

Gildasio Mendes dos Santos

...as seeing him who is invisible

Preface

On the occasion of the bicentenary of Don Bosco's dream at nine years of age, Father Gildasio Mendes Dos Santos, General Councillor for Social Communication, felt the urgent need to write a book titled "*...as seeing him who is invisible*". The phrase takes the letter to the Hebrews 11:27 as a source of inspiration, in which the biblical author summed up the entire story of Moses; an enlightening reinterpretation of the gospel concept of faith with stimulating reflections. This is a key text for understanding the evolution of Don Bosco's thought, taken up by all of us as a model in the Salesian Constitutions, art. 21.

Through this perspective, persuasively, Father Gildasio retraces the history of Don Bosco's dream at the age of nine, likening it to Moses as a pilgrim on the way to the 'promised land'. Don Bosco's dream, the famous "dream of the three stops" will be revisited and expanded upon in discussions exploring how human potential confirms the iconic re-examination of this visionary experience: at first, the wolves turn into lambs, then some lambs become shepherds, and finally as the number of shepherds grows, these become missionaries, always at the service of the young in other parts of the world. An action oriented towards an immediate service in the presence of the least, abandoned youth, a love for those who suffer, the true essence of his life as the only commandment, the commandment of love.

In this excursus the author re-reads the history of Don Bosco as that of a young priest who takes his first steps first among the Moglia family, then in Chieri, both in Lucia Matta's and Giuseppe Pianta's homes, and must live through a series of indescribable difficulties in a basement and later, as a young priest, must search for a place for his boys, moving from Saint Francis of Assisi to Saint Peter in Chains, to Saint Martin of the Mills, Moretta House, the Filippi field, until the providential encounter with Pancrazio Soave who offers him a place to establish his "laboratory". To Don Bosco's response that it is "Not a laboratory but an oratory", he replies "I don't know the difference between an oratory and a laboratory, but there is a site available. Come and have a look at

it. It belongs to Mr Joseph Pinardi”, and after signing the contract, finally, this long pilgrimage through the desert ends with the arrival at Valdocco, “the promised land”.

The experiences that led Don Bosco to move from one place to another, to experience the same situations that many boys experienced, then led him to put welcome and the sense of offering *hospitality* into practice. This is the concept and the key word with which Father Gildasio provides a biblical and Christian interpretation of “Hospitality”, seeing the human being as a guest, and how everything belongs to God and therefore we are in fraternal communion and solidarity with and for others. This, then is how, in the chapters that follow, he tackles the figure of Don Bosco and his spiritual and educational experience.

In fact, Father Gildasio describes Don Bosco’s work as the “Salesian house of hospitality”, the “essence of Don Bosco’s educational charity”, and qualifies his action as “evangelical and educational hospitality”.

Let me literally quote the text which, in my opinion, is the most significant one for the reinterpretation it makes of Don Bosco and the Oratory at Valdocco:

“Don Bosco’s hospitality is manifested in taking care of others, in welcoming a young orphan, and in caring for him so that he can develop as a human person, loved by God, with the mission of responding to God’s plan in his life.”

Hospitality for Don Bosco, therefore, consists of responsibility and commitment to find the means and resources necessary to build a place to welcome them, provide food, a place to sleep, to play and have fun, books to study, a teacher to teach them a trade, and professional education of the young”.

With no other argument can this evident, undoubted truth be hidden from the Christian; in other words, the originality of the approach is found in this reinterpretation of Don Bosco starting from the two dreams: the dream of the nine-year-old (1824), and the dream of the young priest (1844), as a true or proper pilgrimage similar to that of Moses in search of the ‘promised land’;

walking in the dark supported by faith and therefore “as seeing him who is invisible.”

Why am I speaking about originality in the approach? the foundation of human good lies in “The theology of hospitality”, biblical anthropology in which the human being is a debtor and a guest in this world, therefore everything belongs only and totally to God. He welcomes us and makes us his guests, with the responsibility of being his collaborators in making everyone’s life more human.

Especially foreigners, migrants, homeless individuals, those deprived of family and work. This is one dramatic picture that characterises our world today. From this point of view, it is necessary to be aware of the situation of such a universal drama in every part of the world in which they find themselves on a pilgrimage, wandering in the desert of life in search of acceptance, hospitality, love.

And then there is the quotation Father Gildasio gives repeatedly of the celebration of Holy Mass in the Sacred Heart Church in May 1887, eight months before Don Bosco’s return to the House of the Father, and the tears that meant he interrupted the celebration fifteen times while he contemplated the painful journey of that dream, full of astonishment and gratitude as a kind of ‘flashback’ . Those comforting words of Mary, mother and teacher, “in due course you will understand everything”, are intended to confirm the authenticity of his vocation and mission, and therefore of his holiness in the service of “a closely-knit life project, the service of the young” that our Father realised with “firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue.” (C. 21).

I hope that reading the book can provide inspiration to continue pursuing ‘God’s dream’ as we continue on like Don Bosco “as seeing him who is invisible.”

Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, SDB

Roma, 24 February 2024

Interpreting a dream today

Celebrating the Bicentenary of Don Bosco's "Dream at nine years of age", this book aims to explore the dream young John had when he was nine years old and dreamt once more later as a young priest in Valdocco in 1844.

