himself said more than once: "The salesian superior must be aware that he has to spend himself for others. He must be available to all, day and night, and ready to receive anyone at any time – in the first place his own community and sons. For them he must leave aside his own convenience, his books, other good works, even prayer itself... Above all else he must be willing to listen. This is what the confreres need."<sup>63</sup>

But his concept of salesian "kindness" extends far beyond this, especially as regards young people, as can be deduced from his conferences, sermons, writings, various directives, and even from the filial notes he used to write to our Blessed Lady.

Let us look at some components which throw light on its nature and intensify its growth: first of all *love of the young* as an application of the preventive system, and then the importance of the *sacrament of Penance*, the *fostering of the family spirit* in the house, and self-control in *temperance*.

— A first and fundamental element of salesian kindness begins from "da mihi animas" and implies a *love of predilection for needy youth of such intensity that it becomes translated into the pastoral practice of the preventive system*. It is therefore a kindness of a fatherly and motherly kind urgently needed for the salvation of the young. It is an exercise of practical charity. "Never forget," wrote Don Rinaldi, "that the Salesian is an educator, not an

<sup>63</sup> P. RINALDI, o.c. p. 95

educational theorist... Our pedagogy is written in salesian life,"<sup>64</sup> and its pages are the playground, study, refectory, church, dormitory and outings.

The indispensable wisdom of the salesian educator stems daily from "pastoral kindness" which is supernatural love, as Don Bosco himself has left written: "The practice of this system is wholly based on the words of St Paul, who says: 'Love is patient and kind. It bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things'. Hence only a christian can apply the preventive system with success."<sup>65</sup>

In his pedagogical conferences Don Rinaldi insisted always on a *sympathetic heart*, accompanied by sufficient pedagogical knowledge; the heart requires that educators be friends who can make themselves loved and are able to use means suited to a youthful environment (study and religion yes, but also music and theatre, sport and tourism, etc.), so as to constitute a true and large family: "*Don Bosco's ideal was a house that was also a family...*"; in educating the young we have to give direction to head, heart and soul. Don Bosco used to say that to govern the heart you have to aim at something inside. This is the characteristic of the Congregation. Don Bosco was a father to all his sons, and offered them his entire heart."<sup>66</sup>

And so, a first element of salesian kindness is the practice of a love of predilection for the young through the preventive system.

— A second aspect, very dear to the Founder and recalled insistently by Don Rinaldi, is the practice of spiritual fatherliness realized through the *administration of the sacrament of Penance*. There, above all, the Rector and the priest confreres learn to practice and grow in true fatherliness. "According to Don Bosco the educator represents God.

<sup>64</sup> ASC 36, p. 497-8

<sup>65</sup> *Regolamento per le case...*, Salesian Press, Turin 1877, p. 3-13

<sup>66</sup> E. VALENTINI, o.c. passim

Boys need to feel divine authority. This is the reason behind all reasoning. If you put to a boy the higher-level motive that 'God sees you', everything becomes a lot easier. Prayers, assistance at Mass, frequent reception of the sacraments, are a great means of education – but they are not a means of discipline. If their use is not spontaneous and convinced they only alienate young people. You have first to form them to piety.”<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* p. 39

Hence the sacrament of Penance, as a vital element in educational work, should be celebrated not as a kind of magic means for obtaining discipline, but as a “*mediation of divine fatherliness!*”

He insisted particularly on the importance of Rectors and salesian priests being willingly and deeply committed to the administration of this sacrament, which implies for the priests a practical exercise of union with God for the benefit of others. He lamented the over-wide extension of the decree of 1901 which forbade Rectors to be confessors of the confreres of their own house, but no more than that. And so he gave frequent reminders that the administration and frequent use of this sacrament forms a living part of Don Bosco's family atmosphere.

