

1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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1.1 THE SALESIAN ACCORDING TO DON BOSCO'S DREAM OF THE TEN DIAMONDS

1.1 « THE SALESIAN ACCORDING TO DON BOSCO'S DREAM OF THE TEN DIAMONDS » - Introduction - « The model of the true Salesian » - Importance given to the dream by Don Bosco - Importance of the dream in our Salesian traditions - Don Rinaldi the most enlightened interpreter - Our specific spirituality: The august personage; The august personage: front and back - The visible image of the Salesian: Visible characteristics; Basic elements; Christ the fountainhead - The supporting spiritual framework: Obedience is central; Practical poverty; Demands of chastity; The guerdon of heaven - Distinctive Salesian spirituality - Destruction of Salesian Identity: The Salesian Image debased; Collapse of the supporting spiritual structure - Appeal for formation and vocations for the future.

Rome, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 1981

Dear Confreres,

My first duty is to invite you to share the joy and hope of our confreres in Spain as they begin on 16 February the celebration of the centenary of Don Bosco's charisma in Spain. Together with the 4th missionary expedition in late January of 1881, Father John Branda left Turin with four other confreres and a layman and travelled to Andalusia to set up the Salesian foundation at Utrera. With them went Father John Cagliero to help them with his five years of founding expertise in South America.

Today Spain has over 3,200 Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and also many missionaries, thousands of Co-operators, innumerable past pupils, an active group of Don Bosco Volunteers, and friends throughout the length and breadth of the Peninsula. The pioneers possessed the secret of expansion and the courage to face the

future; they had been trained at Valdocco and their model was our great-hearted Founder himself.

We congratulate the confreres of Spain for their generous and inspired sharing of this "experience of the Holy Spirit" that had its beginnings so humbly in that tiny southern Spanish town. We wish to imitate the spiritual zeal they are displaying this year and explore the secret of *the true Salesian model* the early pioneers projected so magnificently.

On this same line of thought, there is another significant centenary in September next: Don Bosco's important dream of the future of his Society. He saw an "august personage" wearing a mantle "richly adorned" with ten large and brilliant diamonds. The dream took place at San Benigno Canavese on the night of 10 September 1881.

The model of the true Salesian

The dream has three parts. In Scene I the august personage portrays the ideal Salesian. The front of his mantle is adorned with five diamonds, three on the breast representing Faith, Hope and Charity, and two at shoulder level for Work and Temperance. On the back of the garment are another five diamonds: they stand for Obedience, Poverty, Reward, Chastity and Fasting.

Don Rinaldi calls this august personage of the ten diamonds "the model of the true Salesian".¹

In Scene II the august personage depicts the model completely debased. The mantle "is faded, moth-eaten and torn. Where the diamonds, had been, the cloth was in tatters and eaten away by grubs". This depressing scene portrays "the ruin, the anti-thesis of the true Salesian".²

1. ASC 55, 1930.

2. ASC 55, p. 923.

In Scene III there is a handsome young man of imposing and charming mien, dressed in white garments delicately worked in gold and silver thread. His message to the Salesians is to "listen, take heed and be strong and courageous; to bear witness in their words and lives, to be prudent in accepting and training the new generation, and to see to the healthy growth of the Congregation".

The three scenes of the dream are realistic and challenging. They present a deft, personalised and dramatic exposition of Salesian spirituality. Don Bosco considered them an important frame of reference for our Salesian vocation. The careful choice and presentation of the special characteristics must be seen as an authoritative identikit of a true Salesian, and Don Bosco tells us that as long as we cherish these characteristics the future of our vocation in the Church is assured; however, if we neglect them the Congregation will face total extinction.

In his description of the dream Don Bosco remarked on two events: first, that 10 September was the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary,³ and secondly, that the Salesians at San Benigno were making their Retreat and he seemed to be walking up and down with the Rectors. These are two matters worth reflecting on: they link the dream with Marian devotion, and suggest that the dream is particularly suitable for days of reflection and meditation (such as Retreats), and of special importance for those responsible for animation (such as Superiors).

It is a dream offered to every Salesian because he is a Salesian. There is no direct reference to the young (though obviously it is totally oriented to their good). Don Bosco is speaking to us in our

3. The Feast of the Holy Name of Mary was instituted by Innocent XI to commemorate the Christian victory over the Turks at Vienna on 13 September 1683. It was kept on the first Sunday after the Nativity of Mary. In 1881, the year of Don Bosco's dream, this was 10 September. At the beginning of the 20th century Pope St Pius X changed the date of the feast to 12 September to free the Sunday for liturgical reasons.

own Salesian house; or whilst we are making our Retreat; or in our character as animators and educators. It is a topic that affects us intimately; it calls for a "revision of life".

Importance given to the dream by Don Bosco

The dream made such an impression on the Saint that he not only expounded it by word of mouth but also set it down in writing.⁴

In the archives we have his own hand-written text that Don Ceria had been unable to find for inclusion in Volume XV of the *Memorie Biografiche*. Now, thanks to the patient and painstaking labours of a Salesian Sister, we have at our disposal even a critical edition of the dream.⁵

The text was written some weeks after the 11 September and reflects Don Bosco's concern that the dream be understood and applied to our living traditions.

The rough copy of the manuscript has many corrections and shows Don Bosco's painstaking care in editing for publication;⁶ also his concern to recall accurately the details of the dream — a profound effort to record faithfully what he humbly believed to be an admonition from on high. Don Bosco prefaces his dream with words that imbue it with mystery, solemnity and prophecy: "May the grace of the Holy Spirit enlighten us all. Amen".

From these pages, filled with Don Bosco's minute and painstaking corrections, Don Berto made a fair copy and gave it to the Saint to check. Don Bosco added yet another addendum which read: "This dream lasted almost the whole night, and in the morning I was exhausted. Still, for

4. MB XV 182.

5. Sister Cecilia Romero: *I sogni di Don Bosco - edizione critica*; LDC 1978. The authress groups this dream with a number of others Don Bosco had towards the close of his life (1870-87). Sister Romero remarks on p. 10 that the current events of his history "had a considerable bearing on the content of the dreams; for this was the period following the abolition of the temporal power of the Popes and characterised by profound social, political and religious changes. One of the serious problems that resulted was that of religious and priestly vocations.

"Also, this was a time of soul-searching for Don Bosco in regard to his educational work and his Congregation. It was in need of consolidation to meet the present and future needs of the Church and society, and so it required a solid increase — all the more so because of the great missionary expansion taking place at that time.

"This soul-searching is very obvious in a number of his writings in this second half of the 19th century — for instance, the *Memoirs of the Oratory* (1873-75) and the pamphlet on the *Preventive System* (1877).

"Seen in this light the dreams assume a marked importance both in view of their content and their common characteristics; they can be analysed under various aspects: psychological, pedagogical, theological, historical, and so forth."

6. P. Stella: *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*; Vol. II, p. 527.

fear of forgetting it, I rose quickly and made a few notes that have helped me recall what I have written here on the Feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple" (21 November).

Don Bosco's concern is noteworthy: he *immediately* made notes; *later* he applied himself personally to writing the details. He plainly saw it as something important, and it is not out of place to add his own words: "I was not able to remember everything".

And note again Don Bosco's repeated reference to a Feast of our Heavenly Mother.

Because of our Founder's special effort to keep alive the memory of this dream, Father Ceria, in the *Memorie Biografiche*, ranks it as *one of the most important* of his many dreams.⁷

7. MB XV 182.

Importance of the dream in our Salesian traditions

At San Benigno Canavese today one can still see the room and bed where Don Bosco had the dream: such is the desire to keep it ever in mind; and it is no overstatement to say that almost straight away Salesians used the dream for meditation, spiritual formation and revision of life. The oldest extant printed edition has the title in Latin: *Futura Salesianorum Societatem respicientia*, and it was used for innumerable conferences, sermons and spiritual retreats.