Later on in life, when he visited Pius IX, he received an obedience from the Pope to set out his memoirs and his educational system in writing, and he would write his famous *Memoirs of the Oratory*.¹

Clearly, for a child, a dream, even if a revelation from God, is not easy to assimilate and quickly understand. It would be interpreted gradually, and would be confirmed throughout all his life experiences, in daily life, verifying the events mentioned in the dream, and the gradual nature of real-time events.

The dream was reinterpreted from a broad perspective: revelation is part of God's plan of love and calling in his life. It is a sign, a message that John Bosco experiences and that he follows, interprets, lives, and which materialises as part of God's project for his life, and as part of the charism and mission that the Holy Spirit entrusts to him. It was precisely this dream that guided his path towards the priesthood and deeply marked his entire life.

We can ask ourselves initially: when did Don Bosco make this dream his own in an explicit and experiential way? The central idea of this book is precisely to answer this question.

The argument underlying this question leads to showing how Don Bosco, from 1844 to 1846, was on a continuous pilgrimage which was at times intense and not without suffering, looking for a place for his young people in Turin so he could make what he glimpsed in the dream become fact. So the dream becomes life, existence, experience in Don Bosco the adult.

¹ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011.

Two questions are fundamental for this research: what does it mean for Don Bosco to have the experience of a pilgrim in continuous search for a place, and after finding it how does he build a friendly environment to welcome and accommodate the poorest young people?

And, consequently, in personally experiencing this search for a place to live and take in his young people, how did Don Bosco develop and integrate the value of hospitality into his life, spirituality and educational praxis?

Don Bosco is a pilgrim on a journey of faith to fulfil God's project of love in his life! From the initial journey in search of a stable place to the fulfilment of his work as an educator and founder, Don Bosco experienced a spiritual path, as a true pilgrimage, akin to Moses, in search of the Salesian Promised Land: Valdocco!

In this vein, we want to present how, starting from the pilgrim's experience, he experiences the gospel of hospitality, founding the Salesian Work as a place of welcome, affection and human and spiritual growth.

Through his life experiences Don Bosco knows well what it means to be a guest and what it means to offer hospitality: being welcomed into a home, having food, feeling the affection of people, receiving educational support, having a place to work... As a boy and as a young man he experienced the gospel value of hospitality first hand; that is why, as a young priest, he sees God in the faces of all those who seek hospitality.

As priest and founder, Don Bosco has a clear understanding of what it means to welcome, love, and educate the poorest. His was a surprising and bright personality, deeply creative and enterprising. He was able to quickly make pastoral choices and establish relationships with the Church, the authorities, and the families of the time.

With great divine inspiration and educational wisdom, he deeply touched his young people through the love of a father; he was a brilliant and tireless educator, a leader capable of attracting the young to collaborate in the mission that God had entrusted to him.

He had a clear goal in everything he did: to do the will of God and fulfil his dream, that of saving souls!

For his boys, for the first Salesians, and for many lay people, Don Bosco was a man of God sent into the world to carry out a great work. His holiness is a marvellous gift for the Church and the world. Even today, in all the Congregations scattered around the world, in the many courtyards and playgrounds of the oratories, the figure of Don Bosco stands tall, full of hope and light for all the young people who represent the future to come.

Like a time spiral, with a chronological and dynamic leap into the nine-year-old John's dream, we will immerse ourselves in his intentions in a reflected inversion like an image in a temporal mirror. Between the dream at nine years of age and the dream of the young priest: mystery and search!

Like Don Bosco we are God's pilgrims!
Pilgrims with the young!

Rome, 24 May 2024

Father Gildasio Mendes, SDB

Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Rome, May 1887. Don Bosco, 8 months before he died

“That morning Don Bosco chose to go down to the church to say Mass at the altar of Mary Help of Christians. No less than fifteen times after he had started the Holy Sacrifice Don Bosco had to stop, overcome by powerful emotion, which caused him to shed *tears*. **‘There appeared before my eyes the scene when at the age of ten I dreamt about the Congregation.** I could actually see and hear my mother and brothers, as they argued about the dream... At that time Our Lady had said, *‘In due time you will understand everything.’*”²

²*Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco (Blessed ... Saint) John Bosco*, vol. XVIII, pp. 288.

Valdocco, Turin, October 1844. Don Bosco, a new priest

“On the second Sunday in October 1844, I had to tell my boys that the Oratory would be moving to Valdocco. But the uncertainty of place, means, and personnel had me really worried. The previous evening I had gone to bed with an uneasy heart.

That night I had **another dream, which seems to be an appendix to the one I had at Becchi when I was nine years old.**”³

³ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 109.

Becchi, Piedmont, 1824. Don Bosco as a young boy, 9 years old,
“It was at that age that I had a dream. All my life this remained deeply impressed on my mind... At that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand her, because I did not know what all this could mean. She then placed her hand on my head and said, “In good time you will understand everything”.⁴

⁴ John Bosco,. *Memoirs of the oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 34

“The Lord has given us Don Bosco as father and teacher.

We study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace.

He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth;

And he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living

“as though he saw him who is invisible”⁵ (C. 21)⁶.

⁵ Cf. Heb 11:27.

⁶ *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St Francis de Saes*, Edizioni S.D.B., Rome 2015, art. 21.

