

1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

Father Egidio VIGANO

Introduction — Don Bosco's canonisation — Our religious consecration — The main qualities in salesian holiness — Serve the Lord in gladness — An oratorian heart — Attracting the love of our charges — The asceticism of the daily grind — Close to Jesus Christ our Redeemer — The two most harmful enemies of our holiness — A final word of farewell.

Dear confreres,

The time is fast approaching for our General Chapter: let us intensify our prayers of supplication and homage to God; let us beg him to grant the abundant enlightenment and gifts of his Holy Spirit to the members of the Chapter, one and all. *The Act of Entrustment to Mary Help of Christians* that we shall make at the beginning of the Chapter will be a reminder to us of Don Bosco's devotion to our Mother and Guide: she will intercede for us that our efforts to be interpreters and exemplars of our Founder's spiritual and apostolic heritage may be faithful and relevant.

The six-year mandate of your Rector Major and Superior Council is drawing to a close. My colleagues have laboured hard in brotherly union. In their name I wish to thank all provincials and confreres for the cooperation and spirit of communion they have shown us during these years that carried such a heavy work-load but were so full of hope. As for myself: now is the time for me to ask forgiveness of the Lord and all my friends for my inevitable failings and inadequacies in my dialoguing and in my ministry of animation and government of the Congregation.

We all need to increase our vitality and efficiency in the mission bequeathed to us by Don Bosco — which means achieving that maturity that belongs to his distinctive holiness.

In 1984 we shall commemorate the 50th anniversary of the canonisation of our Father and Founder (1 April 1934). May this event be a spur to us “to strive with fresh resolve for our distinctive salesian holiness” in accordance with *Strenna 84*, our practice for the coming year.

Don Bosco's canonisation

It was the desire of Pope Pius XI that Don Bosco should be canonised on Easter Sunday, at the conclusion of the Jubilee Year of our Redemption.

A re-reading of the Acts of the Superior Council and the Salesian Bulletin of the time evokes the extraordinary emotion of those days; one can sense the all-pervasive festive joy and the deeper appreciation of the salesian vocation. The Rector Major, Fr Peter Ricaldone, wrote, “This canonisation day is the most glorious event the Congregation has ever experienced; there will never be, I venture to say, another like it”.¹ He compared Easter Day of 1934 with that of 1846, when Don Bosco “had suffered rebuff after rebuff; he had been ousted from every part of the city where he had to make a start with his work; he found himself without the smallest patch of land which he could use for the good of his young charges. It was on that Easter Day that Providence put him in possession of enough land to settle into and make a solid start with his mission. These two Easter Days open and close an era in the history of salesian action and

1. Acts of the Superior Chapter, 21 January 1934, page 143.

lodge it soundly within the annals of Church history".²

For a religious family the canonisation of its Founder is of special importance and invested with a practical ecclesial significance. Such a Founder is publicly proclaimed as a transcendent expression of the vitality and holiness of the Church. The canonised Founder is not the "private property" of his religious family: he becomes a very special part of the universal heritage of the People of God, and is thus invested with a genuine spiritual authority for the benefit of his followers. In a religious family the Founder's canonisation is of greater ecclesial importance than the approval of the Holy Rule — and the procedure followed by the Holy See in the two cases bears this out. The first article of our Constitutions tells us that the canonisation of Don Bosco is one of the principal actions of the Church in officially recognising the hand of the Holy Spirit in the founding of our Society. Well may we say, "With humble gratitude we believe the Salesian Society came into being not only by human agency but by the providence of God".³

In my letter to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians on the occasion of the centenary of the death of Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello, I made the point that the holiness of a Founder has a very special character quite different from that of a canonised saint who is not a Founder; and this is not only because of his particular personal and historical features, but because of his distinctive and unique holiness and apostolate and the "experience of the Holy Spirit" that he transmits to his followers to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them in harmony with

2. Acts of the Superior Chapter, 8 December 1933, page 116.

3. Constitutions art. 1.

the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth.⁴

4. *Mutuae Relationes* 11.

In Don Bosco we find the Saint and the Founder so blended as to make him our perfect father and model. To this end the Holy Spirit fashioned him by endowing him with a practical holiness that was further enriched by his talent for attracting and forming spiritual children so that he could say with the Apostle, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ".⁵

5. 1 Cor. XI 1.