Don Albera refers to it as a well-known theme in his famous letter of 1920; and it is significant that he is developing the concept of *Don Bosco our model*.⁸

Don Rinaldi spoke frequently of it and referred to it several times in various Acts of the Superior

8.v. Lettere circolari di D. Paolo Albera ai salesiani, ed. 1985, p. 370.

Council (in those days called the "Superior Chapter").⁹ He also published the dream twice: in 1924 and 1930.¹⁰ The first edition contained the complete text referred to above; the second edition had the Latin expressions translated and certain dates omitted that did not affect the content in any way. Each confrere was presented with a copy.

Don Rinaldi considered that the rays of the ten diamonds had their best authentic and practical explanation in the writings of St Francis of Sales, particularly his *Theotimus* and *Spiritual Treatises*¹¹ that were daily fare for Salesian formation. Furthermore, in two of his more significant circular letters he has linked the teachings of the dream to the most authoritative sources of our Salesian spirituality: the *Constitutions*, the *Regulations*, and our authentic *Traditions*. It was the golden jubilee of the *Constitutions*, and there had been a recent revision of the *Regulations* (both basic and authoritative texts and at the very heart of the Congregation);¹² and Don Rinaldi also spoke of the traditions as giving to our Society and mission a colour and character without which we might still be religious and educators according to the mere letter of our Rule, but we would no longer be Salesians of Don Bosco.¹³

In fact the dream was a constantly recurring theme in Don Rinaldi's conferences and homilies, especially in his latter years. He saw it as essentially linked to the Holy Rule and the Salesian traditions; it was a frame of reference for delineating the Salesian identity.

Don Zaggiotti too in his Motto for 1964 drew the attention of Salesians to the dream. He presented it as an authoritative means for life-revision, conversion and the development of our charisma.

9. v. ASC 23, p. 187; 55, p. 923; 56, p. 933; 57, p. 965.
10. ASC 23, pp. 200-3; ASC 55, pp. 925-30.

11. ASC 23, p. 175.

12. v. ASC 23, pp. 174 et seq.

13. ASC 56, p. 933.

“The dream of the ten diamonds”, he wrote, “invites us to practise the virtues most vital for us”.

It has been rightly maintained that this is one of the best-known dreams in our Salesian tradition, and among the most popular for meditation and reflection.¹⁴

At this point, specialists in certain fields of study might justly remark that “a minute examination should be made of the documentary tradition of the dreams of Don Bosco before subjecting them to psychological, theological and pedagogical analysis”. This is hardly the place for a scientific assessment of the textual criticism or the specific nature of Don Bosco’s dreams. We are interested in something more important and sublime: our living and authoritative spirituality. After all, life must be lived before it can be studied; and the elements that go to nourish and stimulate life must find expression by means of an authoritative and timely charisma. (If these elements had to wait to be detailed and programmed by scholars, it would be too late!) Don Bosco and his successors, especially Don Rinaldi, made use of this charisma with confident assurance; so did their co-workers in Salesian formation. In other words, our spirituality came to us by means of a living transmission.

The following words of Don Rinaldi are thought-provoking in this regard: he tells us the model presented by the dream “should be studied and elucidated in daily meditation; every opportunity should be used to speak of it; it should enlighten every angle of our perspective. Provincials and Rectors are asked to base their conferences on it; and retreat preachers should use the material in their instructions and impress the confreres with the beauty of our Salesian spirituality”.¹⁵

14. Romero: I sogni di Don Bosco; v. note on page 6.

15. ASC 56, p. 934.

Don Rinaldi the most enlightened interpreter

Without a doubt Don Rinaldi would have pondered this dream more than anyone else; and time and time again he spoke of it to the whole Congregation. He was actually at the house of San Benigno when Don Bosco had the dream and related it to the confreres; and hence he was impressed by it in a particularly vivid manner.

As Don Bosco's third successor he wrote often to the confreres regarding its contents, as we have already indicated. There are still many Salesians who actually heard him dilate on the topic — for example, in the final sermon to the young confreres in formation at Foglizzo in the early summer of 1931 when the souvenir cards were given out.

(Notes of this sermon are extant in the archives.)

A perusal of Don Rinaldi's writings reveals a profound study and a progressive elucidation of the dream, and we see in his last two pronouncements an interpretation that is original, excellently devised, penetrating and detailed; the perfected fruit of long meditation and assiduous exploration. He has described with exactness the real significance of the august personage and interpreted the particular disposition of the diamonds. These latter, mounted on the front and back of the garment, each suitably positioned and luminous, present our Salesian spirituality both forcefully and methodically. Don Rinaldi comments that the disposition of the diamonds is important: set in any other way they

16. ASC 56, p. 934.

would not show forth the splendour of our life-style.¹⁶

17. ASC 57, p. 985.

Many times did Don Rinaldi affirm that the dream portrayed "the model of the true Salesian"¹⁷ as Don Bosco envisaged him and "handed down to us to be not just a memory but the reality of our life"¹⁸.

18. ASC 56, pp. 933-4.

In summation, according to Don Rinaldi, the august personage clad in the mantle and the particular disposition of the diamonds are important, as they combine to give a true picture of our distinctive spiritual character. This is interesting and has the backing of scholarly researchers as they study the special qualities of the various vocations.

Don Rinaldi is one of the most faithful witnesses of our Salesian spirituality and his reflections on the dream belong mainly to the last years of his life as Rector Major. I am convinced that his interpretation was the integrated and seasoned fusion of ideas achieved by one who was utterly conscious of his Salesian vocation and totally at one with it; who had meditated and prayed; and had perhaps been blessed by some special enlightenment from on high.

The thoughts I now offer you are inspired by Don Rinaldi's exact and penetrating understanding of the dream; and I have endeavoured to develop certain particular aspects. My hope is that they will help all to be ever more loyal to our vocation in the Church and that we shall all gain an ever greater insight into its distinctive character.

Our specific spirituality

Scene I of the dream presents us with the model of the Salesian not by means of the diamonds alone but rather by the vision taken as a whole.

The august personage

The protagonist is a "man of majestic mien" and represents the ideal of our Salesian spirituality. He should be a reflection of every Salesian present and future.¹⁹ Today, a hundred years later, we can assuredly state that Don Bosco himself "was throughout his life the living incarnation of that symbolic personage". Indeed we can go even further and use Don Rinaldi's imaginative words: "All the diamonds had their own special ray, but all the rays make up but one sole ray of light — Don Bosco".²⁰

19. ASC 55, p. 923.

20. ASC 55, p. 923.

Naturally Don Bosco did not explain the dream in this way: the thought would not even have occurred to him. But the acute and practical interpretation of Don Rinaldi rings true.

Indeed the new Constitutions speak of Don Bosco as the *model* whom "the Salesian studies and imitates very closely; he is the father given us by God and by the Church".²¹

21. Const. 49.

The august personage: front and back

The dream portrays the august personage from both front and back. To remark that these positions are complementary may seem a platitude; but there is more in it than meets the eye. It was one of Don Rinaldi's suggestive and meaningful observa-

tions that had not occurred to others. He mentioned it in many of his talks (for instance, in the already cited sermon of the Retreat souvenirs at Foglizzo in 1931), and we find it briefly but clearly in his April circular letter of that same year: the Salesian life is symbolised "in its activity", by the diamonds in front, and "in its interior life" by the diamonds at the back.²²

22. ASC 56, p. 934.

We could speak of the front and back of the Salesian coin: the social work of the Salesian, the *Da mihi animas* (the obverse), and the secret constancy and asceticism, the spiritual supporting structure, the *coetera tolle* (the reverse).