PART ONE

Don Bosco the new priest relives his dream at nine years of age

In 1844, as a new priest in Turin, Don Bosco relives his dream as a nine-year-old in 1824 in a kind of flashback.

“On the second Sunday in October (1844) I had to tell my boys that the Oratory would be moving to Valdocco. But the uncertainty of place, means, and personnel had me really worried. The previous evening I had gone to bed with an uneasy heart. That night I had another dream, which seems to be an appendix to the one I had at Becchi when I was nine years old.”⁷

Gangs of thugs

Turin, 1844 Don Bosco has only recently been ordained a priest. In a district on the outskirts of Valdocco he launches the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales. This is consolidated once it finds a stable location in the Pinardi house, in 1846⁸.

In those years, a large number of poor young people, driven by the need to find work, are arriving in Turin, a city experiencing rapid economic and social development, experiencing great fragility in terms of emotional, religious, and educational aspects.⁹

Don Bosco chooses to dedicate himself completely to them, to the poorest and most abandoned young people who arrive in the city of Turin to work.

⁷ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 109.

⁸ Here we record quotations from the *Memoirs of the Oratory* and the *Biographical Memoirs* without going more deeply into the sources. For a deeper study of the life of the Saint we suggest A. Giraud (ed), *Memorie dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855. Saggio introduttivo e note storiche*, LAS, Roma 2021. T. Bosco (ed.), *San Giovanni Bosco, Memorie*, Elledici, Torino 1985 (with some adjustments to 19th century language in today’s Italian). Or various Studies of the Istituto Storico Salesiano, in its «Ricerche Storiche Salesiane» (LAS).

⁹ For a broad view of the life and mission of Don Bosco in Valdocco, cf. Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, vols. I-II, Rome, LAS. 2009.

They are young people whom no one wants to take care of; a source of fear for the wealthy citizens; but in search of a better future.

“Having recognised that the organised structures of the Church were no longer adequate to address the social and cultural imbalances of the time, inspired by the Catholic charitable tradition, Don Bosco attempted a different interaction with young people uprooted from their original environment.”¹⁰

Wolves and lambs

In the second dream Don Bosco is already an adult, a priest integrated into the Christian community as a priest whose thinking has matured and who has embraced his inner calling with a deep sense of dedication and sacrifice.

Freeing up the dream means having a responsibility for this divine awareness and, with feet firmly planted on the ground, starting to make it happen.

“On the second Sunday in October (1844) I had to tell my boys that the Oratory would be moving to Valdocco. But the uncertainty of place, means, and personnel had me really worried. The previous evening I had gone to bed with an uneasy heart.”¹¹

Don Bosco continues, narrating his second dream, and emphasising:

“I think it advisable to relate it literally. I dreamt that I was standing in the middle of a multitude of wolves, goats and kids, lambs, ewes, rams, dogs, even birds. All together they made a din, a racket, or better, a bedlam to frighten the stoutest heart. I wanted to run away, when a lady very handsomely dressed as a shepherdess signalled me to follow her and accompany that strange flock while she went ahead.”¹²

The pilgrim’s dream

Don Bosco is a real pilgrim who dreams.

The dream situates him in constant and demanding activity. The expression of his inner vitality is energy and enthusiasm. The dream in John Bosco’s heart is like a burning bush: a flame of inner fire, a vital movement that emanates from him, in God.

¹⁰ Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, Vol. II, LAS. Roma, 2009, p. 42.

¹¹ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p.109.

¹² John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 109-110

The realisation of a dream requires concentration and attention to discover the signs of God, every day, in small things, to interpret and give meaning to everything connected to the dream.

But carrying a dream in the heart needs constant search, sometimes means walking in the dark; it is always a case of questioning oneself about what to do to make what the dream has vaguely announced actually happen.

The period that runs from 1844 to 1846 is a time of profound existential questioning about the meaning and, above all, the actual fulfilment of the dream at nine years of age. At a psychological and spiritual level Don Bosco is carrying a true existential burden, moving quickly from one place to another, making important decisions in a short time, dealing with people close to him regarding his intentions, and reaching the point of causing people to doubt his mental health.

Chosen by God for a grand mission, Don Bosco's journey of faith is dynamic, always uphill, experiencing the exodus of leaving his small village of the Becchi and constantly searching for a place for himself and his young people.

From the perspective of faith: desert and the road ahead!

A road through the desert

The direction Don Bosco embarked on parallels Moses' quest for the Promised Land.¹³ Both Moses and Don Bosco have two great missions which God wanted and had chosen for them.

Pilgrimage, when viewed as a form of care and rediscovery at its core, is the most profound way for human beings to comprehend the human experience.

If you are walking along a wet, muddy road, wouldn't you consider veering off course for a few steps to explore and discover where it goes? At the end, on arrival, you will be amazed by the tough journey and pleased with the effort.

Just like in a struggle, as he grapples with things along the way, Don Bosco undertakes a long pilgrimage in search of his land, a promised destination, a fixed place, a finally solid ground that represents the ultimate boundary.

¹³Jacques Loew. *Pregghiera e Vita*. Grande Modelli. Edizione Morcellana. Brescia. 1991

In the name of absolute truth, like Moses Don Bosco crosses the “desert” reaching the border and arriving at the gospel model for taking care of his neighbour¹⁴

¹⁴Fr Morand Wirth in his *Don Bosco et la Bible*, presents a study on the influence and texts of the Old and New Testament in the life of Don Bosco, pp. 46-85.