The events of history show us clearly that the only way open to Don Bosco to achieve his vocation and holiness was to be a Founder. As I wrote to our Salesian Sisters, "he was led by the Lord, and was practically obliged to embark on a brand new kind of sanctification and apostolate, a personal interpretation of the Gospel and the mystery of Christ with a special adaptation to the signs of the times. This originality meant a new fusion of the common elements of Christian holiness that was balanced, congenial and perfectly regulated; the virtues and the means to holiness had their own proper place, quantity, symmetry and beauty that were wholly characteristic".⁶

6. Acts of the Superior Council no. 301, page 25.

We know that what distinguishes our spiritual family in the Church from any other is not Christianity but a special way of translating into its life Christianity's message and mission. Thus the Salesian Family reads the Gospel through the eyes of Don Bosco and his distinctive holiness.

This concept is all-important for us; it establishes that our holiness is intimately related to that of our Founder to whom we are bonded by the religious consecration we made by our perpetual profession; and this religious consecration must grow and manifest itself in our salesian holiness.

Our religious consecration

On the part of the minister, the rite of perpetual profession focuses on a solemn blessing or liturgical consecration by which the Church signs the candidates with the gift of the Spirit, thus confirming their religious profession.

7. 1st formula of Ritual.

The minister of the Church extends his arms and invokes the Lord: "Look down, Father, on these your chosen ones; fill them with the Spirit of holiness so that with your help they may fulfil what they have joyfully promised through your bounteous grace".⁷

8. 2nd formula of Ritual.

"We humbly beg you, Father: send your Holy Spirit on these your sons; strengthen their resolve, that they may become signs and witnesses that you are the only true God and love all men with a love that is infinite".⁸

9. v. Constitutions article 74.

What the candidates "have joyfully promised and resolved" is expressed in the formula of the profession they make into the hands of their Superior. They undertake to practise the evangelical counsels according to the way marked out by the salesian Constitutions; they thus pledge themselves to live the spirit and mission of the Founder in communion with all the confreres of the Congregation.⁹

The seal of the Spirit is naturally an earnest of his special help: his many gifts, graces and providential circumstances that will help the salesian to achieve holiness as he lives the spirit and mission of Don Bosco in all fidelity.

Religious consecration, then, is totally directed to the achievement of that kind of holiness that is promised in the making of our vows and as described in our Constitutions. On the one hand

(as in the dream of the ten diamonds) it is the supporting structure and the impelling force, the nerve centre that constitutes the unobtrusive but indispensable bulwark to our holiness. On the other hand it is the professed member's authentic title guaranteeing the mediation of the Church that bestows on him the grace to live as a genuine sign and bearer of God's love; it incorporates him into an ecclesial life that is sealed by the Holy Spirit's action, thus assuring him of the means and strength to be a faithful and joyful witness to the spirit of the beatitudes.

Thus our religious consecration nourishes, develops and defends our salesian holiness. It is a seal of the Holy Spirit impressed by the Church on the heart of every confrere to make him a shining witness to that holiness that God implanted in Don Bosco.

At this point it is of interest to observe that Vatican II has made a profound restatement of the particular religious consecration of institutes of the active life. It is a special kind of covenant with God in which the action of the Holy Spirit impresses on our hearts a specific way of practising our dedication — it could well be described as an "apostolic consecration", that is, a religious consecration that is simultaneously apostolic and imbued with the *grace of a unity* that overflows into *pastoral charity*.

Above all, the Council restated the very concept of religious consecration as an act of God through his Church,¹⁰ and then described the uniqueness of the active religious life in the famous no. 8 of *Perfectae Caritatis*. These postconciliar years have made considerable progress in the study of the distinctive marks of *apostolic consecration*. Within

10. v. Lumen Gentium 44, 45; *Mutuae Relationes* 8.

this kind of religious consecration there is the vibrantly divine seal of an apostolic instinct and ethos that permeates the whole religious life with pastoral zeal and imbues every apostolic activity and initiative with a religious spirit.

In this consecration the Holy Spirit's graces unite and concur in a daily and distinctive way of life that unites love for God and love for our neighbour; we then become unique witnesses to the mystery of redemption. In this sense, through our apostolic consecration lived in fidelity to the Constitutions, the Spirit of the Lord invites and urges us to an ever deepened and practical realisation of the holiness characteristic of our Founder and Father.

The 50th anniversary of Don Bosco's canonisation is a happy occasion for providing a special opportunity for this.

The main qualities in salesian holiness

In last year's circular letter, "*Replanning our holiness together*", I wrote that "only God is holy". As far as we are concerned, holiness is nothing other than the life of God intimately incorporated in our existence. We become holy in accordance with God's indwelling in us.