The visible image of the Salesian

The five shining diamonds in front (Faith, Hope, Charity, Work and Temperance) show the Salesian in his public witness of self-donation to the young. From this frontal view he is not classified as a religious but rather as a Christian overflowing with enthusiasm for the mystery of Christ and full of kindness and charity. He is dynamic and balanced, hard-working and temperate, imbued with creativity and common sense. *Work* and *Temperance* support the whole mantle. Don Rinaldi writes, "Here we see the Salesian life: considered in its activity it is *work* and *temperance* enlivened by profound *charity* in the evergrowing light of *faith* and *hope*".²³

23. ASC 56, p. 934.

I do not envisage at this point a Salesian meditation on these first five diamonds; but I think it well to make a few general remarks that may serve as food for reflection by all.

Visible characteristics

It should be pointed out that the diamonds must not be interpreted simplistically as a mere list of generic virtues to be considered one by one as in a theological treatise. Nor are we interested in the fact that they are all found in the classical list of virtues. For us they are seen as practical attitudes and in particular (referring to the front part of the mantle) as external and clearly perceptible. The diamonds add up to a portrait of the Salesian that shows forth his Salesian traits, that limns the features that characterise the disciple of Christ as Don Bosco wanted him to appear in a society that unfortunately no longer seemed to appreciate the classic forms of the religious life.

Recently in my letter to you on the Salesian Brother I wrote that our Congregation was founded with an unusual "secular slant".²⁴ I was struck by Don Rinaldi's insistence on "certain modern principles (sic) on which Don Bosco was inspired to base his while Institute, and which are our most precious heritage".²⁵

24. ASC 298, p. 32.

25. ASC 23, p. 184.

The best way to illustrate these "principles" is to quote the memorable words of Pius IX to Don Bosco at the audience granted to him in his bedroom on 21 January 1877: "I am certain that your Congregation has been raised up by Divine Providence to show forth the power of God. I am certain that God had willed to keep hidden an important secret till our times, a secret unknown to so many centuries and so many other Congregations of the past. Your Congregation is new in the Church; *it has a new nature*; it has arisen in these times and is both *religious and secular*; it has the vow of poverty and allows ownership; *it belongs to the*

*cloister and also to the world; its members are both religious and secular, cloistered and free citizens. It was instituted to show how religious can render to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's"*²⁶

26. Quoted by Don Rinaldi ASC 23, p. 184; v. MB XIII 82-83.

Thus the characteristics of a Salesian shown by the first five diamonds *are not primarily a description of the Salesian as a religious*, even though, as we shall demonstrate, we definitely are true and solid religious.

The first and principal aspect of the august personage is that of a *loyal hardworking citizen spurred on by the profound mystery of Christ*. The fact that he is also a 100% religious should create no problem whatsoever. The Salesian is normal and at his ease in a secularised society. He is an active and reponsible citizen yet totally Christian because of his vigorously committed interior life.

The same holds for the larger circle of the Salesian Family, in which numerous groups of non-religious "commit themselves to work according to the Salesian spirit. The form of their work is not identical but varies with the actual situation of each one and the real need of youth in a particular case and at a given moment"²⁷.

27. SGC 729.

Basic elements

The mantle of the august personage hangs from the shoulders and seems to be held in position by the two large diamonds of *Work* and *Temperance*, so often referred to as Don Bosco's escutcheon.²⁸

28. v. Const. 42, 43, 87.

In the dream of the angry bull (1876) we have the conditions for the future of our vocation: "You must etch these words into your minds as your special armorial bearings, as your password, your

distinctive badge. Take good notice of them — *Work and Temperance will prosper the Salesian Congregation*. Explain these words well; repeat them and insist on them. Have the explanation printed and see that all understand that work and temperance are your heritage to the Congregation, and its glory”²⁹

29. MB XII 468-7.

The *diamond of Work* is on the right shoulder as if to indicate the primacy for Salesians of that “ecstasy in work” spoken of in St Francis de Sales’ *Theotimus*,³⁰ and that is animated utterly by the urge of Faith, Hope, and especially Charity. This kind of activity must not reduce the Salesian to a frenzied fustpot but make him a genuine worker in the cause of salvation in his ceaseless and updated educational efforts for man’s betterment.

30. Treatise on the Love of God, Bk. VII, ch. 7.

The *diamond of Temperance*, on the left shoulder, must not be confused with the *diamond of Fasting*; and to emphasise the difference in these two virtues, so seemingly alike, one is positioned on the front of the mantle and the other on the back. As we shall see, the *diamond of Fasting* stands for mortification of the senses; whereas *Temperance* indicates a general Spartanlike self-control achieved through a cogent work-plan, self-sacrifice, moderation and balance that are the fruit of self denial. Our temperance will be linked with a general mien that is congenial and in keeping with the ordinary working folk, full of common sense and tinged with a healthy shrewdness. To quote Don Rinaldi: “The Salesian must practise self control: he does not go about with his eyes closed; he opens them but goes no further; if something is wrong, he stops. He will control himself also in his games; he will be restrained with the bothersome boy; he will be able to hold

his peace, hide his feelings, speak at the right time, and exercise a measure of shrewdness”.

Christ the fountainhead

The three magnificent diamonds on the breast of the mantle symbolise the sparkling fountainhead of the whole personality of the Salesian: his constant openness to the mystery of God as he follows in the steps of Christ. This is the fundamental secret of Don Bosco's special vocation and hence of Salesian spirituality in its totality.

31. ASC 290.

In my letter on the *Preventive System*³¹ I wrote that the Salesian spirit derives from the enthusiastic and total bond with Christ; and under Mary's guiding hand it brings to today's world the mystery of Christ "blessing the young and doing good to all", as Vatican II affirms.³²

32. Lumen Gentium 46.

It is not possible to develop fully in this letter the Salesian contents of the diamonds of Faith, Hope and Charity. Still, it should be noted that the *diamond of Faith* stands for a totally supernatural vision of the world in which we are immersed, and it is a vision full of optimism: "This is the victory over the world, our faith".³³ It provides our activities with clear pastoral motivations; it permeates and sustains that healthy humanism that characterises the Salesian apostolate.³⁴

33. 1 John V 4.

34. v. Const. 47.

The *diamond of Hope* assures us that as we live our daily lives in creative and practical dedication to the young our help from on high is certain (after all, we honour Mary as our *help*).³⁵

35. v. Const. 43.

The *diamond of Charity* calls for special attention. It is positioned over the heart of the august personage; and Scene I of the dream closes with Father Costamagna telling Father Fagnano, "Char-

ity understands all things, sustains, all things, conquers all things; let us preach it in word and deed”.

For Don Bosco charity means a constant attitude of sincere love for persons, treating each individual as God himself or his image; it means being one with Christ and living in him our sonship to the Father in an uninterrupted spirit of prayer; uniting ourselves with him in total dedication to our neighbour — our boys. It is here that we discover the heart of Don Bosco in its overflowing *kindness*, endowed with his singular predilection for the young.

This charity, says Don Albera, “does not consist in a kind of natural attraction towards the young: it is a true *love of predilection*. This predilection is initially a gift from God, it is the *actual Salesian vocation*; but it is up to us to put our intelligence and our heart into developing and perfecting it”.³⁶ In short, we are speaking of that pastoral charity that is at the very centre of the Salesian spirit³⁷ and the perennial source of an extraordinary kindness that characterises our whole pedagogy and permeates it with an *aura of joy and spontaneous happiness*.

Thus it is that the diamonds on the front of the mantle present the basic Salesian image.

36. Lettere circolari di Don Paolo Albera, ed. 1965.

37. v. Const. 40, 41.

The supporting spiritual framework

On the reserve side of the mantle the rays of the five *diamonds of Obedience, Poverty, Reward, Chastity and Fasting* present the Salesian's strong and hidden spiritual framework. Here lies fulfilment of the second part of the Salesian motto,

Coetera tolle; here lies too our special style of consecrated life.

Again it goes without saying that the five diamonds are not just a list of virtues but rather the principal paths of an ascetical *sequela Christi*.

Following Don Rinaldi's line of thought, it is important to indicate that these principal ways are positioned on the back of the mantle and characterise the Salesian's interior life. They are not directly obvious in the basic exterior image of the Salesian, but rather are they a hidden and absolutely necessary supporting structure.

