

## I. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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*Rome - Feast of the Annunciation, 1978*

*My dear confreres,*

I greet you with joy and hope, and I would like to share with you some thoughts that I have at heart.

Each one of us is accustomed to meditate on the facts of his own existence and of the salesian family in humble imitation of the Virgin Mary who knew how to store up in her heart the most meaningful events of her vocation and ponder them within her.<sup>1</sup>

A few months ago Providence upset my whole existence with my election as your Rector Major. The awareness of the heavy responsibility inherent in this 'family service' which demands real spiritual fatherliness in full harmony with Don Bosco is already becoming second nature to me. It is a good thing that it is our practice to give each other mutual support.

But the good Lord is helping me also to perceive the beauty and the abundance of grace that comes with such a service, and the joy of being able to enter into communion with you, with each one individually and with every community, so that we can reflect and grow together in a spirit of gratitude and fidelity.

Would that I had the calm and penetrating style of Don Bosco and the facility of communication shown by his successors.

<sup>1</sup> Cf Lk 2, 51.

I hope to be able to make up for the lack of this charm and simplicity at least by sincerity and solidity.

I am writing this letter during the Easter Octave with the deep and joy-filled atmosphere of the Resurrection in my heart: this is the wonderful day the Lord has made! It is the day that brought us the greatest, the most disturbing and radical innovation that explodes every secularist world-vision and forces us to reread all earthly values from a point of view that is humanly speaking unthinkable, but which absorbs them all and shows their relativity.

How much it must have cost our Lord to make his apostles understand what his Resurrection was and what it implied in reality. It marked the beginning of a 'new humanity': man reaches the fullness of God the Father's plan for him, he touches his true destiny and captures the real dimension of his history.

We are at the heart of the gospel, whence we can perceive with penetrating clarity the baptismal mystery and the meaning of religious profession, the Church's true mission in the world and our role among youth as salesians; we can view the entire horizon both of the saving dynamism of the faithful and the technical, economic, cultural and political undertakings of man with their real objectives.

Easter is truly the vertex from which we can see and evaluate everything in the light of faith, and it is from this paschal summit and in the hope of the Resurrection that I invite you to reflect a little on our relationship with the Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

### **Let us make a place for Our Lady in our home!**

The GC21 invites us to renew the Marian dimension of our vocation.

The time seems ripe for us to review together our convictions about the Blessed Mother and make an accurate verification

of our devotion to Mary Help of Christians. What is the relationship between the living person of Mary and ourselves? To what extent is devotion to our Lady experienced and felt in our hearts and in our pastoral activities at the present day? Is it an exaggeration to say that the Marian dimension of our life is on the decline? Is there not perhaps an urgent need to create a new space for Mary in our family?

On the afternoon of Good Friday while I was listening to the reading of St. John's account of the Passion, I was particularly struck by the importance he gives to the words the dying Jesus addresses to his Mother: "Woman, this is your son!", then he said to the disciple: "This is your mother", and by what he immediately adds: "and from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home".<sup>2</sup>

This is both a testament and a program.

I thought instinctively of our Congregation and the whole salesian family that today needs to re-examine closely the reality of Mary's spiritual motherhood and live again the attitude and resolve of that disciple. And I thought to myself: "We must make the evangelist's affirmation our own program of renewal — 'make a place for our Lady in our home!'

In this way we too will be 'beloved disciples' because we will give better attention to our baptismal adoption as sons, and will experience in a tangible way the beneficial effects of Mary's motherhood.

And I remembered the affection and the reality of Don Bosco's filial concern for our Lady's presence in the house, planning and carrying out his multiple activities in dialogue with her.

Then on Easter Sunday there flashed into my mind with great clarity the deeply realistic aspect of Mary's role as mother in the life of the Church.

Meditating on the objective meaning of the Resurrection of

<sup>2</sup> Jn 19, 26-27.

Christ, not on the miraculous aspect as in that of Lazarus who came back for a time to mortal life but as a final transfiguration of human existence, an effective fullness of new life conquering evil and death and sharing in God's glory. I once again saw emerging the singular figure of the Mother of Christ. In fact the paschal transfiguration of the Resurrection has so far found its concrete realization in only two members of the human race: Jesus and Mary!

As two of us they live the paschal Resurrection as the first fruits and the beginning of a renewed human race. They are the "new man" and the "new woman": the second Adam and the second Eve. And they are so not only as a model to be imitated or an objective to be attained, but more precisely as the only efficacious source of regeneration and new life for all.

### **Let us build on objective reality**

I want to emphasize with particular insistence that this is a 'fact', or in other words an objective reality that exists and functions over and above our awareness of it; it is neither a religious 'theory' nor a pious way of feeling, but a real fact extrinsic to our subjective thought and approached with the seriousness of human knowledge guided by faith. At the root of our faith convictions there is the most concrete reality: living people and real events. The deepening of Marian doctrine and the expression of our piety must rest on such objectivity.

Belief in the Resurrection and the affirmation that Christ has ascended and Mary has been assumed into heaven, does not mean that they now live on some distant planet and are within reach of the earth only by some kind of extraordinary astronomic flight; it means rather that they are very much alive for us, present and active in our world through the new paschal reality of the Resurrection.

Today then Mary is a person living and acting among us; her assumption, by which she fully participates in the Resurrection of Christ, is a fact of faith; her universal motherhood is an objective and daily reality of grace, to which the Church bears witness.

Vatican II expressly assures us of this: the spiritual motherhood of Mary "in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home."<sup>3</sup>

Rightly therefore "the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix... And the Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary, which it constantly experiences and recommends to the heartfelt attention of the faithful, so that encouraged by this maternal help they may the more closely adhere to the Mediator and Redeemer."<sup>4</sup>

Setting out from so convincing and realistic a point of reference will give particular strength and seriousness to our reflections, without us sinking into superficial sentimentality.

Unfortunately there are still to be found here and there uncontrolled outbursts of unhealthy fantasy, with expressions of questionable piety based more often than not on pseudo-revelations; this robs Marian devotion of credibility and tends to lead astray the precious patrimony of popular devotion which is today in process of rediscovery and which is very dear to our mission.

<sup>3</sup> LG 62.

<sup>4</sup> LG 62.

When we resolve to imitate the beloved disciple in “making a place for Mary in our home”, we mean to make a serious study in depth of the solid reality of the Resurrection, in the perspective of Church tradition and in the realistic style so consonant with Don Bosco’s spirit, and so characteristic of his devotion to our Lady under the title of “Help of Christians”.