When we consider Don Bosco's holiness we look to see the extent of the Holy Spirit's indwelling in him; and we know that the Spirit means to fashion our own hearts too, according to the same kind of faith, hope and charity, building up our strength and defence through the same special asceticism of total selflessness found in Don Bosco.

Serve the Lord in gladness

The first aspect that strikes us in Don Bosco's holiness (in fact it would seem designed to hide the remarkably intense presence of the Spirit) is his *simplicity and cheerfulness*; it made what was difficult and supernatural appear easy and natural. This was Don Bosco's *joie de vivre* in daily evidence; it was his acceptance of events as the hard and practical road leading to hope; it was his intuitive understanding of people, their talents and their limitations, with a view to forming a family; it was his acute and practical sense of goodness with its conviction that in man's past and present history good prevails over evil; it was his predilection for the young that opened his heart and imagination to the future, and engendered a creative adaptability capable of facing up to the values of the new generations with equilibrium; it was the affection of a friend who could make himself loved, and build up an educative confidence and dialogue that led to Christ; it was his bed of roses that he trod with a smile and a song — though well shod with boots as some protection against the innumerable thorns.

"We make holiness consist in being always happy": such an attitude was the very special fruit of the Holy Spirit; it was God's abundance clothed with a simplicity and joy that were seemingly designed to hide such a wondrous gift.

An "oratorian heart"

Beneath Don Bosco's obvious appearance of simplicity and affection, there beat a heart completely attuned to *Da mihi animas*; this was his great driving force. His soul was marked with a

unique and intense *apostolic consecration*. The Holy Spirit had graced him with a characteristic *gift for unity* and this brought the mystery of redemption to the fore in all his contemplation. His was a heart that admired and loved unceasingly the *redeeming God*. It was for this reason that his charity found its outlet in untiring labour.

Don Bosco has taught us that we must reconcile the active life with the contemplative, the life of the Apostles with that of the Angels.¹²

Don Albera describes our Founder's holiness well when he says that for him "religious perfection and the apostolate were one and the same thing";¹³ and Don Bosco clearly showed that God was his all-in-all by being always totally available for the mission of Christ and his Church.

In my circular letter on the Salesian Family¹⁴ I endeavoured to analyse that kind of supernatural love, that pastoral charity, that was peculiar to Don Bosco: his powerful spirit of union, the unique ethos of our religious consecration, and the living spring of our holiness.

It is essential that our hearts beat in time with his to the rhythm of *Da mihi animas*. I hope we can reach out to the reality beyond this metaphor and understand the practical significance and crucial scintilla that gives meaning to our whole way of holiness: a life of pastoral charity that finds its outlet in a predilection for the young and is characterised by kindness.

Here we have the crystalline and salvific spring of salesian holiness at its very source.

12. v. Constitutions FMA 1885, ch. XIII.

13. Don Albera: Letter of 18 October 1920 (*Lettere circolari di Don Paolo Albera*, Turin 1985, page 366).

14. Acts of the Superior Council no. 304, 1982.

Attracting the love of our charges

I have just spoken about *kindness*. It is an essential part of Don Bosco's attractive and congenial holiness. This was no ingenuous seeking after popularity (which would have been a contradiction of holiness); it had to be attractive because its source, pastoral charity, was intrinsically youth-oriented, and thus of pastoral necessity it was a *pedagogical charity*.

Kindness is a wonderful fusion of reasonableness, sociability, self-giving, humility, patience, good and lively sentiments, loving-kindliness, cheerfulness, communicability and infectious goodness; and all these qualities create an atmosphere of confidence.

In the practice I have given the Salesian Family for 1984, I have reminded all of the centenary of Don Bosco's famous letter from Rome as an incentive that we "strive after our distinctive salesian holiness with fresh resolve". The word "distinctive" is all-important: it explains and justifies the paradox that "it is not enough that we love our pupils".

Indeed the statement in Don Bosco's letter that "it is not enough that we love", could at first sight appear quite scandalous, especially in view of St Augustine's famous dictum, "Love, and then do what you will". However, Don Bosco was both saint and educator, and his long experience had proved that "it was not enough just to love". Charity that is educational demands something further: "We must make ourselves loved"; in other words, this love must be translated into kindly attitudes, methodological skills in making friends, dialogue as in a family, and cheerful sociability.