Don Bosco was very concerned that his Salesians should not present a public image as monks or friars, and in this he had the backing of Pius IX. There are many witnesses and facts that make it clear he did not want his Salesians to have the external appearance (in habit, customs and style) of the traditional religious. They were not to catch the public eye and invite antagonism in the new secularist society — although he wished them to be 100% "priests" and "faithful", no matter what kind of society they lived in.

However, for Don Bosco, the more hidden the more profound must be the Salesian's conscious determination to strive after a genuine asceticism in his following of Christ. He considered it absolutely necessary that the backing strength, the power from within, should be provided by the inexhaustible drive that derived from strongholds hidden and well defended (hence the square of diamonds on the back of the mantle). John Cagliero understood this well when he said, "Friar or no friar, I'm staying with Don Bosco".

The front of the mantle depicts the Salesian's public image in society and among his boys; the

secret of his spiritual energy, his constancy, and his solid hard work is to be found in his profound awareness that he is a consecrated person and hence must walk in the steps of asceticism.

Again, rather than a detailed analysis of the five diamonds, here are a few general thoughts.

Obedience is central

The first thing that strikes one about the diamonds at the back of the mantle is the central position given to the diamond of obedience. Don Rinaldi comments, "The spirituality of a Salesian is guided by obedience".³⁸

In the Constitutions Don Bosco always put obedience as the first of the vows for his Salesians. Speaking of the spiritual formation of his sons he insisted on obedience as the first religious principle to be cultivated. "In the Congregation", he said, "obedience is everything",³⁹ "it is the basis and support of every virtue";⁴⁰ "it is the very soul of a Religious Congregation".⁴¹ In his *Introduction to the Holy Rule* he quotes St Jerome, St Bonaventure and St Gregory, and adds that the primacy given to obedience was also noticeable in a negative sense: one's religious identity and sense of belonging was lost when one placed one's own will before obedience. "On that day", Don Bosco wrote, "you will begin to be discontented with your state of life".⁴²

This central position could also suggest a Marian thought when we consider Don Bosco's dream of the ribbon.⁴³ Our Blessed Mother tells Don Bosco to "tie them together with the ribbon of obedience".

One of the main reasons of this priority of

38. ASC 56, p. 934.

39. MB X 1059.

40. MB XVII 890.

41. MB XII 459.

42. Const. Appendix, p. 237.

43. MB II 298 et seq.

44. Const. 3.
45. Const. 35, 50.

46. v. P. Stella: Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica: Vol. II, pp. 402-7.
47. Ibid. v. Vol. II, pp. 227-240.

obedience in the life of a Salesian is the *importance of our mission*⁴⁴ and our *community life*.⁴⁵ Availability is part of the very foundation of a Salesian's religious profession;⁴⁶ for Don Bosco a genuine and suitable obedience was a priority even in the young when being educated.⁴⁷

Indeed in the writing up of his dream Don Bosco asserts that the "largest and most brilliant diamond was in the middle of the square formed by the others, and it carried the inscription, *Obedience*".

It is also significant that the central position of the *diamond of Obedience* is matched by the centrality of *Charity* on the front of the mantle: Salesian obedience must help in giving practical expression to the "one heart and one soul" of our community life, which in turn is the fruit of that bond of brotherly love that gives foundation and life to our communion.⁴⁸

48. v. Const. 5.

Practical Poverty

On the rays emanating from the *diamond of Poverty* is written, "Poverty is not lived in words but in love and deeds". In its place on the torn and tattered mantle in Scene II of the dream the voracious grub carries the inscription, "Bed, dress, drink and money".

The diamond of Poverty reminds us too that this vow should be considered according to the characteristics common to all the diamonds on the back of the mantle: it is not immediately visible; it forms part of our renouncement, our asceticism as consecrated souls, both as individuals and as communities.

To quote Don Bosco: "The dignity of a reli-

gious lies in his practice of poverty”,⁴⁹ “which must be coupled with scrupulous personal cleanliness”;⁵⁰ “we must eschew the abuse of the superfluous... what we possess is not ours, it belongs to the poor; woe to us if we do not make good use of it”.⁵¹ “We must love poverty and the companions of poverty”.⁵² Hence, no soft living; let us be Spartanlike; we must “have poverty in our hearts if we wish to practise it”.

The diamond of poverty stands for an attitude of the heart and a personal and community way of life by which, “like the apostles at our Lord’s invitation, we free ourselves from the burden of earthly goods, trust in the providence of the Father, and dedicate ourselves completely to the service of the Gospel”.⁵³

The apostolic and more obvious aspect of our poverty appears rather on the front part of the mantle. Don Bosco remarked that “we must possess the spirit of poverty not only in our hearts and in detachment from material things, but we must show the world we are poor”.⁵⁴

Our poverty will be evident to all by the kind of people we work for, and especially by our public way of life and apostolate. *The diamonds of Work and Temperance* are rightly considered the social expressions of our poverty;⁵⁵ for by them we associate ourselves with the poor, and with them we testify to a common life inspired by the poverty preached by Christ in his sermon on the mount. This witness we give shows the world the inspiring alternative to materialism. To quote Puebla: “In today’s world, Gospel poverty is a challenge to materialism and makes *alternative solutions to consumerism* possible”.⁵⁶ Our life must be the antithesis of capitalistic schemes and socio-political

49. MB XIV 549.

50. MB XV 682.

51. MB XV 682.

52. MB X 1046.

53. Const. 81; cf also.

54. MB V 675.

55. v. Cost. 87.

56. Puebla 1152.

intrigues. We do not seek ideological subjection or class warfare: we go to the Gospel for our inspirations; we seek continuous nourishment and updating from the mystery of Christ; we live the Gospel in well-balanced common sense; we are able to dialogue with all. This was how Don Bosco acted in a society in travail and in search of new structures.

Demands of Chastity

The dream tells us, "This diamond of Chastity had a *splendour* all its own. It drew and held the attention as a magnet attracts metal".

Don Bosco spoke often of the splendour of chastity in a Salesian. The Benedictine Rule says that "chastity must be loved". Don Bosco went further: *not only must chastity be loved and practised, it must be made to shine splendidly.*

We are well aware how our Father insisted on the value of chastity. The Salesian must work amongst the young and must show to all a heart brimming over with pastoral charity in order to build up friendship. For him it is not enough to love his boys: he must make himself loved by them. This is not an easy task (suffice it to recall the dream of the bower of roses).⁵⁷ It is essential that the Salesian's spiritual formation be such as to make him a model of chastity beyond reproach, taking wise preventive precautions in defence of this virtue. Salesian loving-kindness is impossible without purity.

Chastity for us is "the supremely necessary virtue" also in regard to our mission as educators: in a special way must we be bearers of the message of love in the young people's world so plagued

57. MB III 32.

by eroticism today. Also, as Don Bosco writes in his *Introduction to the Holy Rule*, "this pearl beyond price is everywhere beset by the enemy of souls, because he well knows that if he succeeds in snatching it from us the whole affair of our sanctification may be said to be ruined"⁵⁸ Hence the need of precaution, prevention and defence that must form an intelligent part of our Salesian spirituality.

58. Const. Appendix, p. 241.

Such precautions are part of the *diamond of Fasting*.

This diamond is, as already stated, quite distinct from that of *Temperance*. Its being on the back of the mantle emphasises its indispensable place in Salesian spiritual formation; whereas *Temperance* indicates one of the qualities of the external image of the Salesian.

For Don Rinaldi the *diamond of Fasting* stood for the large area of asceticism covering the mortification of the senses: chastity is inconceivable without mortification. Don Bosco spoke often of "the beautiful virtue", but he always linked it with a spirit of mortification — many daily acts of self denial. He was more concerned with *how* to guard chastity than with its beauty (which he was heard to laud so often). This certainly shows how practical our Founder's pedagogy was.