Here once again I would like to quote from a significant page in Don Rinaldi's circulars:

“The exterior practice of fatherliness is something passed on to the Rector of the house in virtue of his appointment..., and *when Don Bosco passed it on to the Rector of his time* it was in close association with the most sublime act and reality of *spiritual regeneration* through the exercise of the divine power of forgiving sins. Don Bosco used this divine power uninterruptedly throughout his priestly life and with a special predilection in favour of his boys. Hearing their confessions was what he

most liked doing, and would not abandon it in favour of anything else. He did it as soon as he was on his feet each morning, he did it at all hours of the day and all sorts of places, and often continued in the evening until midnight.

As soon as he had gained a youngster's confidence, he invited him to make his confession, and he could do this with such supernatural fatherliness that the other could not only not refuse but derived great pleasure from doing so and opened his heart to him with full sincerity. I experienced this myself...

By his words Don Bosco led his boys to love confession... *in this he was the great conqueror of souls*; wonderful results followed from it, and he took it for granted that his successors and the rectors of houses could do likewise.

When the docile and obedient Don Rua received the order from the Holy See, he at once promulgated precise norms for putting the new dispositions into practice in our houses. Superiors and Rectors no longer exercised this spiritual fatherhood over their religious subjects. But for the purpose of avoiding any misunderstandings they at first went far beyond the terms of the decree: Rectors no longer heard the confessions of the boys, something that was not forbidden to any approved priest, whatever might be his office in his religious Institute...

My dear Provincials and Rectors, *I beg of you* in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ *to revive in you and around you this tradition of spiritual fatherhood* which, sadly, is dying out with great harm to the souls of the young and to our salesian physiognomy. Go back again to the work, which in the mind and heart of Don Bosco, should be the first and most important for the Rector who is a father. Be in truth the *fathers of the souls* of your young-

<sup>68</sup> ASC 56, n. 940-2

ters. Do not abdicate from your spiritual fatherhood, but practise it!"<sup>68</sup>

This is a page in which Don Rinaldi's conviction comes through to us in clear and vibrant fashion!

At the present day we need to give a good deal of thought to this aspect, which was for us the source of the fatherliness and the means which ensured the pastoral kindness which should distinguish us in the Church. What a great responsibility rests on salesian priests as regards the growth or decline of the style of kindness in all our Family; and what a responsibility too rests on all the others in the creation of an favourable environment for making use of the sacrament of Reconciliation. There is an urgent need for proper importance to be given once again to this sacrament by all who want to live salesian kindness by the integral application of the preventive system.

— A third aspect which ensures, defends and increases pastoral kindness is the *family spirit* lived in the house between confreres or sisters. It is the fruit of the common "da mihi animas", a natural requirement of our educational method, and a special and constant part of the responsibility of the one directing the house.

The salesian style of its very essence implies the creation of a family atmosphere with "one heart and one soul". When we recall that our mission is entrusted to the local salesian community as such, how could it radiate pastoral kindness unless it lived a happy fraternal life?

Don Rinaldi as a Superior was always outstanding for his concern to make the house a family. When he was a young Rector at Sarrià (at the age of 33) the confreres used to say that despite his imposing appearance he showed more of the affection

of a father than the authority of a superior. On his appointment as provincial in Spain, he made various resolutions, all of which can be summed up in the emphatic expression: "I will be a father!"<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> cf. E. CERIA, o.c. p. 93 ff

As Rector Major he wrote to the confreres: "Rather than a society, *Don Bosco intended to form a family*, based almost entirely on the gentle, amiable and vigilant fatherliness of the superior, and on the filial and fraternal affection of the subjects; indeed, though maintaining the principle of authority and corresponding subjection, he did not want distinctions, but rather equality among all in everything."<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> ASC 23, p. 179

The family spirit makes fraternal communion flourish through the attainment of pastoral objectives, without seeking middle-class comforts and without individual idiosyncrasies: "the good waiting to be done by the sons of Don Bosco will never be lacking. In nearly every case each one, in addition to the main task assigned to him by obedience, has other occupations that by themselves would be enough to keep another confrere busy.