It is well worth pondering some of the thoughts in this "Roman letter":

"Affection was our rule of life"; "we must be considered as fathers, brothers, friends"; "we should develop in our charges an affectionate confidence"; "if we want to be loved, we must make it clear to our pupils that we really love them"; "anyone who is loved can get whatever he wants, especially from the young"; "this love makes us willing to suffer fatigue, annoyance, ingratitude, upsets and failings when dealing with our boys"; "when this love begins to fail, it is then that things no longer go well"; "the best course in a meal is a cheerful face"; and finally, Don Bosco's call from the heart: "This poor old man who has spent his life for his dear young people — do you know what he wants of you? He yearns for the return of the times when everywhere could be seen affection and Christian confidence, the spirit of toleration and forbearance for the love of Jesus Christ. Oh for those days when hearts were open with simplicity and candour — the days of charity and true happiness among all".¹⁵

In short, the secret of our pastoral and educational charity, i.e., our "oratorian heart" lies in that kindness that attracts the love of our charges.

It is for this very reason that we are called salesians — from St Francis de Sales, the saint of gentleness and kindness.

The asceticism of the daily grind

To be cheerful and attract the affection of our charges is all very fine and charming, but such qualities may exist without holiness. In order to

15. *Memorie Biografiche*
XVII 107-114.

clothe his holiness with these attractive pedagogical and pastoral characteristics Don Bosco made ceaseless and enormous efforts in the way of asceticism. He was constantly concerned for himself and for others with serious training in self-domination. This he expressed in his motto, *Work and Temperance*; and these two inseparables imply a spiritual and practical sense of the daily grind, in which hour after hour and day after day we translate into practice the ideals and urges of our faith, our hope and our charity. In the burden and heat of our daily lives, the demands of our personal duties, the persons with whom we live and the circumstances that surround us, we have plenty to bevel away the edges of our selfishness and achieve a true self-discipline.

Work and Temperance, always coupled together, are a positive expression of the whole vast field of salesian ascetical practice; as Don Bosco said, "Through them the Congregation will flourish".¹⁶

16. v. Constitutions article 42.

In the very apposite dream of the "bed of roses" our Founder tells us, "All those (and they were many) who saw me walking through that rose-bed said, 'Don Bosco and his perpetual bed of roses! See how how comfortably he walks through it; all goes well with him'. But they did not see the thorns that tore at my poor legs! Many priests, clerics and layfolk whom I had invited to come with me, did so with alacrity, attracted by the beauty of the flowers; but when they found that they had to walk through thorns that were everywhere and lacerated them unceasingly, they cried out that they had been deceived. I replied, 'Those who expect to walk a charmed way through a bed of roses without thorns should go back; the others, follow me!' ".¹⁷

17. *Memorie Biografiche* III 34.

And indeed we will follow him, convinced that without the discipline of asceticism we will not succeed in building up our salesian holiness.

In short, our pastoral charity must be translated into untiring apostolic work; our kindness that engenders love in our charges must be sustained by an intelligent and constant temperance; (implied in this is humility, gentleness, purity, balance, holy shrewdness, sobriety and cheerful austerity); thus we shall avoid the dangers of comfort-seeking, easy-living, sentimentality and sensuality, that are the marks of those who are wordly and intent on creature comforts.

In bequeathing us *Work and Temperance* our Founder and Father has certainly left us a well-tested way of asceticism for the achieving of our salesian holiness. Without *Work and Temperance* we could not be faithful to that apostolic consecration with which we are signed with the seal of the Holy Spirit and through which we are graced with his gifts to become saintly salesians.

Close to Jesus Christ our Redeemer

The canonisation of Don Bosco took place on Easter Day of a Holy Year of Redemption. In the solemn audience Pius XI granted in St Peter's to all the Salesian Family gathered in Rome for the canonisation, he spoke of the connection between this happy event and the Holy Year of Redemption: "Jesus Christ stated clearly the purpose of his redemptive act when he said, 'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly' (Jn. X 10); and he meant Christian life, since it is Christ who has given it to the world. And so Don Bosco speaks to us today, 'Live your Christian lives as I have

done and as I have taught you to do'. But I think that Don Bosco has a few more specific words for you who are closer to him since you are his spiritual children. His first message for you is love of Christ, love of the redeeming Christ. One could go so far as to say that this was one of the dominant urges of his whole life; and this he revealed by his motto *Da mihi animas*. This love was a constant and uninterrupted theme in his prayers: he loved souls not for what they were in themselves but for what they meant in the thoughts, the works, the blood of Christ, the death of the divine Redeemer. This is how Don Bosco appreciated the inestimable and unimaginable value of human souls; hence his great desire and prayer, *Da mihi animas*. This is assuredly an expression of his love for his Redeemer, an expression that of happy necessity makes love of neighbour become love of the Redeemer, and love of the Redeemer love of the souls he has redeemed and for whose redemption he considers the price of his precious blood not to have been excessive". Pius XI then concluded, "It is this very love of our divine Redeemer that we have come here to commemorate in gratitude during the whole of this Holy Year of Christ's continuing redemption"¹⁸.