The guerdon of heaven

The *diamond of Reward* is quite different from that of *Hope*, which displays visibly the drive and activity of the Salesian in building up the Kingdom; his persevering efforts and enthusiastic dedication are based on the certainty of God's help given through the risen Christ and his Holy Mother.

The *diamond of Reward*, on the other hand, lays the emphasis on the *constant attitude of mind* that imbues every effort of a man of the spirit — “a little bit of Paradise puts everything right”.

The Salesian, according to Don Bosco, “should be ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, fatigue and rejection whenever the glory of God and the salvation of souls require it”.⁵⁹ The interior support for this spiritual urge is the thought of heaven that accompanies a good conscience. “In all we do, our duty, hard work, troubles and sufferings, we must never forget that the least thing done for his name’s sake is not forgotten. It is of faith that in his own good time he will give us rich recompense. At the end of our lives, radiant with love, he will say to us as we stand before his judgement seat, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little: I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your Master’.”⁶⁰ “In fatigue and suffering, never forget that there is a great reward awaiting us in heaven.”⁶¹ And when Don Bosco tells us that a “Salesian worn out with overwork” is a triumph for *the whole Congregation*, he seems to imply that the diamond of Reward includes brotherly communion — the community sharing the guerdon of heaven.

The continual awareness of heaven is one of the pivot-principles that gives thrust to Don Bosco’s distinctive spirituality and pedagogy. It sheds light and deep understanding on the basic instinct of a soul in vital quest of its own proper goal. This is instanced in the seven “Goodnights” on “Why we must be convinced that God wills Paradise for us”.⁶²

59. Const. 42.

60. Matt. XXV 21; Const. Appendix, p. 256.

61. MB VI 442.

62. MB V 554-6.

Distinctive Salesian spirituality

The front and back diamonds are complementary and portray the Salesian idiom, or, according to Don Rinaldi, the "distinctive spirituality of the Salesian life".⁶³ With the help of the dream it is not difficult to describe this specific spirituality point by point. It consists in the blending of the ten diamonds in the vital and radiant unity of the august personage wearing the mantle. It is plain the complementary front and back diamonds are inseparable. The dream portrays a person (or a dedicated community) committed utterly to the mystery of Christ, convinced of the ultimate triumph of good over evil, given tirelessly to the building up of the Kingdom, with a heart permeated with that pastoral charity which is love translated into kindness and firmly engaged in constant and practical asceticism. History has presented us with a living and visible example of this in that masterpiece of the Holy Spirit, Saint John Bosco. To quote again Don Rinaldi's words: "All the diamonds had their own specific rays; however, all these rays make up but one single ray — Don Bosco".

63. ASC 55, p. 923.

The distinctive quality of the Salesian spirit is not one single characteristic or virtue: it is a blending of attitudes, of profound convictions and well-tested methodological experiences, all combining to create a unique and peculiar style of holiness and apostolate. For a true understanding of this idiom it is better to look to the dream than to an abstract definition, to Don Bosco rather than a theoretical tabulation of items.

The practice of this distinctive Salesian idiom makes us (as Don Rinaldi puts it) "living examples

64. ASC 55, p. 924.

of the august personage";⁶⁴ but to achieve this ideal requires a community life and a formation totally in accord with the Constitutions and our genuine Traditions. These latter are our help in vitally and authentically transmitting that *experience of the Holy Spirit* created and lived in the early days in communion with our Father and Founder.

Don Rinaldi calls on us to imitate the august personage of the dream (not only as individuals but also as communities) "in every minute detail, so that the Salesian Society may shed its splendour as it ought throughout the world. Don Bosco sees us, the Society, in the august personage and all the magnificence of his mantle with its radiant beams of light. Each individual Salesian must set about acquiring for himself and perfecting the diamonds; but if we wish them to blaze in all their splendour, we must be united into *one sole body* (just as the mantle is one) by observing the Constitutions in accordance with our Regulations and genuine Traditions".⁶⁵

65. ASC 58, p. 934-5.

Destruction of Salesian Identity

66. ASC 55, p. 924.

Scene II of the dream is dramatic. It describes the "ruination of the true Salesian",⁶⁶ the "anti-Salesian". The frightening argument of "Salesian/anti-Salesian" threatens us like the sword of Damocles, and it behooves us to be continually on the defence. The scene was depressing enough for our early Salesians. For us today, after the grave crisis in the last two decades, it should constitute a very special frame of reference regarding our too numerous losses.

Among those who asked me to write about

the dream was one who argued strongly for an original interpretation of the date "1900" found at the beginning of Scene II. According to him, the date in the title "What the Salesian is in danger of becoming in 1900" could refer to any specific year in the 1900's; there are still a couple of decades left to fix that date, and perhaps the serious crisis of recent years could then be better understood in relation to the grave warning on the tattered mantle.

But even without this interesting hypothesis it is still relevant and fruitful to apply ourselves to what Don Bosco wanted to say to us. More than once his conferences and dreams had severe warnings about the future of our Society. (For instance there was the dream of the meeting of devils to discuss ways and means of destroying the Congregation).⁶⁷ The distressing Scene II of the dream of the diamonds is so full of dramatic warning that it is unnecessary to bother about dates. In times of travail such as today the warnings become desperately relevant; but they are valid for all periods of history.

We have already reflected on the alarming crisis in religious life in my letter *Strengthen your brothers*.⁶⁸ Here and now we shall limit our remarks to emphasise the gravity of the dream's warning.

In Scene II the august personage is "distressed and seemingly on the verge of tears". His mantle is faded, tattered and moth-eaten. In place of the diamonds are moth-eaten holes. In fact the diamonds have become so many grubs gnawing away at the garment.

67. MB XVII 385.

68. ASC 295.

The Salesian image defaced

Instead of the *diamonds of Faith, Hope and Charity* there were words indicating a *complete weakening of the sense of the supernatural* and the subsequent grave spiritual decline. We know how the failing sense of the supernatural is usually substituted by current ideologies that in various ways tend to justify the change in identity that is taking place — which in turn leads to final abandonment. *Work and Temperance* will be exchanged for *idleness and neglect of the apostolate* and the *easy life* with the frivolities, fads and superficialities of consumerism (and of course sporting some fashionable ideology of the moment).

Collapse of the supporting spiritual structure

The back of the mantle shows a progressive destruction of the whole spiritual structure with the neglect of *obedience*. Thus is destroyed the practical basis of our spirituality; the bonds of communion are severed, individualism is lionised, and there is little chance of recovery.

Concupiscence replaces chastity, with an immature and compulsive need for sensory affection that quickly leads to the most unforeseen falls.

Poverty, with its detachment, its dependence, its sharing and its regulated use of material things, is considered out of step with modern times: it is replaced by constant selfish *pursuit of comforts* and an unhealthy independence in the use of money.

In place of the *diamond of Reward* there is no daily effort in asceticism, and no longer are eyes lifted up to the joys of heaven. There is an increasing inclination towards temporal things and a well-

heeled *horizontalism that seeks man's development* only in the present life.

In place of the *diamond of Fasting* there is now only an empty hole and no writing. When custody of the senses is missing the gate is thrown open to all sorts of temptations and deviations.

It is plain that Scene II more than sufficiently portrays our crisis, and we summarise it thus:

— *the front of the mantle*: a weakening of the sense of the supernatural; the substitution of ideologies to rationalise the change; and the acceptance of soft and easy living;

— *the back of the mantle*: instead of the supporting structure of asceticism there is individualism, concupiscence, money, horizontalism and rejection of mortification.

Here indeed is a complete programme for an impelling revision of life.

Appeal for formation and vocations in the years to come

Scene III of the dream presents a young man dressed in white who encourages and exhorts the Salesians. He reminds us that we are not alone in our labours; we are servants and tools of the Lord: hence even in the face of a distressing challenge *we can really fight and conquer*. He tells us to "be strong and brave".