### **The motivations behind the renewal in our devotion**

The reasons that move us to relaunch devotion to Mary Help of Christians in the entire salesian family are not without importance. Let us recall some of the more important ones: they will serve as a source of enlightenment and give a better foundation to our undertaking.

— First and foremost we must keep in mind the *cultural change* which has followed the emergence of a new appreciation of human values; in the sphere of social custom, literary and artistic modes of expression, mass media and the sensitivity of public opinion, it has given rise to a completely new style which has its repercussions also in the expression of religious convictions.

This may have brought with it a certain antipathy for a set form of religious expression resulting for a time in more than marginal confusion and eventually, for some people, in doubts of a doctrinal nature. Think for example of the impact the women’s liberation movement can certainly have on Marian devotion.

The Pope exhorts us “to pay close attention to certain findings of the human sciences” so as to be realistic about eliminating “one of the causes of the difficulties experienced in devotion to the Mother of the Lord, namely, the discrepancy existing between some aspects of this devotion and modern anthropological discoveries and the profound changes which have occurred in the psycho-sociological field in which modern man lives and works.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> MC 34.

All this certainly demands of us a new commitment.

— Another very strong motivation is provided by the great spiritual and pastoral event that was Vatican II. We know that it had a profound effect on the whole life of the Church and in particular on devotion to our Lady. Who has forgotten the heated discussions of the Council Fathers in this regard and the consequent need for renewal in the light of the concrete choices that were made?

The line taken by Vatican II regarding our Lady follows a new path characterized by the total mystery of the Church. Pope Paul's apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus* sets out precise directives and places a direct responsibility on religious families (like our own) "to promote a genuine creative activity and at the same time to proceed to a careful revision of expressions and exercises of piety directed towards the Blessed Virgin. We would like this revision to be respectful of wholesome tradition and open to the legitimate requests of the people of our time."<sup>6</sup>

In particular the dogmatic Constitution on the Liturgy encouraged after Vatican II a more authentic and creative development of christian worship; for "the development of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, fitted into the only worship that is rightly called 'christian', is an indication of the Church's genuine piety."<sup>7</sup> Therefore the whole thinking behind the liturgical movement and the reform of christian worship demands an accurate revision and a new development of our Marian devotion also.

— Further, we are witnesses to an interesting rediscovery of "*popular religiosity*"<sup>8</sup> as a "theological-pastoral" point of practical importance for a realistic renewal. In this rediscovery there is a special consideration and a practical and faithful reevaluation of the "people" in the ecclesial communion, together with a more

<sup>6</sup> MC 24; cf 40.

<sup>7</sup> PAUL VI, MC - Introduction.

<sup>8</sup> Cf EN 48.

comprehensive and properly critical discernment of their "religious sense". These two ideas of "people" and "religious sense" should find a special sympathetic resonance in the salesian vocation.

— There is also a very deep and intimate reason that should prompt us to a conscientious relaunching of Marian devotion; it is the fact that we see *our vocation as a "charism of the Holy Spirit"*, of whom Mary is the "spouse" and the "living temple".<sup>9</sup>

Today "we live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit"<sup>10</sup> with his gifts and charisms, and therefore at a moment strongly *linked* to Mary's special role: her maternal function in the life of the Church is a fact linked with every "birth" and "rebirth" in the Spirit.

Therefore just as Don Bosco was able to give special honour and foster devotion to our Lady through the "birth" of the Congregation and the salesian family, so today should we with equal love and initiative know how to give her special honour and veneration through our renewal, which is a "rebirth" of our vocation today.

There can be no relaunching or recovery for us without the Help of Christians, but with her motherly help we shall be able to see the growing effects of our rebirth, and even "miraculous" effects. Add to this the fact that Mary is our special model because of her openness to the renewal that took place at the most difficult time of transition from the Old to the New Testament; there she provides for all to see the greatest lesson of fidelity to what is essential and complete openness to the unforeseen action of the Holy Spirit.

— Then there is a reason that derives from a characteristic aspect of devotion to the Help of Christians: it is a Marian dimen-

<sup>9</sup> Cf LG 52, 53, 63, 64, 65; AG 4; etc.

<sup>10</sup> EN 75.



sion that is of its very nature meant *for critical times*. Don Bosco himself expressed it to Don Cagliero in his well-known affirmation: "The Madonna wishes us to honour her under the title of Help of Christians; the times are so sad that we have real need of the most holy Virgin's assistance in preserving and defending the christian faith."<sup>11</sup>

We too are living through times of serious and unheard-of dangers, whether in the area of the faith of believers, the life of the Church and the ministry of its shepherds, or in that of social and political reform, the integral education of youth and the development of the working classes.

If the title Help of Christians indicates a Marian dimension specifically relevant in difficult times, and if Don Bosco and the salesian family have been raised up by the Spirit as specialized and effective instruments in the spreading of that same devotion in the Church, we can conclude that the present complex and problematic difficulties in the Church and Society urgently demand from us a specific Marian relaunching.

— Another reason particularly relevant for us is the intimate link that exists between our *salesian spirit and devotion to Mary Help of Christians*. Don Bosco did not arrive at this devotion by mere chance, nor was it dependent on some local apparition; it appears rather as the maturation of a spiritual and apostolic line of thought that had been developing and becoming clearer with successive historical circumstances, interpreted in the light of a deep personal dialogue with the Holy Spirit in the context of those typically characteristic Marian touches so familiar in the daily life of Don Bosco.

The Help of Christians represents the peak of Don Bosco's feelings about our Lady: advocate, helper, mother of youth, protectress of christian people, conqueror of the devil, victor over

<sup>11</sup> MB 7, 334.

heresy, aid of the Church in difficulty, bastion of the Pope and the Bishops tormented by the forces of evil.

Such a devotion to the Mother of God is the practical realization of that sanctity-in-action so characteristic of Don Bosco's spirituality. It is enough to recall his conversation with the artist Lorenzone, whom he had asked to depict our Lady as the centre of a gigantic ecclesial dynamic activity,<sup>12</sup> or to gaze at the picture itself in the Basilica at Valdocco and discover there, so to speak, the inborn relationship between salesian spirit linked with ecclesial apostolate, and devotion to Mary Help of Christians.

If therefore the whole Conciliar movement of the renewal of Religious is to lead to a reactualization of their specific spirituality, this must mean for us a strong relaunching of the Marian element of our charism.