The Shepherdess

The second dream has a simple and concrete sequence to it. It quickly opens up to the new, to what is to come, and to what needs to be accomplished: the animals transform into lambs, grow larger, new lambs arrive which help transform the other animals that still need to be transformed... Everything is pedagogical! Everything is revealed, showing a horizon, a promise and a grand future.

In this scenario, another important point is noted that will forever mark Don Bosco and clarify his mission. Something wonderful happens at this point in the dream: *“Lambs that took care of the others...”*, *“wonderful”*, writes Don Bosco: *“Then something wonderful happened. Many of the lambs were transformed into shepherds, who as they grew took care of the others. As the number of shepherds became great, they split up and went to other places to gather other strange animals and guide them into other folds.”*¹⁵

The dream will be shared with others, many others. His dream, which is God’s dream for him, will be the dream of many other people who will come to help him in his mission. Journeying together! This is the secret of all those who walk with God.

The next part of the dream continues with another very precious and revealing indication for Don Bosco from the Shepherdess: a Church with an inscription dedicated to Mary.

We are at one of the culminating points of the dream: he confirms that Mary is guiding him clearly and surely. He is called to take care of young people who are poor, among whom will emerge those who will take care of and collaborate in the mission (his collaborators, the future Salesians), and one glimpses the Church dedicated to Mary, from where the mission will expand and the Glory of the Mother of the Son of God will be known.

“I wanted to be off because it seemed to me time to celebrate Mass; but the shepherdess invited me to look to the south. I looked and saw a field sown with maize, potatoes, cabbages, beetroot, lettuce, and many other vegetables. ‘Look again’, she said to me. I looked again

¹⁵ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, pp. 110.

And saw a wondrously big church. An orchestra and music, both instrumental and vocal, were inviting me to sing Mass. Inside the church hung a white banner on which was written in huge letters, 'Hic domus mea, inde gloria mea'.

As my dream continued, I wanted to ask the shepherdess where I was. And I wanted to know the meaning of that journey with its halts, the house, the church, then the other church. 'You will understand everything when you see in fact with your bodily eyes what you are looking at now with the eyes of your mind.' Thinking that I was awake, I said, 'I see clearly, and I see with my bodily eyes. I know where I'm going and what I'm doing.'

But at that moment the bell of the Church of St Francis sounded the Ave Maria, and I woke up.¹⁶

Impossible... wonderful

The dream contains the vision and the necessary and natural questions that arise, as if asking the Shepherdess: "And now? What do all these animals, this church and everything mean?"

Questions that reveal a stance before the Shepherdess, saying: "Yes, all this is wonderful. Come to You, trust in You. How can I carry all this out?"

There is still much to do... There is a huge gap between dream and reality. Don Bosco, from a perspective of faith, needs to make this shift to achieve what is most challenging and sacrificial: turning the dream into reality! He needs to carry a dream in silence like a seed that ripens...

He need to carry the dream of a nine-year-old child in his heart, and later in the depths of Don Bosco the priest.

All of that has implications for his interpretation of faith. It is not he himself who has to interpret the dream, to dream with his feet on the ground, his head focused on real questions that he must give an answer to, regarding the situation of young people, youngsters who are lost and crying out for help.

How much does a dream weigh?

A dream is always planning for something new, placing the individual before the unpredictable, the imaginary, the symbolic. All this psychological and spiritual reality has a strong impact on the human psyche, on emotions, on how to interpret life.

¹⁶ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p.110.

And to that we have to add the spiritual weight: how does one bear this new reality that has yet to be achieved? How does one live one's ordinary life while keeping something intact within oneself that is not yet visible, not yet realised, and make it concrete?

Who can carry this burden? Only the individual and no one else. The individual and God. It is clear that Don Bosco shared his concern, perhaps his apprehensions and his spiritual search with his great spiritual director, Father Cafasso.

But Don Bosco himself knew he could go much further. There was a very thin border between what he had visualised in his dream, between what he was achieving and what he still had to accomplish, just as there is between madness and a brilliant idea.

Night as clear as day

The silence of the heart and soul, for someone called by God to carry out a great mission, often takes place in the darkness of the night, searching for the faint flame of a lantern. It often becomes a whirlwind of images and voices passing through the mind and heart. God is the invisible leaven in this difficult exercise of gifted love, a breath that marks destiny. Don Bosco now knows that he is confronted with something sent from Heaven.

This psycho-spiritual tension increases and reaches a peak, at which point the individual experiences an existential crisis. How can he bring to fruition a project that takes him to his limits, without being certain that it is truly the will of God? Because a great dream also requires great actions!

The secret of the future

It is interesting to note the sequence of verbs the Saint uses as he narrates the second dream.

Don Bosco expresses his latent inner state in experiencing this dream and the stages of the psycho-spiritual dynamics of the dream narrative: observing, listening, accompanying, following, being worn out, running away, and transforming. He speaks of the uncertainty of place, means and personnel. It

is something quite concrete. It follows a simple but realistic logic. What should he do, by what means, with what people to carry out this task?