This extra work is almost a characteristic of salesian life, and is accepted generously... But no one can be a member of our Society unless his principal concern is the good of the Society itself; if its members were nothing more than individualists, the Society would be finished, and its members nothing more than a group of people without a reason for their existence."<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> ASC 47, p. 710

Hence, we are talking about a kindness shared in the atmosphere of a united family, totally directed to those for whom we work, and tirelessly dedicated to our common mission.

— Finally, another aspect that contributes to the ensuring of pastoral kindness in each one of us



is the *constant asceticism involved in self-control*, or in other words the fostering of the cardinal virtue of *temperance*, in the sense explained by Don Rinaldi in his comments on the dream of the ten diamonds. Speaking of the diamond of "temperance" (in a wider sense than that of "mortification", indicated by the diamond of "fasting"). he said: "The Salesian must know when to put the brake on; he does not rush blindly ahead, but keeps his eyes open to see where he is going; if the way is not clear, he waits. He has himself always under control, even in games; he keeps his patience even with the lad who drives him to desperation; he is able to hold his tongue, to dissimulate, to speak at the appropriate moment, to be always shrewd in what he does!"<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> AGC 300, p. 16-17;  
cf. p. 10-11

In temperance seen like this, as a personal and daily sharing in Christ's royal dominion over him that came with baptism, a special factor is not only patience but also *the fundamental virtue of humility*, because the latter helps in the cultivation of "meekness" under its aspects of both mildness and moderation; it ensures in the Salesian the pedagogical and pastoral ability to "make himself loved" so much recommended by Don Bosco, but certainly not easy to acquire.

In connection with the amiable and endearing *humility* of Don Rinaldi, his immediate successor (Fr Peter Ricaldone) was able to declare in the Processes: "We saw him always humble in his deportment, in his words and actions. As I have said already, he had a very unassuming opinion of himself; I do not remember him ever speaking of himself at all. Every time he was promoted to any office, he considered himself unworthy of it. In his final years, when he could see that his strength was declining, he had it in mind to lay down his assign-

ment and offer his resignation to the Holy See. His humility was always clothed in kindness and gentleness. He was always welcoming in manner, and from his actions it was evident that he *considered himself the servant of all*. I may add that his humility was understood in a correct manner and did not prevent him from occupying his post, whether as Rector, Provincial, Prefect General or Rector Major, with due decorum. And while he practised in himself humility and all the other virtues of which I have spoken, he never neglected to inculcate them with strong and loving insistence in other confreres.”<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup> *Summarium*, p. 293-4, n. 1032-3

To an FMA novice who asked his advice about her formation Don Rinaldi replied: “Be careful about the formation of the spirit, and be specially careful about self-love. Crush it within you. You must imitate the humility of the Heart of Jesus. All else is vanity and foolishness. Never allow a single day of your novitiate to pass without making progress in the spirit of God, i.e. in piety, charity, *humility of heart*, sacrifice and self-denial. Make Mary disappear (note: Mary was the novice’s name), so that no one remains but the good Lord, who wants you to be holy in mind and heart, in soul and body.”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Letter to Sr Maria Lanzio, 24.3.1924, ASC 9.31 Rinaldi

And so Don Rinaldi, through his incomparable priestly fatherliness, helps us to detect in salesian kindness *four truly indispensable elements*: that of the love of predilection for the young in the constant practice of the preventive system, that of the special place to be given to the living and loving celebration of the sacrament of Penance, that of a fraternal family spirit in the community, and that of constant self-control to “make oneself loved”.

*If we join these elements to the three we men-*

*tioned earlier* when speaking of apostolic interior life, we have an interesting descriptive picture of the traits which, according to Don Rinaldi, characterize Don Bosco's salesian spirit.

## INTERCESSOR AND GUIDE FOR THE WHOLE SALESIAN FAMILY

The event of the beatification will assure all of us that Don Rinaldi is still accompanying us from heaven. Our communion with the Church in heaven strengthens our hearts in hope; the new Beatus will be our intercessor and guide!