— For all these reasons, and not without the special influence of the Holy Spirit, the recent General Chapter asked us for an explicit commitment to the renewal of the Marian aspect of our vocation.<sup>13</sup>

In the course of a fraternal visit to our Chapter assembly, the Mother General of the FMA together with her Council accepted with active enthusiasm the assignment proffered by the Rector Major to feel themselves privileged to foster initiatives for the spread of Marian devotion throughout the whole salesian family.

And so, with the FMA and all the groups that make up the salesian family, we are conscious today of our call to create an atmosphere and to program concrete activities to make our Lady known and loved by the new generations of youth, who more than ever before are hungry and thirsty for the great christian and paschal reality.

Today for them too the prophetic words of the Virgin Mary

<sup>12</sup> MB 8, 4.

<sup>13</sup> AGC21, 94.

herself must be valid and be transformed into action: "all generations will call me blessed."<sup>14</sup>

### **The Marian choice of Don Bosco**

It is enlightening to recall, even if only briefly, some details of the process by which Don Bosco arrived at his intense devotion to Mary under the title of Help of Christians. They may lead us to a better understanding of the physiognomy of his and our vocation.

We know that John Bosco was born and educated in a deeply Marian environment of local church tradition and family piety. Suffice it to recall the event of October 1835, a few days after he had been given the cassock and on the eve of his departure for the seminary, Mamma Margaret called him aside and gave him that memorable advice: "John, when you came into this world I consecrated you to the Blessed Virgin; when you began to study I recommended you to be devout to that same Mother; and now I advise you to be entirely hers: love those of your companions who are devoted to her, and if you become a priest always recommend and spread devotion to Mary."<sup>15</sup>

It is of special interest, I think, that in the famous dream when he was only nine — a dream many times repeated and one to which Don Bosco attached great importance in his life — in his faith awareness Mary appeared as an important personage directly in a mission project for his life, a woman showing a particular pastoral preoccupation for the young; in fact she appeared "as a shepherdess". And we should take note that it is not John who chooses Mary; it is Mary who takes the initiative

<sup>14</sup> Lk 1, 48.

<sup>15</sup> MB 1, 373.

in the choice; at the request of her Son, she will be the inspirer and guide of his vocation.

This deep awareness of Mary's personal relationship with him was to help Don Bosco to develop spontaneously in his heart a care and affection that go far beyond local Marian feasts and titles, though he certainly appreciated and celebrated these with enthusiasm.

This mark of personal relationship with the Madonna will always be characteristic of him: his Marian devotion leads him directly to the living person of Mary and in her he contemplates and admires her greatness, her numerous roles and the many titles of veneration attached to her. Thus a Marian devotion was gradually built up in Don Bosco's heart of a kind which was not compartmentalized or partial, but comprehensive and total, centred directly on the living and real aspect more ecclesiastically proper to the person of Mary.

Fr A. Caviglia writes: "When it comes to his devotion to Mary, we leave aside every celebrational, ornamental and devotional title. For him she is above all Mary, the Madonna. It would be natural to ask the question: to which Madonna was Don Bosco inclined? To which one was Dominic Savio devoted? The answer would have to be — all and none. In Don Bosco's dream at the age of nine there appeared not a Madonna as such but *the* Madonna, Mary the Mother of Jesus. At the time of which we are speaking our Father was devoted to Our Lady of Consolation, the Madonna of the Turinese — the first little statue in the Pinardi Chapel was of her. And then with the religious movement that led the Church to define the Immaculate Conception, he turned to Mary Immaculate in love and devotion and with an intensely Catholic spirit and a very clear understanding. And because of certain aspects Mary Immaculate became his Madonna for a long time; it was to her that he led Dominic Savio, for whom the encounter provided the first big moment of his life

and explains why the historic sodality he began was named after the Immaculate Conception.”<sup>16</sup>

A similar attitude, combined with his practical genius and historical sense, led Don Bosco to give his active support to the Marian movement promoted by the Church at the time. And so in the first twenty years of his priesthood we find him expressing his comprehensive Marian devotion by emphasizing Mary's singular privilege of the Immaculate Conception, and the feast of the 8th December remains a central feature of his pastoral and spiritual methodology. It coincides too with the starting date of his most significant undertakings. Don Bosco lived with intelligent enthusiasm the ecclesial climate which preceded and accompanied the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and that saw the apparitions of Lourdes (1858).

We can recall, for example, the importance in his educational work of the “Sodality of Mary Immaculate” at Valdocco; it was the school that formed his first boy saint, Dominic Savio, and the first members of the future Society of St Francis of Sales. And it is significant that a parallel preparation was taking place at Mornese of the first members of the future Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, which took its rise from the “Union of Daughters of Mary Immaculate”.

The choice of Mary Immaculate shows us therefore a Don Bosco who was involved in the Marian movement to an extent that went beyond titles and local devotions; it was a following of Mary, his inspirer and guide, in the vital way that was being realized in the Church at the time.

But it is clear too that Don Bosco tended to transcend the formal aspect of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception; he did not limit himself to the prerogative of the absence in her of original sin; he never stopped simply at the greatness of Mary's

<sup>16</sup> A. CAVIGLIA, *Vita di Domenico Savio*, Opere ed. e ined. di DB, SEI, Torino, IV 314.

individual dignity (her fulness of grace, her virginal integrity and her glorious assumption), but he tended to consider them objectively in relation to her personal role of Mother of Christ and of all men — Christ's brethren.

Don Bosco's apostolic vocation led him to discover and to emphasize what had been the original picture of his "Mistress" since his dream at the age of nine: her role of spiritual motherhood.

In practice therefore one can easily recognize Don Bosco's clear tendency to assign to Mary Immaculate a role of help and protection in his educational activity, and to value her fulness of grace as a source of patronage for salvation.

Since 1848 he had begun to write the title "Auxilium Christianorum" on several pictures arranged on his desk. Before 1862 such a title does not appear officially, either as a main or a contrived title. But there were already growing indications, arising either from circumstances in the Church or from the very nature of Don Bosco's vocation, that he considered Mary Immaculate as the *protectress who overcomes* and crushes the wicked serpent's head.

It was in the 1860's, the years of Don Bosco's full maturity, and especially from 1862, that his choice emerged clearly for Mary Help of Christians. And this was to remain his definitive choice: the point of arrival in a continuous vocational growth and the centre of the Founder's charism. In Mary Help of Christians Don Bosco finally recognized the true image of the Lady who had established his vocation and had been and always would be his inspirer and guide.