“This dream lasted most of the night. I saw it all in great detail. But at the time I understood little of its meaning since I put little faith in it. Later, together with another dream, it served as a blueprint for my decisions.”¹⁷

Reading the dream in its entirety, we see that the uncertainty does not simply concern the search for a physical place for his boys, but something more, concerning what God asks and shows him in the dream. What disturbs him is the future mission that God must reveal to him in secret.

Grasped by the invisible

It is interesting to note the verb “worn out”. Within all these symbolic images, both for their visual intensity, and for their surprising movement reaching a crescendo and unexpected conclusion, there is a significant psychological effect on his affective and cognitive process of gathering information and attempting to understand.

The dream is like an immense torrent invading our inner universe, with rapid actions, quick transformations, in a continuous crescendo, which emotionally exhausts us.

The protagonist in the dream is Don Bosco. He is not watching from afar, as if there is something distant going on. He is called to act, to intervene, to do something to calm the conflict. Furthermore, he experiences the physical and emotional powerlessness of not being able to resolve the situation.

How should he calm all these children who were squabbling? Beyond the physical limitation there is another that must be faced, but at a deeper level, (spiritual and existential): how to take care of these young people? What mission does God have for him?

“We wandered from place to place making three stations or stops. Each place we stopped many of the animals were turned into lambs, and their number continually grew. After we had walked a long way I found myself in a field where all the animals grazed and gambolled

¹⁷ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 111.

*together and none made attacks on the others But the uncertainty of place, means and personnel had me really worried.*¹⁸

Lonely pilgrim of Grace

There is a difficulty but necessary question for this young priest facing a mission: “*How can I ensure that all this comes true?*”

The answer, a consoling one, is very simple but still full of mystery: “*You will understand when...* ”.

In practice Don Bosco, completely alone, will be carrying the weight of this dream, of a great promise and huge project.

A lonely journey to be borne in silence, pain and yet in joy, in a dream that will blossom in God’s time.

Through his personal experience of faith Don Bosco is called to interpret his life, the events of his daily life, giving them meaning. It is a total abandonment to a continuous pilgrimage in search through day and night.

None of what happens in his life lies beyond his universe of interpretation of faith: from the people he meets to the paths that open up; from the difficulties he encounters to the steps to be taken to begin the Congregation. Everything is interpreted from a deep faith and trust in God and in his grace.

His task was to guard this revelation between God and himself. This intimate agreement was the only thing he knew deep down that he could not disclose. Here, Don Bosco embarks on an inner and solitary journey, entering a mystery where only he, in prayer and in interpretation through his faith in God, can find open windows of hope and comfort.

In his faith, he knows that his dream is also the dream of others like Moses, Joseph...

¹⁸ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 110.

PART TWO

“Go! The road will reveal itself.”

Twenty years after his dream as a nine-year-old, Don Bosco dreams again, in the light of reality... the invisible.

The common man's thoughts are potent and focused, like sharp arrows directed by a strong will given by Grace. Don Bosco embarks on a journey towards the promised land of Valdocco, much like Moses set out towards his own Promised Land.

This similarity highlights above all a Biblical vision that unites these two extraordinary figures.

The journey, as highlighted in the dream, the key word of the spiritual viaticum, causes Don Bosco's vocation to be an entrusting of himself to God, a sign that challenges the boundless space of the desert.

One of the biblical personalities who most resembles Don Bosco is Moses. Both have a journey of faith to undertake and embody within themselves like a promise: the mission to lead a people to a predestined place. Faith will lead them towards the action exerted by God.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, we read that:

“By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible.”¹⁹

Interestingly, we find in Don Bosco's biography a passage referring to the people of God who were leaving Egypt. There emerges here a very interesting detail about Don Bosco's interest in this passage, which is closely related to the theme of the departure of God's people from Egypt, the pilgrimage of God's people seeking lodging, a land, and hospitality.

“These dreams brought great comfort to the great Servant of God. “I recall”, Joseph Buzzezzetti said, “that sometimes our dear Don Bosco, alluding to the Israelites leaving Egypt, journeying through the desert and subsequently building their camps in various places,

¹⁹ Cf. Heb 11:27.

*encouraged us to hope that sooner or later God would also give us a Promised Land to settle down.*²⁰

Don Bosco faces all the events of life with great faith, seeking to give meaning to everything that appears on his journey.

He was not a man who willingly shared his personal experience with God with others; he was a pilgrim who had learned to walk in the desert of life with profound inner freedom.

What the desert teaches

Biblically speaking, the desert is the place of purification, freedom, the place where God speaks to the heart and educates those whom he chooses for a special mission.

God educates through the unknown, the unpredictable. God prepares the individual to enter the “pedagogy of the desert”, that is, to walk in uncertainty following a logic of faith in which he or she confronts God directly as he speaks along the journey, in the naked and boundless space of constant inner and outer movement.

Faith matures and grows in the desert. The desert leads man into the imperceptible, into the unknown of things, for it is only through the attainment of the true limit within himself that man is revealed.

The desert is the place of prayer, inner freedom, surrender in undertaking the long journey that often reveals itself without knowing the destination.

Here lies the greatness of Don Bosco. He is not afraid of this desert. He does not run away.

Through Divine Grace he reads the presence of God in the unknown, in uncertainty, in hostile criticism within the Church of his time, in physical frailty and illness.

Moses listened to the cry of his people.