In the circular he wrote after the beatification of Don Bosco and the transferring of his body from Valsalice to Valdocco in solemn procession, he expressed his emotion and joy in heartfelt words: it seemed to him like the beginning of a *new era* of salesian life, characterized on the one hand by innovations of the times, but on the other linked with the holiness of the Founder, now endorsed by the Church.

He considered this event as a sign of approval for the future of our Family: "I have come to understand," he wrote, "just who Don Bosco has become for us, without ceasing to be what he always was before... With this event he has become:

- the *sure model for our own life*;
- the *light placed on a candlestick* to give light to the whole world;
- the *faithful minister appointed* by his and our Lord Jesus Christ to distribute Christ's goods to those in need;
- our *special intercessor* with the Virgin Help of Christians...

I understood what our spirit must be, what our individual and corporate life must become... In the basilica his name has become really and indivisibly linked with that of his powerful Helper... and I seem to hear a gentle fatherly voice, a voice I had already heard in times past, coming down from his place in glory, and saying to me: '*Exemplum dedi vobis. Imitatores mei estote*'! Do as I have done and then my beloved Congregation will always flourish as it seemed to me to be doing when I was with you on earth in the vision I had at S. Benigno (– the reference is to the dream of the diamonds –): 'love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things': preach it in words and deeds... You will become a spectacle to the world and to the angels and then your glory will be the glory of God...

If the *new era* of our salesian life which has just begun takes always the examples of Don Bosco as its norm; if our educational mission is always carried out under his protection, then we shall spread and multiply without limit the immense treasure of christian education as our Founder intended."<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> ASC 49, p. 767-71

By analogy and in the light of a heritage that has been preserved and made to bear fruit, we can say something similar today with reference to the coming beatification of Don Rinaldi. At the present time we too consider ourselves *at the beginning of a new era* of our salesian life, laboriously rethought at communal level and in fidelity to our origins over a period of twenty years, in harmony with Vatican II as a response to the challenges of new times. At such a moment the figure of a beatified Don Rinaldi will bring us closer to the Founder in an extraordinary and attractively relevant way; it will illuminate and develop the content of his charisma with filial sentiments, based on an unchallengeable knowledge of his heart and spirit; his

enterprise and wise ability for developing its germs which still lie hidden is a warning to us that every dynamic innovation must be the result of complete harmony with his most genuine spirit.

The holiness of the new Beatus is a proof of creative fidelity. It shows us that the Holy Spirit united in him the past and the future in the homogeneous growth of the same charisma without any arbitrary changes or deviations, without any reversals and above all the many fleeting ideological mirages.

It is stimulating to think that Don Rinaldi achieved holiness by dedicating himself totally, and we could add exclusively, to making Don Bosco's spirit lived and extended. This, I think, is the finest meaning of his life as a salesian superior: he gave witness, animation and thrust to the patrimony he had received as a heritage.

Another point about the event of his beatification is that it will assure us that he will continue to be our *intercessor*, the same function that he practised all his life, though in a different way; now he will be doing it in union with St John Bosco, Blessed Michael Rua, St Mary Domenica Mazzarello, and so many other glorified brothers and sisters.

But we must interpret his role by reflecting on the teaching he gave us while he was alive on earth. In this sense we look on him as a sure *guide*, who teaches us to face with salesian authenticity the needs arising from temporal progress.

In considering the figure and historical role of Don Rinaldi, we could have dwelt on many other aspects which we have not dealt with; examples of the more important and even essential of these, which are to some extent taken for granted, include: the centrality of his life in Christ, his sense of

the cross and self-oblation (which could be studied more deeply especially by some of the Groups in our Family), his Marian devotion, his sincere and strong adherence to Peter's Successor, the doctrine of consecrated life, his concept of poverty and the administration of temporal goods, his dynamic and social vision of the Oratory, his extraordinary organizing ardour for the missions, etc.