"The experience of eighteen centuries — wrote Don Bosco, drawing from authoritative sources — makes us realize very vividly that from heaven Mary has continued with great success the mission of *Mother of the Church and Help of Christians* that she had begun on earth."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> DON BOSCO, *Meraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di MARIA AUSILIATRICE*, Torino 1868, p. 45; Opere ed., vol. XX, p. 237.

We should notice that the choice of Mary Help of Christians is associated with several facts of particular interest for our reflection.

— Don Bosco was sadly aware<sup>18</sup> of the special and increasing difficulties facing the Church: the serious problem of the relation between religion and politics, the fall (after more than a thousand years) of the Papal States, the delicate situation of the Papacy and the episcopal sees, the urgent need for a new approach to pastoral work and for a new relationship between hierarchy and laity, the incipient mass ideologies, etc.

It is essential to remember that the history of the Church in the middle of the nineteenth century "is characterized by a violent encounter between old and new, between liberalism and conservatism, and between the structures of an officially christian society and the ever more decisive affirmations of the secular world." The whole life of the Church is involved in a multiplicity of ways: doctrinal questions, popular piety, pastoral methods, the first affirmations of the laity, singularity of the local churches. "There emerges the picture of a key period in the history of the Church, which once again spells out the terms of the confrontation between christianity and the cultures of the various historical eras with which it comes in contact."<sup>19</sup>

— Moreover, Don Bosco had been impressed by the Marian events at Spoleto, seen by Archbishop Arnaldi (who maintained contact by correspondence with Turin) and by the Catholic press as a sign of the intervention of Mary Help of Christians; from the very centre of Italy she gave hope to the Church and to the Pope at a most alarming time. This miraculous intervention recalled the happy solution to the vicissitudes of Pius VII (and

<sup>18</sup> Cf as an example of the expression of his meditations, the prayer he composed for setting to music by Cagliero: "O Maria, Virgo potens..." (MB 17, 309-310).

<sup>19</sup> G. MARTINA, *Pio IX, Chiesa e Mondo moderno*, ed. Studium, Rome 1976, p. 7-8.

of Msgr. Franzoni at Turin), and so gave rise to a real enthusiasm for Marian devotion among the faithful of the whole peninsula as well as of Turin.

— We know too how Don Bosco retained and deepened in his heart the sense of the presence of Mary in his vocation and in the life of the Church. His meditations and personal intuitions in this regard can be seen either from his various statements, e.g. the one to Don Cagliero already quoted, or in the dream of the two columns which occurred precisely in 1882, or in the particular kindness and goodwill on the part of Pius IX in the naming of the basilica then under construction.<sup>20</sup>

— Finally, no little influence was due to the construction of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians itself at Valdocco, completed in only three years and in a way considered by Don Bosco as quite prodigious. It was not a parish church to serve local needs: the local people were already well served pastorally. It was to be a shrine to Mary for the city, the country and the world itself, open to more universal spiritual and apostolic needs.

The basilica is well known as a place that offers the world the presence of God and Christ as well as Mary. The theology of the temple is linked to God's free initiatives for his insertion into history for the salvation of men, and we can say that for Don Bosco the building of the basilica became in fact a positive and palpable expression of this profound theology of the temple,

<sup>20</sup> Don Bosco writes in fact: "While the title for the new building was under consideration, there occurred an incident which removed all doubt. The Pope then reigning, Pius IX, whom nothing that would benefit religion ever escaped, being informed of the need for a church in the place referred to, sent a first kind donation of 500 francs with an indication that Mary Help of Christians would be a title certainly pleasing to the august Queen of Heaven." (JOHN BOSCO, *Meraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di MARIA AUSILIATRICE*, Torino 1868, p. 108-109 - Opere ed. vol. XX, p. 300-301; JOHN BOSCO, *Maria Ausiliatrice col racconto di alcune grazie*, Torino 1875, p. 30 - Opere ed. vol. XXVI, p. 334; JOHN BOSCO, *Associazione dei devoti di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Torino 1869, p. 27 - Opere ed. vol. XXI, p. 365).



seen through the maternal and active presence of Mary. The basilica is to be a "Marian sanctuary" that becomes the "privileged sign", the "holy place" of the protective presence of Mary Help of Christians: "haec domus mea, inde gloria mea!"

This also explains why Don Bosco dedicated himself so completely during those years to this undertaking. "Only one who actually witnessed it — Don Albera tells us — can really know of the work and sacrifices that our Venerable Father imposed on himself for three years in order to finish the work; many thought it a rash undertaking, beyond the capacity of the humble priest who had begun it."<sup>21</sup>

But whatever may be the concrete reasons for the choice of the title "Auxilium Christianorum", already weighted with history and with a vital urgency for the socio-religious situation, it seems that what subsequently became the determining factor for Don Bosco was the daily realization that Mary herself had well-nigh built this house of hers in the grounds of the Oratory, and had taken possession of it from which to spread her patronage.

The way in which Don Bosco speaks of this "House of Mary Help of Christians" emphasizes not so much the historical associations but rather the affirmation of a living presence, a fountain overflowing with grace, of a continuous renewal of apostolic action, of a climate of hope and of willing commitment to the Church and to the Pope.

There is a real "factual lyricism" behind the construction of the basilica which vividly illumines Don Bosco's Marian choice.

I think we should reflect at greater length on the spiritual consequences for Don Bosco (and for us) of the construction of this basilica, its effective significance and its creative role in giving shape to his charism, and its concrete consequences in the founding and development of the salesian family.

<sup>21</sup> Circular Letters, Torino 1965, p. 286.

From the time this sanctuary came into existence the Help of Christians became the Marian expression that would always characterize the spirit and the apostolate of Don Bosco: his entire apostolic vocation he would see as the work of Mary Help of Christians; and his many great initiatives, especially the Society of St Francis of Sales, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the big salesian family would in his eyes be foundations desired and watched over by her.

I think it true to say that, through the living experience of the granting of so many favours, the Sanctuary has become even more important than Don Bosco may have initially thought. The light that shines forth from the basilica at Valdocco transcends local pastoral anxieties and even the history of its title, to become a partly new and even greater reality: a place privileged by the motherly and helping presence of Mary.

### **Characteristic elements of his devotion**

Can we speak of an “originality” in our devotion to the Help of Christians which, in our desire to enter whole-heartedly into the Marian movement of the present day, should lead us to emphasize and develop certain characteristic aspects that emerge as distinctive of this devotion?