Don Bosco listened to the cry of his poor boys.

²⁰ G.B. Lemoyne, *Vita di San Giovanni Bosco*, vol. I - I - Nuova Edizione ed. Don Angelo Amadei, SEI, Turin, 1983, 278.

Like Moses, Don Bosco is called by God to a great and challenging mission. Against all hope Don Bosco will continue on this journey.

He will go on pilgrimage to a promised land for the young.

All this will require great trust in God's promise.

A nest for the sparrows

Don Bosco was rather worried! This is how Father Lemonye describes Don Bosco, who is looking for a place for the many boys that keep coming...

“All the activities just described made the little festive oratory prosper ever more during 1843. Don Bosco, however, was rather worried about the limited space available to him and his boys. The boys were now too many and it was no longer feasible for them to play, even for a short while, in the square before St. Francis of Assisi Church...”

Considering that this Church was central, with many masses, various priests, the influx of citizens... it was not a suitable place for this activity which was not accepted by a good part of society.

“The boys therefore were in the people's way and a source of annoyance. Nor would the city police tolerate any noisy assembly in the nearby upper-class residential district, where the streets were very narrow. For this reason Don Bosco would go out to the square and adjacent street corners, both to lead the boys to his meetings and later to dismiss them on their way home...”²¹

There among a crowd of boys, on his own, the dream and the reality harshly clashed.

“He is mad!”

In Don Bosco's journey there is the challenge of facing alone, with God, the mystery which is inherent to all who embark on the journey of obeying the will of God, a mystery that gradually unfolds and can lead to misunderstanding. It is true that he had had good spiritual directors, especially Father Joseph Cafasso who accompanied him on his spiritual journey. However, who could enter into the depths of his restless heart, bearer of an incomprehensible dream?

²¹ G.B. Lemoyne. *Biographical Memoirs*, vol. II, pp. 107.

There was nothing else left but to carry on in mystery with deep faith and trust.

Instead of finding understanding, or at least the opportunity not to be disturbed in his spiritual quest to fulfil the dream, the opposite happens. Don Bosco's personal experience of believing and following that dream left some people, even those close to him, very concerned about his way of interpreting the reality around him.

This attitude of his, considered to be a mistaken one by his closest collaborators, is described in his biography by Father Lemoyne.

In 1846, *"As word got around that Don Bosco's work was being opposed on all sides, some of his friends, rather than encourage him to continue, tried to persuade him to give up the project... Several who had attended the seminary and the Convitto with him attempted to persuade him, at least, to change the methods of his apostolate.*

'You are compromising the good name of the priesthood,' they told him. 'How?' Don Bosco asked.

*'With your embarrassing ways; you lower yourself in playing with these urchins and letting them traipse after you so boisterously. Turin has never before seen anything like this; this runs utterly contrary to the set ways of the serious-minded and reserved clergy that we have always had here.'*²²

Lemoyne, writing about Don Bosco's psychological situation, says that even Father Borel, a great friend of his, was very worried, even thinking that he might have a mental disorder.

"Father Borel, who fully shared Don Bosco's ideals, ended up by telling him in the presence of Father Sebastian Pacchiotti:

'Dear Don Bosco, lest we risk losing all, let us be content with saving at least part of our project. Let us wait for a more favorable time. For the present, let us dismiss the oratory boys we now have and keep only some twenty of the younger ones. While we continue to look after these few privately, God will find some way for us to do more and will provide us with suitable premises and other means.'

Confident of his own course, Don Bosco firmly replied:

No, no! In His mercy the Lord has begun this work and He must complete it. You know how hard it has been for us, Father, to get many of these boys to give up their evil ways, and

²² G.B. Lemoyne. *Biographical Memoirs*, vol. II, pp. 319-320.

how well they have behaved since. I don't see how we can abandon them now to themselves, and expose them to the dangers of the world, to their great spiritual harm.'

'But where can we gather them?'

'In the oratory.'

'But where is this oratory?'

'For me this is no problem! I see a church, a building, and a playground. It is real and I can see it.'

'Where are all these things?' the good priest asked.

*'I can't tell you exactly now,' Don Bosco admitted, 'but they certainly do exist. I can see them and they will be ours.'*²³

This exchange profoundly disturbs Don Bosco's great friend. For every question he puts to Don Bosco he receives a precise answer. And to Don Bosco's replies, he poses a new question, to which he receives another firm answer, leaving Father Borel somewhat distressed and certainly confused and frightened.

"On hearing these words Father Borel was deeply distressed, as he told some older Salesians several years later. It seemed to him that what Don Bosco had said made it fairly certain that he was mentally ill.

'Poor Don Bosco!' he sighed. 'Truly his mind is gone.'

*Then, unable to keep back the wave of sorrow that surged in his heart, he came up to him, gave him a parting kiss and walked away with deep-felt tears. Father Pacchiotti, too, looked at him with pity, muttered, 'Poor Don Bosco!' and went away sadly."*²⁴

Light along the way

With all these reactions from friends and faithful, Don Bosco continues his personal journey of faith interpretation of the dream and works to make it a reality. He follows up every clue with determination, to find concrete signs in everyday life to bring the direction he has taken to fulfilment.

Worried and anxious he immerses himself in this silence, sinking into its profound mystery in a connection as laborious and uncertain as an uphill road.