We today enjoy a happy coincidence: we are commemorating the 50th anniversary of the canonisation of our Founder at the conclusion of another extraordinary Holy Year of our Redemption. Pius XI's comments on our Founder's *Da mihi animas* are a clear proclamation that Don Bosco's secret was an intimate friendship with Jesus Christ in his mission of redemption.

How indispensable it is, then, to foster this personal friendship with Jesus Christ so that each one of us may be his disciple as our Founder was.

18. Acts of the Superior
Chapter no. 66, 1934,
pages 181-182.

However, to be a *true disciple* two fundamental conditions are necessary: first, *we must have the same ideals as Christ had*; and secondly, *we must carry his cross with generosity*.

- The first condition: to have Christ's ideals. This is the fruit of meditation and prayer; in other words, that contemplation of our Redeemer that fills our hearts with the same ideals and aims as he had. This means cultivating a union with Christ that steep us in the mystery of salvation — a witnessing and a mission that together signify love of God and zeal for redemption. This is a mystery that is situated at the very vitals of our person, and from its pastoral and pedagogical charity we derive our sustenance and energy.

It is clear that a salesian who seeks holiness must cultivate a constant encounter with Christ. As I wrote to you last year, this daily encounter “implies a permanent relationship of friendship; what I have in mind here is a definite time-slot inserted in each day for practices such as meditation and personal prayer, the liturgy of the hours and the Eucharist. The sacrament of his paschal memorial which comprises the greatest act of love in all history must become again the vital and impelling principle of our own lives and of all our communities”¹⁹.

- The second condition to be true disciples is to cultivate a spirit of sacrifice, self-control and self-renunciation; this means a personal acceptance and shouldering of Christ's cross.

A Protestant biblical scholar has written, “To be a disciple without self-renunciation and suffering is a contradiction in terms — like salt that has lost its essential substance. The nature of a disciple

19. Acts of the Superior Council no. 303, page 19.

is inseparable from the function he must fulfil for the world, and vice-versa. To be a disciple means to be always a disciple for the world; and since discipleship demands a spirit of sacrifice, the world needs disciples who are ready for suffering, self-renunciation and sacrifice".²⁰

Let us recall again the lesson Don Bosco has given us on suffering the lacerations of the thorns: "Those who expect to walk a charmed way through a bed of roses without thorns must go back; the others, follow me".

A few months ago we meditated in this vein on the martyrdom and suffering that are found in the apostolic spirit of the salesian.²¹

Don Bosco has written, "Whoever seeks a life of ease would waste his time entering our Society, for it is founded on the words of our Saviour, 'He who wishes to be my disciple must follow me in prayer, penance and especially self-denial; he must take up his cross of daily tribulations and follow me', even to death, and if need be, death on a cross. This happens in our Society when a member spends himself utterly in the sacred ministry, in the classroom or in other apostolic labours — even to the extent of a violent death in prison or exile, or through fire, water or the sword — and finally, after having suffered and died with Jesus Christ on earth he joins him in the happiness of heaven".²²

20. O. Culmann: *La fe y el culto en la Iglesia primitiva*, Studium, Madrid 1971, page 308.

21. Acts of the Superior Council no. 308.

22. Circular letter, 9 June 1867, *Memorie Biografiche* VIII 828-830.

The two most harmful enemies of our holiness

The nature of our religious consecration is totally geared for leading us to holiness; indeed if we do not live our religious consecration with

holiness as our aim, it will become tainted and purposeless.

This is a fearsome statement, but unfortunately it is borne out in life's events: the crises of these recent years provide many practical examples.

In my experiences during these last six years, I have been able to individualise here and there the beginnings of two problems that I consider in the highest degree the two most dangerous enemies for salesian holiness. They are the *abandonment of our pastoral distinctiveness* and the *breakdown of religious discipline*.

- We have seen that *pastoral charity* is the very heart of our spirit, and hence of our holiness.