Let us ask the question from a very practical point of view: the reply will serve to highlight those aspects of our renewal to which we should give preference.

Don Bosco is one of the greatest devotees of Mary in history. His devotion was a characteristic one, expressed in his own way but inserted fully into the reality of the most incisive Marian movements in the Church of his day. Let us note well that Don Bosco inserted himself into devotion to the Help of Christians: he did not devise it. He associated himself with an ancient specific tradition, but he was able to give it so singular a style

that from then onwards the Help of Christians has also been familiarly called “Don Bosco’s Madonna”!

Let us dwell briefly on some of the elements which were strongly emphasized by our Founder, and which help to give this devotion a characteristic physiognomy and style.

— In the first place, *the living awareness of the personal presence of Mary* in the history of salvation brings to Don Bosco’s devotion, as we have already seen, the continual desire to establish a living relationship with her (linking Mary with Christ of course, in a inseparable binomial of salvation: the two columns of his dreams!).

It follows that this Marian devotion always refers directly to the “person” of the Madonna herself with all her greatness and her titles; it is therefore never expressed in any form of rivalry with other devotions, but rather in a form of intensive convergence and operative projection, through which every Marian title and feast is loved and celebrated through emphasis on the help she brings to the salvation of man.

This awareness of the personal presence of Mary Help of Christians was felt positively by Don Bosco in his own life as a basic objective fact, a fundamental element of his whole vocation both as regards the objectives and style of his apostolic mission and the delineation of his own evangelic spirit.

— Another characteristic element is found in the *doctrinal postulates* of devotion to the Help of Christians. Don Bosco took them from the most esteemed authors, but he marked them out and widened them with particular theological virility and pastoral concreteness. They elucidate the real nature of the devotion and cult of Mary “Help of Christians” and must be cultivated and deepened by her devotees. They refer specifically to Mary’s victorious intervention in favour of the faith of christian people, and in helping the Catholic Church led by the Pope and the Bishops.

“The need — writes our Founder — universally felt today

to invoke Mary is not a particular but a general one; it is no longer just a case of making more fervent those who are lukewarm, the conversion of sinners, the protection of the innocent. These things are always useful everywhere and for everyone. But it is the Catholic Church itself that is under attack. She is attacked in her functions, in her sacred institutions, in her head, in her doctrine, and in her discipline; she is attacked precisely as the Catholic Church, as the centre of truth and as the teacher of all the faithful.”<sup>22</sup>

This characteristic aspect of “ecclesial help”, the source for Don Bosco of the title of Help of Christians, does not seem to have been connected to Marian titles by other devotees or charismatics.

We have of course already a quite significant collection of literature of our own on these doctrinal notions,<sup>23</sup> but after the

<sup>22</sup> JOHN BOSCO, op. cit. (Meraviglie...) p. 6-7 - Opere ed. XX, p. 198-199.

<sup>23</sup> BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES. The following publications are worthy of special mention:

— P. RIGALDONE, *Devotion to Mary Help of Christians*, in ASC, Sept.-Oct. 1948.

— THE 11 VOLUMES OF THE “ATTI DELL’ACCADEMIA MARIANA SALESIANA”:

I. *L’Ausiliatrice nel Domma e nel culto*. Reports presented at the first International Marian Congress (Rome 1950).

II. *L’Ausiliatrice della Chiesa e del Papa*. Commemorative papers for the 50th anniversary of the coronation of Mary Help of Christians in the Basilica in Turin, 1903 - 17 May 1953. Preface signed by Pius XII.

III. *L’Immacolata Ausiliatrice*. Commemorative papers of the Marian Year 1954.

IV. *L’Immacolata e S. Giovanni Bosco*. (Fr Dominic Bertetto).

V. *Maria e la Chiesa*. (Fr Joseph Quadrio). The social mediation of Mary in the teaching of the Popes from Gregory XVI to Pius XII.

VI. *Relazioni commemorative del Centenario delle Apparizioni di Lourdes*.

VII. *Aiuto dei Cristiani, Madre della Chiesa*. Commemorative papers for the centenary of the consecration of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin.

VIII. *La Madonna nella nostra vita*. Twelve studies dealing with Marian devotion lived and propagated pastorally and pedagogically. For the fourth centenary of the manifestation of the Help of Christians at Lepanto (7 October 1971).

developments of Vatican II it has become necessary to add other and topical reflections in line with the renewed concept of the mystery of the Church.

Let us begin by noting that Don Bosco had already added the title of "Help of Christians" to that of "Mother of the Church" which we rejoiced to see proclaimed by Paul VI at the end of Vatican II.<sup>24</sup> We must emphasize that it is precisely *the living*

XI. *La vita salesiana oggi nella luce di Maria.* (Fr Dominic Bertetto) 23 lectures on salesian life and mission in accordance with the Salesian Constitutions as renewed by the Special General Chapter.

X. *La Madonna oggi. Sintesi Mariana attuale.* (Fr. Dominic Beretto) Marian doctrine in the light of Vatican II and subsequent developments. For the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Salesian Marian Academy.

XI. *Maria Ausiliatrice e le Missioni.* The missionary ideal carried out with Mary's help, Patroness of the Mission and Evangelizing Star. Papers on the occasion of the Centenary of the Salesian Missions.

— F. GIRAUDI, *Il Santuario di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice*, SEI, Torino 1948.

— P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 2, cap. 7; PAS-Verlag 1969.

<sup>24</sup> On 21st November 1964 Paul VI officially proclaimed the Marian title "Mother of the Church". It was at the end of the third session of Vatican II, in which the dogmatic constitution "Lumen Gentium" was promulgated which outlined the conciliar doctrine on the Church and on Mary. In his historic address the Pope declared:

"Reflection on this close relationship of Mary with the Church, so clearly set out in the present conciliar Constitution, leads us to think that this is the most solemn and appropriate moment to fulfil a desire which, after we had mentioned it at the end of the previous session, very many Council Fathers have made their own. They have insistently asked for an explicit declaration during this Council of the maternal role of the Blessed Virgin in respect of christian people. To this end we have decided to dedicate in this session a title in honour of the Virgin that has been suggested from various parts of the Catholic world, a title particularly dear to us because it synthesizes in an admirable way the privileged position of the Virgin in the Church, already recognized by this Council. To the greater glory therefore of the Virgin and for our own encouragement and consolation, we proclaim Mary most holy to be *Mother of the Church*, of all the people of God, the faithful as well as their pastors, who see in her their loving Mother; and it is our wish that henceforth the Blessed Virgin be still further honoured and invoked by all christian people with this endearing title." (AAS, 56 [1964] 1015).