²³ G.B. Lemoyne. *Biographical Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 320.

²⁴ G.B. Lemoyne. *Biographical Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 320.

These are natural doubts that cross the heart of those who are called to a great mission in God's name.

In the depths of his own being, Don Bosco interprets his journey and these new circumstances with an attitude of deep *faith*, the trust that God is with him and that he must continue on his path, trying to interpret everything in the light of Divine trust.

Illness

Incomprehension. Criticism. Uncertainty. Illness!

Don Bosco, by now a priest for some years, carrying within himself the huge challenge of finding a place in Turin for his boys, suddenly falls ill.

At the beginning of July 1846, returning on Sunday from the Oratory to the Refuge, he fainted and had to go to bed with a fever. From the severity, course, and outcome of the illness it was considered to be a serious lung affection, perhaps bronchio-pneumonia. Once the immediate serious crisis was over, a long convalescence in his birthplace was necessary... From Castelnuovo Don Bosco, he kept up a regular contact by letter with Father Borel. At the end of a long convalescence of almost three months, on 3 November 1846 he settled with his mother in the house they had rented in June.²⁵

Exhausted and forced into immobility, even in his illness Don Bosco is constantly thinking of what he must do for his boys: the mission cannot be abandoned.

What would have been unveiled before his eyes remains concealed, and it is uncertain what breathtaking views, what dramatic encounters awaited those who would be involved with them. Only someone able to rise above the human being and ascend to celestial heights can look inside and perhaps even pass through them.

Strength from above

Despite all the uncertainties and difficulties, Don Bosco continued to follow this path of inner silence fuelled only by trust in God and in himself. This is why he wrote little about himself. He didn't want to talk much about his inner

²⁵ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011, pp 143-146, passim.

life. What he wrote and reported is only a small part of the great mosaic of his faith experience.

In his spiritual life, he deeply relied on the guidance of Father Cafasso, who was the first to offer his contribution. His trusting relationship with his spiritual director helped him in the process of discernment and in the important decisions of his life.

When he begins founding the Congregation, bringing together the small group of the first Salesians, Don Bosco opens up a vast horizon to a new all-embracing reality: founding a Congregation to serve the poorest youth. What an undertaking!

Only thanks to trust and will can the soul and body immerse themselves in this supernatural adventure that was completely beyond human logic. This trust gives him security and serenity in the spiritual journey as a Priest and Founder of the Salesian Congregation.

Don Bosco lives from trust. In his role as a father, educator and founder, along with his Salesians and young people, he initiates a great movement for the education of youth.

To trust is to live the Gospel path of the Kingdom of God, fulfil his will, practise the values of the Gospel, and embrace the path of holiness. Trust generates coherent and clear attitudes. Trust makes everything that Don Bosco did credible. In this way a network of relationships based on truth is created, demonstrating that credibility stems from a deep attitude of trust.

Don Bosco's trust in God arises from deep abandonment to his plan, with the certainty of placing his own life at the service of a mission greater than himself. His entrusting himself is fulfilled in the realities of daily life, in the new situations he encounters.

In the midst of all these difficulties, he experiences the certainty in everyday life that God is confirming the works of his grace.

With a great sense of concreteness and a determined will to fulfil God's dream in his life, he seeks out young people around Turin, welcoming one, two, and then many other poor boys. Every boy's arrival at the Oratory in Valdocco is a certainty that God is present, and that his work will grow abundantly.

PART THREE

Like a swarm in flight

The constant search for a safe place for his boys is a great uncertainty, a vast ocean of thoughts bearing as much weight as the sky and the wind woven into a sombre cloak.

But despite everything, perseverance prevails and he continues.

“On the second Sunday of October, feast of the maternity of Mary, I broke the news to my youngsters that the Oratory would be moving to the Refuge.”²⁶

As they move from one place to another, Don Bosco brings certain things with him and his boys, like a crucifix, liturgical material, and above all his profound sadness as a pilgrim in search of a safe place.

He is a pilgrim who devoutly seeks something sacred, further afield, like a knight in a foreign land who travels in search of God so that the sky may be coloured anew.

“...We spent seven months there (the Little Hospital, St Philomena’s). We thought that we had found heaven on earth; then we had to leave our beloved asylum and go look for another. ... Imagine us then, on a July Sunday in 1845, making our way laden with benches, kneelers, candlesticks, some chairs, crucifixes, and pictures large and small. Everyone carried some object suited to his strength. We must have looked like emigrants on the move...”²⁷

Pietro Braido says:

“The opening of the Little Hospital on 1st of August 1845 had already deprived the chaplains of the use of premises months earlier, previously assigned to the oratory: ‘It was necessary to find another place’ Don Bosco wrote.”²⁸

²⁶ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 111.

²⁷ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 114.

²⁸ Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, Istituto Storico Salesiano, Roma - Studi 20, vol. I, LAS, Roma, 2009, p. 182.

Braido continues:

*“The wandering Oratory had begun, in subsequent locations initially used simply for catechism or only for recreation: St Peter in Chains, the Dora Mills, the Moretta house, the Filippi field, until the last, Valdocco.”*²⁹

From reading his *Memoirs of the Oratory*, we see that Don Bosco begins to tell his “people” that a moment of surprise would arrive in their life. It is 1841.