Pastoral concern is Jesus Christ's own invention; it is he who introduced it into human history; it derives from his mystery of redemption; it reaches out to all that is human, but is not identified with any of its aspects (such as culture, science, politics, development, economics, ideologies, etc.). It involves a mental attitude, and is a way of acting that is personal and distinctive, nourished and judged only by faith and supernatural charity. It is not enough that we be hard-working, generous, courageous, up-to-date and tuned to today's situations; it is absolutely necessary that our overall driving force be a *pastoral heart*. Unfortunately there are quite a few regions with a yen for horizontalism that makes for spiritual superficiality. This quickly deprives pastoral concern of its sublime uniqueness and draws its victims down to the level of trendy ideologies or an activism where mere activity is all that matters.

Such an enemy can only be defeated by cultivating an attitude of serious reflection and con-

templation so as to restore to its central position our *Da mihi animas*.

• The second enemy is the breakdown of *religious discipline*. To be faithful to the self-donation of our religious profession it is necessary to cultivate a methodical practice of small and great acts of renunciation, to make good use of proper direction, to develop ascetical convictions, to give due importance to particular indications, to use disciplinary means, to cherish the well tested traditions of our Congregation and to practise personal mortifications, etc. It is not possible to live according to our religious ideals without asceticism.

Unfortunately it is not difficult these days to find a way of reasoning or judging that fancies itself capable of gazing down from a superior ideological plane and arguing itself out of the need for the concrete demands of our religious fidelity. For us salesians especially, who strive after a holiness characterised by a special pedagogical dimension, this presumptuous superficiality would constitute a glaring contradiction. How could such a salesian be holy if he thought he could practise pastoral and educative charity and at the same time condemn or neglect the renunciations that are inherent in the vows, the helps of the magisterium, the directives of the General Chapters and the Superiors, the daily battle against self, the ecclesial signs of the sacred liturgy, the discipline of community life, the ascetical demands of certain articles in our Constitutions and Regulations, the mortifying effort of self-domination! The comfortable life, worldly attitudes and deceptions, and fashionable trendiness are assuredly no help whatsoever to salesian holiness.

Saint John Bosco appeals to us never to neglect the demands of our religious profession. He has written, "The primary aim of our society is the sanctification of its members. Let everyone be convinced of this: from the Superior General down to the last confrere, no one is necessary to the Society. God alone must be its only head, its absolute and necessary master. Thus confreres must have recourse to their head, their true master, their rewarder, God himself; it is for love of him that each one enters our Congregation — for love of him must each one work, obey, abandon all his worldly possessions, so that at the end of his life he may utter Peter's words to the Saviour whom he has chosen for his model, 'Lo, we have left everything to follow you, Lord. What then shall we have?' ".²³

23. *Memorie Biografiche*,
ibidem.

The canonisation of Don Bosco is indeed an incentive to us "to strive after our distinctive salesian holiness with fresh resolve" (Strenna 84).

A final word of farewell

Dear confreres, in these six years of my mandate I have written you twenty-two letters in the *Acts of the Superior Chapter*, and have chosen topics that are of importance for our renewal. My first letter was an appeal to welcome Mary into all our houses and to revivify our devotion to Mary Help of Christians according to the directives of Vatican II.²⁴ I have now concluded my series of letters to you with these brief thoughts and exhortations on the holiness of Don Bosco.

24. Acts of the Superior
Council no. 289, 1978.

Our salesian vocation and mission is completely permeated with a religious consecration that is

geared towards a specific apostolic holiness. We are sons of saints and we live to be signs and bearers of holiness. Let us not be discouraged: part of our way along the path of holiness consists of conversion and penitence in our battle to overcome our failings.

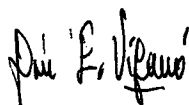
Don Bosco, in his last will and testament, bids us a loving adieu with these words, "Farewell my dearest sons, farewell. I shall await you in heaven. There we shall converse of God and of Mary, mother and support of our Congregation; there we shall for ever bless our Congregation whose Holy Rule was such a powerful and efficacious help for our salvation. Blessed be the name of the Lord now and forevermore. In you, Lord, I put my trust; I shall not be put to shame".²⁵

May Saint John Bosco always obtain for us the motherly help of Mary so that we may be able to give our young people the most desirable and fruitful salesian gift of our pastoral and educative holiness.

Let us pray fervently to the Lord for the success of our forthcoming General Chapter.

My warmest greetings to all.

With brotherly hope and deep gratitude,



Father EGIDIO VIGANÒ,
Rector Major.

25. *Memorie Biografiche*
XVII 258-259.