*sense of the Church* that is the most characteristic element of the doctrine of the Help of Christians.

It will be of great help to the relaunching of this devotion in the present-day world if we make use of the interest with which the impressive relationship "Mary-Church" is developing at the present time.

Mary in fact is *already* what the Church is striving towards; she is its prophecy and its stimulus. She helps the Church to realize its role of "second Eve" in a motherhood of virginity and grace. In this way "the mystery of the Church is seen through the image of Mary. Looking at her, one can see the Church alive: her eyes explain its mysteries." <sup>25</sup>

Even a non-Catholic writer affirms: "It can be said that one does not get a correct vision of the Church unless there is room for Mary in faith and piety. The Church's renewal is strictly linked with the relaunching of a sound Marian devotion. Loss of the sense of the maternal vocation of the Virgin Mary leads to a loss of the sense of the Church as 'mother'." <sup>26</sup>

Mary's maternal role is at the heart of her relationship with the Church: both exist and are holy in motherhood, and both give life in virginity. Hence there is a close link between "motherhood" and "evangelization", between "Mary-Church" and "apostolic action".

All this is significant for our spirituality today and has practical and compelling consequences. Hence devotion to the Help of Christians, animated by a living ecclesial sense, seems to be in Don Bosco the harbinger of a prophetic doctrinal choice that links "Marian piety" with "Church sense" in a unique form of mutual inseparability and of common growth.

<sup>25</sup> M. MAGRASSI, *Maria e la Chiesa una sola Madre*, ed. La Scala, Noci 1976, p. 40.

<sup>26</sup> MAX THURIAN, *Tradition et renouveau dans l'Esprit*, Taizé 1977, p. 193.

— Such a doctrine of the Help of Christians implies, as a necessary consequence, an untiring and courageous *attitude of practical commitment* that was in Don Bosco one of the characteristic aspects of his Marian devotion: Our Lady of Consolation, or of La Salette, or the Immaculate Conception, would not have indicated an appropriate practical need characterizing him and his numerous followers (and in particular the salesian family) with the same force and the same apostolic physiognomy as did the Help of Christians.

The “Church sense” is expressed daily in an active awareness of “belonging” with a profound spirituality of action.

This involves not only a continuous and generous apostolic activity in general but also a genuine ecclesial commitment, i.e. a dedication which is explicitly directed by a consciousness of existing and acting as a sharing, responsible member of the Body of Christ which is the Church. The Church however not considered in some vague sense, but in so far as “constituted and organized as a society in the present world, she subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him.”<sup>27</sup>

A commitment therefore specifically defined by the concrete historical situation of Catholic life. This realistic choice, which could even lead to martyrdom, comes necessarily close to positions of conflict which could assume in certain situations even the aspect of a political choice. This is the sort of thing that happened in the 60's in Italy with the apparitions at Spoleto and the fall of Rome. Don Bosco led the way as he made devotion to the Help of Christians a real dedication to the Catholic Church, always avoiding the tendency to transform it into a banner for either side: revolution or anti-revolution.

To be able to maintain this attitude he made use of a

<sup>27</sup> LG 8.

characteristically practical criterion of “maternal activity”. This attitude is not prompted by abstract ideologies but by urgent and vital needs. It does all the good it can even if it cannot reach the best solution possible, and it pays more attention to the delicate framework of life than to the working out of great plans.

It is significant to note that there is no place for a similar vital activity (and therefore no parallel with Mary) in the most famous social ideologies, e.g. in Marxism, even though they have various close similarities with ecclesial structures. The pedagogical realism of Don Bosco expressed through his Marian devotion an authentic “mysticism of action” in the profound sense of St Francis of Sales,<sup>28</sup> permanently linked with a powerful (though sometimes hidden) “asceticism of action”.

Because of this I ventured to observe to the members of the Chapter that devotion to the Help of Christians “is intimately tied in with the concrete events of life; it comes through into the living flow of history in all its labyrinths and suffering, but it remains clearly eschatological (Don Bosco would say “religious”). It is not transformed into a “crusade for christianity”; it participates in all the social and cultural vicissitudes and new hopes of all people as they move forward without interruption towards a new degree of liberation, but it never becomes “political” (in the strict and specific sense of the word). It is realistic but transcendent, in perfect harmony with the specific mission of the Church.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Cf *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, lib. 7, c. 7, in *Opera Omnia* V, 29-32.

<sup>29</sup> Cf AGC21, 590.



## The Help of Christians and the Salesian Charism

It is certainly a fact, and we are very grateful for it, that there is an intimate link between devotion to the Help of Christians and our salesian vocation. It is not difficult to demonstrate this in Don Bosco: from the beginning as in the dream at the Becchi at the age of nine, to the end as in the dream at Barcellona in 1886; from the catechism classes begun with Bartholomew Garelli, to the way in which he obtained the approval of the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis of Sales; from the intimate conviction of Don Bosco expressed on so many occasions, to the external sign of the wonderful works he accomplished. But the origins are only the first fruits of the total reality.

*Our Founder* assures us that the salesian vocation cannot be explained either in its birth or in its continuing development without the continual and maternal guidance of Mary. Often he himself claimed that the Madonna was its “foundress” and its “support”, and he assures us that “our Congregation is destined to do great things and to spread all over the world, if the salesians remain faithful to the Rule given to them by Mary.”<sup>30</sup>

He even allowed the following exclamation to escape him: “Mary loves us too much!”<sup>31</sup>

*Don Rua*, the great “continuer” of the vocation of Don Bosco who “teaches salesians to remain salesians” — as Paul VI has said to us<sup>32</sup> — continually stressed the close relationship that exists between the salesian vocation and devotion to the Help of Christians.<sup>33</sup>

It seems particularly evocative to emphasize the interesting

<sup>30</sup> MB 17, 511.

<sup>31</sup> MB 18, 273.

<sup>32</sup> Homily in St Peter's, Rome, during the beatification ceremony of Don Rua, 29 October 1972.