We know only too well that of ourselves we are weak and inconstant, (as we wrote in "Strengthen your brothers").⁶⁹ God alone is strong. He alone therefore can strengthen us. He alone will keep us firm to the end, since he has set us on the solid foundation of Christ. He is faithful by

69. ASC, 295, p. 5.

his very nature and will protect us from evil. His is the power and the glory forever.

So the young man's first word to us is of courage and hope.

Then he speaks of certain *indispensable means* for our defence and growth — which are particularly relevant after the recent publication of the *Ratio*.

The first means he suggests is to translate the many teachings of the dream into our *ongoing formation*. The young man insists time and time again: "Pay attention. Understand well. Take heed of and preach. Constantly practise what you preach so that your works shine before men. Love our traditions and pass them on from generation to generation".

The second means recommended by the young man is the *care of vocations* and the *formation of the new generations*: "Be circumspect in accepting novices. Cultivate them with great care. Be prudent in admitting them to vows. Test them well. Send away the frivolous and fickle".

The third means is daily and practical fidelity to the Founder by means of our knowledge, love and practice of the Constitutions: this must be the food of morning and evening personal and community reflection.

Will the Salesian of today, will the community of every house, heed these admonitions? This indeed is a worrying question. On its answer will depend the future of the Congregation. Don Bosco himself was the first to be exercised by this doubt. He had this dream in 1881, at the eve of his life; the temporal power of the Papacy had been abolished; the Church was agonising over new and serious difficulties; could a new Institute survive in these troublous times after the

death of its Founder? This was no rhetorical question; we know that after Don Bosco's death, during the reign of Leo XIII, it was proposed to join the Salesian Society to the Scolopian Fathers.⁷⁰ The dream was indeed a realistic presage of the future of the Congregation up to the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the present one.

Rightly was the dream considered by the first generation of Salesians as a prophecy; the various dates inserted into it helped in its interpretation and it came to be dubbed *The Dream of the Future of the Congregation*. Such an attitude is interesting and could suggest that we today might also make a sounding or two regarding the future of the Congregation. In any vocation there is a vital link between fidelity, distinctive identity and the future. Such a reflection could take a number of directions.

One direction could that of a holy super-optimism — somewhat after the manner of Pius IX and Don Bosco from time to time. For example, Pius IX, sensitive man of God that he was, once spoke in prophetic vein discussing the pastoral relevance and transcendence of the charisma of Don Bosco. "I predict", he said to Don Bosco in 1877, "and you must put it in writing for your sons, that your Congregation will flourish, will spread miraculously, and will last for centuries so long as it promotes the spirit of piety and religion, and especially morality and chastity".⁷¹

Don Bosco also spoke of the future, and "in centuries" (as Pius IX did) as well as "in decades". He was inspired from on high, convinced he was predicting the development of a charisma created by God and of great use to the new society. Speaking "in centuries", we have from him several super-optimistic presages in which our Founder makes

70. v. E. Ceria: *Annali della Società Salesiana*, I, pp. 747-8.

71. ASC 23, p. 184.

statements that would seem quite incredible except that they came from his firm conviction that he was dealing with a work set up by God himself. One day he exclaimed, "Oh, if I could only keep alive for *five hundred years* fifty of our present Salesians, they would see what an amazing destiny Providence has reserved for us if we remain faithful. There might be a few crazy people who would like to see us destroyed, but they would be isolated cases and without backing from others. It all depends on whether the Salesians can resist the love of comfort and the temptation to idleness".⁷²

72. MB XVII 645.

Speaking "in decades", Don Bosco has bequeathed us many statements and various dreams with concrete facts and details amazingly exact (an instance is the dream of the wheel).⁷³ But it was the dream of San Benigno that he favoured as the *Dream of the Future of the Congregation*, and he appended certain dates to various parts: the first part 1881, the second part 1909. Then he noted, "I can reveal that there are many thorny problems, and also many great consolations: great fear in 1890; in 1895 great triumph".⁷⁴

73. MB VI 897 et seq.

74. MB XV 187.

In fact the Congregation survived that decade safe and sound: it was not annexed to another Congregation; and it grew so vigorously in all parts of the world that Paul VI exclaimed that in the last century of Church history one had to admit to the appearance of "a Salesian happening".

As has been already stated, fifty years later Don Rinaldi, considering Don Bosco had gone to extraordinary pains to pass on this dream to us "for our instruction and for the preservation of the Society in the future", had it published in the 1930 Acts (omitting the dates already past). He wrote, "You will find below the original first draft, without

Don Bosco's personal observations (the limitations of dates would only lessen its universal importance)"⁷⁵

75. ASC 55, p. 923.

Thus presented, the dream has become a vital message for the future of the Congregation for all time. It teaches, it warns, it is a singular vision for reflection, and a rich theme for study as a frame of reference for Salesianity throughout the centuries.

The dream's exhortation to "pay attention and understand well" is just as valid for us in these times.

In practice, the only realistic way for us to reflect on the future of the Congregation is the way traced out in the letter, *Strengthen your brothers*.⁷⁶ There we have an examination of the crisis we are undergoing, and an invitation to look at the positive symptoms and try to grasp the significance of the extraordinary working of the Holy Spirit in the Church today; but we should also pay serious attention to the many defections. Indeed we would do well to meditate on the dream in relation to the critical situation of our present times.

76. ASC 295.

The contrast between Scene I and Scene II is frightening: *corruptio optimi pessima*. Each one of us, unfortunately, has seen with his own eyes the *debasement of the Salesian image* in various places and in flesh and blood. The risk for the Congregation is not imaginary. One wonders whether certain basic principles (such as Work and Temperance, so cherished and practised in the early days of the Congregation) still carry the same weight with us today.

Can we say that our community atmosphere and our daily activities are genuinely inspired by the supernatural and an authentic pastoral urge

(which is none other than the Holy Spirit's gift of love to us)? At the heart of all our work, is there a motive of religious obedience? Do we still believe in the indispensability of a healthy discipline that inspires us daily to be true disciples of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ?

Indeed this century-old dream still poses a challenge for us. In a way, the inscription, "What the Salesian is in danger of becoming", is more relevant today than ever.

Let us meditate on this warning dream in private and in communities. Let us ponder well the appeal from the harrowed heart of the young man in white. Especially let us enthuse over the profound values of our special vocation; let us cultivate them with care and pass them on with fidelity. Let us always consider the growth of the Salesian vocation as coming from on high, and let us sing with gratitude and sincerity, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give the glory".

Dear confreres, I offer you this letter as a humble spiritual heritage for reflection, meditation and practical application. In the warning voice of Scene III of the dream let us hear the appeal of the young people who need us. The Salesian vocation was created for the sake of the young. Don Bosco is God's gift to young people; he is their friend, the sign and bearer of Christ's predilection for them. They have great need of his friendship. To these youngsters around us God has given a kind of right to the Salesian vocation, in the sense that Christ and his Mother have set apart this Salesian Vocation especially for them. (We are reminded of the dream of the nine-year-old John Bosco).⁷⁷ It is a matter of urgency that we put the Salesian Charisma at the disposal of today's youth

77. MB I 123 et seq.

with all its genuine values, and our lives must be shining examples of these same values.

The centenary of the dream is an occasion to re-examine it and fathom its riches. Let us treasure its teachings and warnings.

May Mary be our inspiration and help. The dream took place following the feast of her Holy Name.

My sincere greetings to all. I pray for you in my daily Mass and rosary.

Affectionately yours,

Father EGIDIO VIGANÒ,
Rector Major.

1.2 THE TEXT OF THE DREAM OF THE TEN DIAMONDS

San Benigno Canavese — night of 10 September 1881

The text printed below follows the fair copy made by Don Berto (with Don Bosco's personal corrections) from the first draft in the Satini's own handwriting (v. Salesian Central Archives: 132 Sogni 5). We have also used the critical edition of Sister Cecilia Romero (I sogni di Don Bosco — ed. crit., Turin, 1978 LDC). The following liberties have been taken:

- *The Latin expressions have been translated (as in Father Ziggotti's publication);*
- *Certain lapsed dates have been omitted (as in the second publication of Father Rinaldi).*
- *Titles and subtitles have been added where it seemed appropriate and helpful to do so.*

May the grace of the Holy Spirit enlighten us all. Amen.