In this letter we have preferred to highlight his enterprise which has always remained to some extent in the background, so as to concentrate attention on the central point of the message he has left us.

Here we think we have found his relevance to the present day. This is where we have directed our attention, without any pretext of exhausting its content, but with the joy of being able to see that his role extends to the whole of our Salesian Family, and enables us to admire in him his authoritative precursor who illuminates and endorses one of the great paths<sup>76</sup> of our postconciliar renewal.

<sup>76</sup> cf. SGC, p. xviii-xx

And let me add that if, following in the footsteps of Don Rinaldi (which are those of Don Bosco), I have insisted strongly on apostolic interior life as a vital element to be developed, nourished, and raised to the highest possible level of maturity at both personal and community level, I have done so because the temptation to press ahead in activity and prescind from the "da mihi animas", i.e. from an uninterrupted interior union with God the Saviour, is a reality among us and causes grave harm to the attitude of prayer that is essential to pastoral charity. The *grace of unity* implicit in the "thirst for souls" impels us simultaneously to prayer and to work, the two 'lungs' with which the salesian breathes, in perfect conformity with the will of God.

The witness of Don Rinaldi is a hymn to this "grace of unity" in which the time given to intense prayer adds power to pastoral activity, and tireless apostolic work becomes an essential call to prayer.

In fact it is stated in the Holy See's document on the "Contemplative dimension of religious life", that true apostolic activity (and hence not just any sort of activity) is intrinsically bound up with an attitude of prayer: "The very nature of apostolic and charitable activity contains its own riches which nourish union with God. It is necessary to cultivate every day an awareness and deepening of it. Being conscious of this, religious will so sanctify their activities as to transform them into sources of union with God, to whose service they are dedicated by a new and special title (LG 44)."<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> SCRIS, *Contemplative dimension of the religious life*, 12.8.1980, n. 6

My dear confreres, the insistent appeals I have made to overcome the running sore of superficiality will remain so many empty words unless every Salesian, at the school of Don Rinaldi, gives to the "thirst for souls" the attention and intensity that is indispensable for guaranteeing the authentic "grace of unity" of pastoral charity.

#### INSISTENT PROCLAIMER OF THE VITAL MESSAGE OF "DON BOSCO, THE MODEL"

Before concluding, I want to invite you all to prepare, in harmony of heart and with sincere gratitude and reflection in faith, for this very significant beatification. It is a special gift of God for the sound and vigorous growth of our charisma on the eve of the Third Millennium.

May the beatified Don Rinaldi intercede for us and guide our steps as we press ahead for the edu-

cation to the faith of innumerable young people throughout the world.

I too, who heard his voice while I was still a growing boy, could suggest to you something similar to what he himself had written for the beatification of Don Bosco. In my mind's eye I can see Blessed Don Rinaldi with the new text of the Constitutions in his hand; he is admiring it as the "fair copy" which Don Bosco had foreseen. Opening it he points to a page which must be especially dear to him, because it sums up the endeavours which had characterized his whole life; it is the article which proposes Don Bosco to us as our model. Let us listen to it as though he himself were reading it:

"The Lord has given us Don Bosco as father and teacher. We study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace. He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; and he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living as 'seeing him who is invisible'."

"These two aspects combined to create a closely-knit life project, the service of the young. He realized his aim with firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue. 'He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young... Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls'."<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> C 21

I think it will be this, more than anything else, that Don Rinaldi will recommend to us on the day of his beatification.

Let us ask of him even now, together with Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, to intercede for the success of our coming General Chapters, so that



their members may live in an atmosphere of the strong apostolic interior life of our origins, and so produce final guidelines and directives that will be a valuable stimulus for the relaunching in our Family of the true salesian mystique of the "da mihi animas" in a strongly unified plan of life.

Let us meditate and pray: let each one cherish Don Rinaldi's wonderful testimony, and may the contents of this circular letter provide points for reflection in our spiritual retreats!

I send to all of you my cordial greetings, with best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Affectionately in the Lord,

Don F. Viganò