<sup>33</sup> Cf Circular Letters, Turin 1965; e.g. pp. 178, 293-294, 348, 367-368, etc.

observation he made at the coronation of the Madonna at Valdocco on 17th May 1903. After describing the ceremony with joyful effusion, he adds: "I have no doubt that an increase among salesians of devotion to Mary Help of Christians will also lead to an increase of esteem and affection for Don Bosco, as well as a greater dedication to the preservation of his spirit and imitation of his virtues." <sup>34</sup>

There is here a very clear intuition of the close and vital relationship that exists between devotion to the Help of Christians and our spirituality.

*Don Albera* too, with his delicate sensitivity for the more spiritual aspects of our vocation, insists on the continual presence of Mary. He writes: "While speaking to his spiritual sons, (Don Bosco) never tired of repeating that the work he had undertaken was inspired by Mary, that Mary was its strong support, and that in consequence it need fear nothing from the opposition of its enemies." <sup>35</sup>

Particularly significant, to conclude this argument, is an allusion to St Francis of Sales, in so far as he is the "master of salesianity" in the history of the spiritual life. Describing the almost imprudent magnanimity of our Founder, particularly in the construction of the basilica at Valdocco, Don Albera sees in this extraordinary courage an element of "salesianity". He affirms: "He shows himself a *disciple* of our St Francis of Sales who once wrote, 'I am fully aware of the great blessing of being a son of such a glorious Mother, even though I am quite unworthy of it. Confiding in her protection, we can take on quite extraordinary enterprises. If we love her with deep affection she will obtain for us all we desire'." <sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 353.

<sup>35</sup> Circular Letters, Turin 1965: p. 285; cf also pp. 169, 223, 224, 284, 466, 477, etc.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 286.

Without doubt it would be of great benefit to study in depth the significance and function of devotion to the Help of Christians in our salesian spirituality, but suffice it to outline briefly a few suggestions in the hope that they may provide inspiration for our Marian renewal.

We know that a spirituality is worthy of the name only if it forms an organic whole, where each element has its precise place and function. To displace, to fail to consider, or to suppress this or that element would be to begin the ruination of the whole.

Now devotion to the Help of Christians is, as we have seen, an integral part of the "salesian phenomenon" in the Church because it forms a vital part of its totality. It would be senseless and even destructive to try to separate our spirituality from devotion to Mary Help of Christians, just as it is impossible to separate Don Bosco from the Madonna; that would be an absurdity. Devotion to the Help of Christians is therefore an essential part of our charism. It permeates its whole structure and gives life to the various component parts.

Without a healthy Marian life our spirituality would suffer in its vigour and fruitfulness, while on the other hand a timely effort towards a profound Marian renewal will give freshness to the whole of the salesian vocation.

Let it suffice to note how our devotion to the Help of Christians is closely and vitally connected with the salesian "mission" and with the "spirit" of our own particular charism.

First, its intimate link with the *salesian mission*: Mary is the shepherd girl of the dreams, who plans the exact nature of our mission and indicates those for whom we are to work, handing over to us the field of "youth apostolate". It is her characteristic as the Helper of Christians which opens the mission of the salesians to the wide horizons of modern social and religious problems, along with a definite choice to serve the whole Church and its pastors. It is her maternal goodness which also inspires

our pastoral criteria and teaches us a way in which we must approach those for whom we work.

Secondly, her profound relationship with the *salesian spirit* which finds in Mary, seen as the Help of Christians, its inspiration and its model. It is a spirit centred on "pastoral love", inspired by the maternal love of the Madonna and rooted in the maternal love of the Church. All this implies a careful listening for the promptings of God, a total adhesion to Christ and a complete openness to his ways. It is a spirit full of hope (sure of "help" from above) in an interior attitude of basic optimism towards the natural and supernatural resources of man. It is a spirit of apostolic fruitfulness vivified by zeal for the Church, a spirit of courageous inventiveness and an adaptability appropriate to the vicissitudes of created things. It is a spirit of goodness and of familiar behaviour, full of the richness and simplicity of attitude which flows from sincerity of heart. It is a spirit of magnanimity (as in the Magnificat) which humbly desires to do all the good that it can, even when this seems imprudent, allowing itself to be guided by courage, faith and common sense, and avoiding all extremes.

We can conclude these few ideas by saying that just as in the life of Don Bosco the devotion to the Help of Christians, which was worked out in the full maturity of his vocation, was at the same time the point of arrival of a long period of growth and the departure point for his whole vast apostolic programme, so in the same way it constitutes in salesian spirituality the concrete synthesis of its various parts and is the life-giving source for its dynamism and fruitfulness. Hence what this devotion was at the foundation of our spirituality it must also be at every moment of its renewal.

## The concrete nature of our proposal for a Marian renewal

To renew a devotion does not mean to simply change or intensify certain religious practices. We certainly have to update our Marian piety, but to do this we must first look to the basic values of our faith, the doctrinal presuppositions and the personal and community attitudes that flow from them. Faith and devotion should move together. If it is true that faith lives in piety ("lex orandi, lex credendi"), it is also true, especially in a renewal process, that doctrinal aspects must guide piety ("lex credendi, legem statuat orandi").<sup>37</sup>

It has been rightly remarked: "The recognition of the role of the Virgin Mary in the history of salvation and in the life of the Church brings with it a piety which is in harmony with this role."<sup>38</sup>

Now if in devotion to the Help of Christians there are characteristic doctrinal aspects, deepened and renewed by Vatican II, then we must come to know them well and recognize how we can also find from them a special quality for the renewal of our own Marian piety.

This will directly affect our efforts for renewal in the various sectors of our practical initiatives, and here I cannot go into details. These things must be studied and programmed at local level. I will merely indicate some major lines of action that may serve to guide and inspire the various programmes.

1. *Doctrinal formation* immediately appears as the first element which needs our attention. We have to be able to take a fresh look at and bring up to date our mentality and our knowledge in two complementary areas:

— the figure of Mary in the history of salvation in the light of the Council documents;

<sup>37</sup> Cf. encyclical *Mediator Dei* of Pius XII, nn. 38-40.

<sup>38</sup> MAX THURIAN, *op. cit.* p. 197.

— the doctrinal presuppositions of the title “Auxilium Christianorum” in relation to the spirituality of the charism of Don Bosco.

This is a vast field for research, popularization and both initial and ongoing formation.

Our Founder remains the model and master in this field. We recall in particular his own publications on the Help of Christians.<sup>39</sup>

2. *Marian cult and piety* constitute the life of a genuine devotion. For this renewal we already have the important apostolic exhortation “*Marialis Cultus*” of Paul VI. We must value this rich document. We should remember that in this field the Church has made considerable progress, both as regards liturgical cult (cf. the first part of MC, nos. 1-23), and as regards those activities which are more properly called Marian piety (cf. second part of MC, nos. 24-39). To be able to express our Marian devotion through an active and participation in the liturgical cycle is the most significant and formative goal of our efforts to renew our devotion.