For the instruction of the Salesian Society

On 10 September 1881, Feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary, the Salesians at San Benigno Canavese were making their Retreat.

The model of the true Salesian

On the night of the 10 September I dreamed I was in a large and splendidly ornate hall. I seemed to be walking up and down with the Rectors of our houses when there appeared among us a man of such majestic mien that we could not take our eyes off him. He gazed at us, and without a word began to walk a few paces ahead of us.

He wore an imposing long mantle with a stole-like collar tied at the neck with a ribbon that hung down in front. On the stole was written in luminous characters, *The Salesian Society*, and on the ribbon, *as it should be*.

The august personage wore ten huge and splendid diamonds, and it was almost impossible to look away from him.

Three of the diamonds were on the breast of the mantle and were

inscribed FAITH, HOPE and CHARITY. THE DIAMOND OF CHARITY was positioned over the heart. On the right shoulder was a fourth diamond: WORK; and a fifth, TEMPERANCE, was affixed to the left shoulder.

The other five diamonds adorned the back of the mantle and were arranged in a square, with the largest and brightest diamond of OBEDIENCE in the middle. The upper right diamond was the Vow OF POVERTY, and under it, REWARD. On the upper left was the Vow OF CHASTITY, with a dazzling splendour all its own that caught and held the attention as a magnet attracts metal; below it was the diamond of FASTING. The bright rays from the square of diamonds were directed towards the central diamond of OBEDIENCE.

Clarifying maxims

To avoid confusion it should be noted that each diamond had rays like small tongues of flame on which various texts could be read.

FAITH carried the maxims: *Take up the buckler of faith and battle against the snares of the devil.* Another ray read, *Faith without works is dead. Not he who hears but he who keeps the law will possess the kingdom of God.*

On the rays of HOPE there was written, *Hope in the Lord and not in men. Let your hearts always be set on the attainment of true joy.*

The texts of CHARITY read, *Bear one another's burdens if you wish to fulfil my law. Love and you will be loved. Let your love be for your soul and the souls of others. Recite the Divine Office with devotion. Celebrate Holy Mass with care. Make loving visits to the Holy of Holies.*

The rays of WORK carried the inscription, *Remedy for concupiscence; powerful weapon against all the temptations of the devil.*

TEMPERANCE had the text, *Take away the fuel and the fire will die out. Make a pact with your eyes, your appetite, your sleep, so that these enemies may not ravage your souls. Intemperance and chastity cannot go together.*

On the rays of OBEDIENCE: *Obedience is the foundation and perfection of holiness.*

On POVERTY: *The kingdom of heaven is for the poor. Riches are thorns. Poverty is not practised by words but by love and deeds. Poverty opens the gates of heaven.*

On the rays of CHASTITY: *All virtues come together with it. The clean of heart see the secrets of God and shall contemplate God himself.*

On the rays of REWARD: *If the rich reward attracts you, do not be afraid of the many hardships. He who suffers with me rejoices with me. What we suffer on earth is momentary; the joys of my friends in heaven are eternal.*

On the rays of FASTING: *The most powerful weapon against the snares of the devil. It keeps watch over all the virtues. Fasting puts to flight all sorts of foes.*

Authoritative warning

On the lower part of the garment there was a wide pink hem on which was written, *Here is matter for preaching morning, noon and evening: Treasure small acts of virtue and you will build solid holiness. Woe to you if you neglect small things: little by little ruination will overtake you.*

Some of the Rectors were standing, some kneeling; all were in silent amazement. Suddenly Don Rua said excitedly, "We must write these things down lest we forget them". He looked for a pen but could not find one. He took out his notebook and searched for a pencil. "I shall remember", said Don Durando. "I must get it down in writing", Don Fagnano cried out, and began writing with the stem of a rose. We all watched and could read his writing. When he stopped, Don Costamagna continued to dictate, "Charity understands all things, sustains all things, conquers all things; we must preach it in word and deed".

The debasement of the true Salesian

Whilst Don Fagnano was writing, the light failed and we found ourselves in profound darkness. "Quiet"; said Don Ghivarello, "let us all kneel and pray and the light will return". Don Lasagna began the *Veni Creator*, then the *De Profundis*, *Mary Help of Christians*, etc., and we all responded.

At the words, "Pray for us" a light appeared and lit up a placard on which was written, *The Salesian Society as it runs the risk of becoming.* Then the light increased and we could see and recognise one another.

In the brightness now we saw again the august personage, but distressed

and seemingly on the verge of tears. His mantle was faded, moth-eaten and in tatters. In place of the diamonds there were gaping holes.

“Look carefully”, he told us, “and understand”.

I saw that the ten diamonds had become so many grubs gnawing away at the garment.

In place of the diamond of FAITH was written *Sleep and sloth*; HOPE had become *Indecent laughter and frivolity*; CHARITY: *Neglect of the things of God. They love and seek their own desires and not the ideals of Jesus Christ*; TEMPERENCE was now *Gluttony — their god is their belly*; WORK: *Sleep, dishonesty and idleness*; OBEDIENCE was replaced by a large hole with no message; CHASTITY carried the text, *Concupiscence of the eyes and pride of life*; POVERTY: *Bed, clothing, drink and money*; REWARD: *Our heritage will be earthly goods*; and FASTING was just a hole with no message.

We were all terrified. Don Lasagna fell in a faint. Don Cagliero was as white as a sheet, and leaning on a chair called out, “Is it possible that things have already come to such a sorry pass?” Don Lazzero and Don Guidazio were beside themselves and reached for support. Don Francesca, Count Cays, Don Barberis and Don Leveratto were on their knees, rosaries in hand and praying.

Then we heard a sombre voice that told us, “See how that splendid colour is now faded”.

The message of the young man

We were grouped together in the darkness when a remarkable thing happened.

We were plunged into pitch blackness, and suddenly there appeared a brilliant light in the form of a human body. At first the light dazzled our eyes. Then we were able to make out a handsome young man of imposing and charming mien, dressed in white garments delicately worked in gold and silver thread. He approached us and spoke these words:

“Servants and instruments of the omnipotent God, hark and take heed; be strong and courageous.

“What you have seen and heard is a message from heaven for you and your brethren. Pay attention to it and understand it well.

“Forewarned is forearmed, and the faults you have witnessed can be avoided.

“All the texts you have read must form the themes of your preaching. Speak of them unceasingly in season and out of season. But be careful to practise what you preach so that your works will shine forth and build up a strong and healthy tradition for your present brethren and future generations of your sons.

“Listen carefully and heed these words.

“Be circumspect in accepting novices. Cultivate them with great care. Be prudent in admitting them to vows. Test them well and keep only the good. Send away the frivolous and the fickle.

“Listen carefully and heed these words.

“Meditate morning and evening on the observance of the Constitutions. If you do this the help of God will never fail you. You will be a revelation before men and angels, and your glory will be God’s glory. It will be said of you: This is the Lord’s work and it is marvellous in our eyes. Then all your brethren and your sons will sing with one voice: Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name give glory”.

These last words were sung, and to the speaker’s voice there joined a multitude of other voices so melodious and resonant that we were left benumbed and bemused, and to prevent ourselves from swooning we joined in the singing.

When the music ended there was darkness. I awoke and saw that it was already daylight.

Don Bosco’s footnote

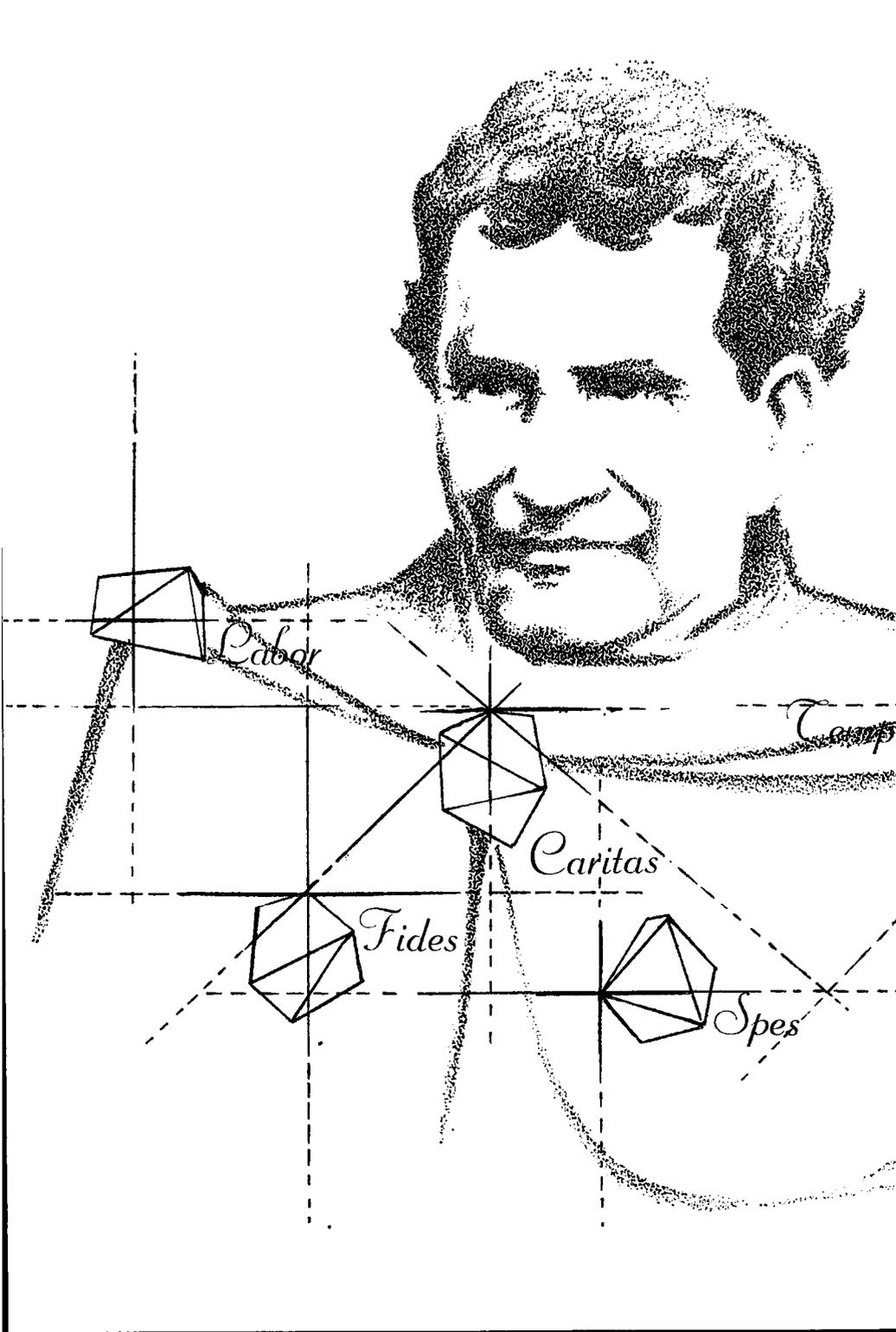
This dream lasted most of the night and in the morning I was exhausted. Still, for fear of forgetting it I rose quickly and made a few notes that have helped me recall what I have written here on the Feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple.

I was not able to recall everything.

One of the many things I have learned with certainty is this: immense is the Lord’s mercy in our regard. Our Society is blessed by heaven. But the good Lord expects us to do our part.

We can forestall the evils that threaten us if we preach on the virtues and vices noted in the dream; if we practise what we preach and pass on to our brethren the authentic tradition of our past and future good works.

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us.



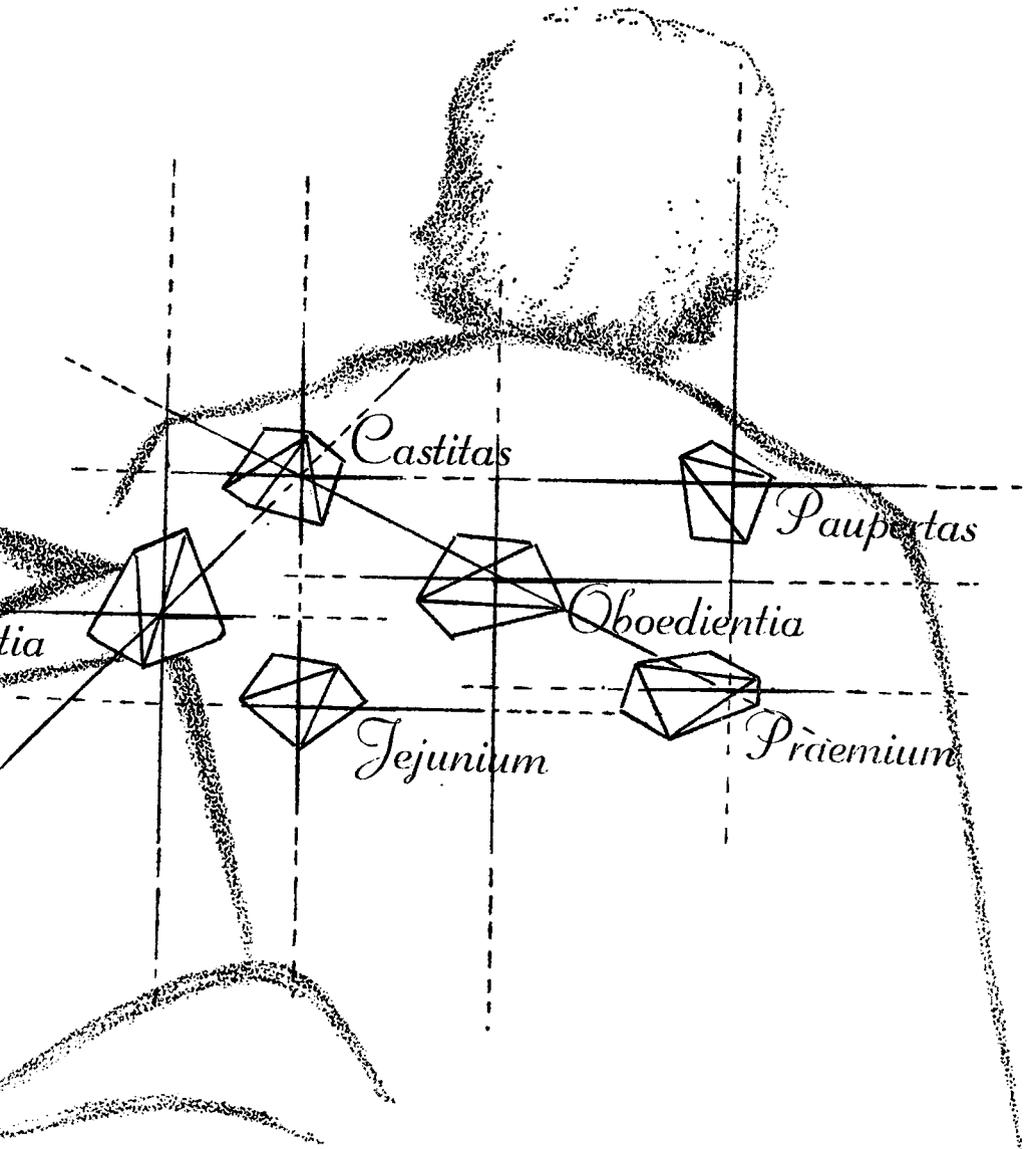
Labor

Caritas

Caritas

Fides

Spes



argumentum prædicationis: mane meridie et vespere!