In this renewal of Marian piety the Pope suggests four precious guidelines “to be kept in mind in the revision or creation of religious exercises and practices of piety.” They are the biblical (MC, 30), liturgical (MC, 31), ecumenical (MC 32-33) and anthropological (MC 34-37) dimensions.

The deeper understanding and application of each of these dimensions demand a profound revision of the way in which we practise our devotion.

As regards the practices of piety (MC 40-55), as well as the Rosary I would like to add and emphasize for us both the “Blessing of Mary Help of Christians” composed by Don Bosco

<sup>39</sup> P. RIGALDONE, *Maria Ausiliatrice*, I sei libretti di Don Bosco, LDC 1951, pp. 39-44.

himself and approved exactly 100 years ago by Leo XIII,<sup>40</sup> and the celebrations in honour of Mary Help of Christians during May and on the 24th of each month.

In addition we must greatly enhance the significance and the spiritual contribution of the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco.

3. *The wide horizons of our ecclesial commitment*, seen realistically in the diverse local circumstances and in the light of present-day needs, upon which our future depends so much. must be the horizons within which our courage to evangelize and our pastoral inventiveness operate. Here is a vast and practical area in which there is always need for a profound apostolic involvement, with our minds kept continually in touch with the pastoral problems of the Church and with the urgent cultural needs of our time, especially in matters which concern the young and the masses.

<sup>40</sup> The formula of the blessing was approved by the Sacred Congregation of Rites on 18th May 1878. I think it both opportune and enlightening to quote in full the letter of Don Bosco to Pope Leo XIII (MB 13, 489), and this will also serve to commemorate the centenary:

Most Holy Father,

In the sadness of the times in which we are living it seems that God wishes in wondrous ways to glorify his august Mother under the title of *Mary Help of Christians*. Among the various points to be considered in this connection is the efficacy of the blessings with the invocation of this title which are being given in various places, and especially in the sanctuary in Turin dedicated to her.

But in order that such blessings may be stable and regulated according to the spirit of the Church, Fr John Bosco, Rector of the above-mentioned sanctuary and the archconfraternity established there, humbly prays that the enclosed formula be given your kind consideration, examined, modified, and where necessary corrected, so that it may be used to give the so-called Blessing of Mary Help of Christians, especially in the sanctuary dedicated to her here in Turin. There is a continual throng of people here asking for the blessing, and it bears obvious fruit in assisting them in both their spiritual and material needs.

The words of the formula are a collection of ejaculations already in use and approved by the Church in the liturgy. They are gathered here for the greater glory of God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Turin, 10th March 1878

John Bosco, Priest.

It was precisely here that Don Bosco found the field in which he could best spend himself in his inexhaustible dedication. Devotion to the Help of Christians should help us to become a catalyst in the construction of a new Society through the young and the poorer classes.

4. Finally, *the care for vocations* was one of the most efficacious expressions of Don Bosco's Marian devotion. The Institution of the O.M.A. ("Work of Mary Help of Christians") for vocations, a movement which was very dear to him, is for us a clear indication of his attitude and also a fillip. We must dedicate ourselves with Mary to a profound renewal of all our vocation work. This will mean that we must give new life to the great values of the preventive system, and it will teach us to measure the depth of our spirituality and the authenticity of our apostolic activity by the yardstick of the vocations which result from it.

If we are able to animate the salesian family in these four great areas of renewal and if, together with the component groups of the family, we are able to work out some kind of modestly successful but enduring programme, then we will see our charism in the Church take on a new youth and grow with Mary's help.

And the Help of Christians will become the source of a more profound union between the various branches: she will appear more explicitly as the "Mother of the salesian family".

Don Bosco "was not content with just loving the Help of Christians; he did a great deal also to make her loved by others! A kind of pact exists between Mary Help of Christians and the salesian family. Mary helps this family and looks after the development of its enterprises. In their turn the members and the branches of the family, each in its own way, spread the cult of the Help of Christians among both young and old. It is one aspect of the salesian service to the Church. This is the significance of the inscription which Don Bosco saw on the



great church of his dreams and which in fact he caused to be carved into the pediment of the basilica in Turin: "Haec est domus mea, inde gloria mea": "This is my house; from here my glory will go forth". We are the living basilica."<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

My dear confreres, the GC21 asked for a genuine renewal of our devotion to Mary Help of Christians. With this renewal that salesian "life" of which there is so much need in our communities, and with which we will again render present the charism of our Founder, will become concrete and genuine.

I beg the confreres of each house to study local possibilities and methods, and I ask provincials and their councils to insert a carefully prepared Marian activity into their plans for the province, in dialogue with the other groups of the salesian family and especially with the FMA.

An immediate increase of devotion to the Help of Christians will give everyone both uplift and hope, and will bring something of value to the Church. Paul VI reminds us: "Contemplated in the episodes of the gospels and in the reality which she already possesses in the City of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary offers a calm vision and a reassuring word to modern man, torn as he often is between anguish and hope, defeated by the sense of his own limitations and assailed by boundless aspirations, troubled in his mind and divided in his heart, uncertain before the riddle of death, oppressed by loneliness while yearning for fellowship, a prey to boredom and disgust. She shows forth the victory of hope over anguish, of fellowship over solitude, of peace over anxiety, of joy and beauty over boredom and

<sup>41</sup> J. AUBRY, *Cooperatori di Dio*, Rome 1977, p. 444.

disgust, of eternal visions over earthly ones, of life over death.”<sup>42</sup>

Dear confreres, let us listen again to the last words of Don Bosco: “The Blessed Virgin Mary will certainly continue to protect our Congregation and our salesian works if we continue to place our trust in her and promote devotion to her.”<sup>43</sup>

Let us promise Don Bosco that we will really act in this way as true sons, imitating his great trust and his ardent gift of self.

I send you my warmest good wishes and joyfully impart to you the blessing of Mary Help of Christians.

FR EGIDIUS VIGANÒ  
*Rector Major*

<sup>42</sup> MC 57.

<sup>43</sup> From Don Bosco’s “Spiritual Testament” in *Scritti Spirituali*, J. AUBRY, vol. 2°, pp. 278-279.