*“Hardly had I registered at the Convitto of St Francis, when I met at once a crowd of boys who followed me in the streets and the squares and even into the sacristy of the church attached to the institute. But I could not take direct care of them since I had no premises.”*³⁰

Don Bosco begins the first Oratory at the *Convitto ecclesiastico* (Ecclesiastical College) of St Francis of Assisi and remains there, surprisingly, until 1844:

*“This is how things normally ran at the Oratory for nearly three years, up to the end of October 1844. Meanwhile, new things, changes, and even tribulations were being prepared by Divine Providence.”*³¹

While on the one hand Don Bosco puts his heart into starting an idea of an Oratory, as a young priest, there are other job proposals for him:

*“During my three years at the Convitto, he often invited me to help at the sacred ceremonies, hear confessions, or preach for him. Thus I already knew and was somewhat familiar with my field of work.”*³²

In that same year, besides the difficulty for Don Bosco in devoting himself to the young and finding a safe place for them, there was also the commitment to respond to different invitations and carry out other duties for the Convitto.

In truth, Don Bosco saw that a very difficult time would soon begin. A dramatic moment for him and his boys:

²⁹ Ibid. pp. 182-183.

³⁰ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 102.

³¹ Ibid p. 107.

³² Ibid p. 109.

“On the second Sunday in October 1844, I had to tell my boys that the Oratory would be moving to Valdocco. But the uncertainty of place, means, and personnel had me really worried. The previous evening I had gone to bed with an uneasy heart. That night I had another dream, which seems to be an appendix to the one I had at Becchi when I was nine years old.”³³

Everything happens quickly: the arrival at a place with his boys and the hope of staying in that place. However, very soon more sad news arrives: it is not possible to stay for various reasons. Another exodus is being prepared for this priest accompanied by many boys through the streets of Turin.

A safe place and the mission he is entrusted with

A real response to this great suffering finally arrives: a safe place, a true consolation. This is the transfer of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales to Valdocco Don Bosco narrates this decisive and historic moment, revealing his profound feelings full of emotion and hope.

While all this was going on, we came to the last Sunday on which I was allowed to keep the Oratory in the field (5 April 1846). I said nothing at all, but everybody knew how troubled and worried I was. On that evening as I ran my eyes over the crowd of children playing, I thought of the rich harvest awaiting my priestly ministry. With no one to help me, my energy gone, my health undermined, with no idea where I could gather my boys in the future, I was very disturbed.

I withdrew to one side, and as I walked alone I began to cry, perhaps for the first time. As I walked I looked up to heaven and cried out, “My God, why don't you show me where you want me to gather these children? Oh, let me know! Oh, show me what I must do!”³⁴

When I had finished saying this, a man called Pancrazio Soave came up. He stammered as he asked me, ‘Is it true that you're looking for a site for a laboratory?’

‘Not a laboratory, but an oratory.’

I don't know the difference between an oratory and a laboratory, but there's a site available. Come and have a look at it. Mr Joseph Pinardi, the owner, is an honest man. Come and you'll get a real bargain.’

³³ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 111.

³⁴ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011, pp. 129-130.

... On the following Sunday, 12 April, which was Easter Sunday, all the church furniture and the equipment for recreation were brought there, and we went to take possession of our new place.’³⁵

In looking for a place for his growing number of boys by day, says Father Braido, various moments stand out that Don Bosco experiences as a pilgrim. ‘For Mass and other ceremonies, Don Bosco went to another church with the boys with a preference for some of them, as the *Cenno Storico* [Historical Outline] tells us. ‘On Sundays I took them to Sassi, sometimes to Madonna di Campagna, and sometimes to the Capuchins del Monte, or sometimes to the Superga.’³⁶

We can also see from this the harshness of the situations he faced.

‘The brief presence at St Peter in Chains, interrupted, according to Don Bosco, also by the acrimonious denunciation of the chaplain, former Capuchin Father Giuseppe Tesio (1777-1845).’³⁷

The tireless search sometimes presented difficult choices that locked in the continual attempts to have a stable and lasting place:

‘The choice for an Oratory, in fact, had been maturing for several months also due to the increasing impossibility of combining his mission among the boys with his commitment as chaplain to the Little Hospital of St Philomena. Among other things, the travails of the wandering oratory coincided with Don Bosco’s increasingly precarious health. The Marchioness Barolo – in Rome for the approval of her religious Institutes – was close to him with maternal sensitivity, using the good offices of Father Borel, whom she immediately engaged with the task of looking after the health of the priest from Castelnuovo, admittedly precarious due to overwork, something she was also responsible for. In a letter on 3 January 1846, Father Borel: the day after Epiphany, Don Bosco would take a period of rest. But his stay with his friend, the parish priest of Sassi, a suburb of Turin, did not resolve the problem since the boys continued to seek him out, wearing out his lungs with their confessions.’³⁸

³⁵ Ibid. p. 132.

³⁶ Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, Istituto Storico Salesiano, Roma - Studi 20, vol. I, LAS, Roma, 2009, p. 183.

³⁷ Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, Istituto Storico Salesiano, Roma - Studi 20, vol. I, LAS, Roma, 2009, p. 183.

³⁸ Ibid p. 186.

Don Bosco's stubbornness and self-denial knew no limits. Choices had to be made also based on the needs of his boys who had top priority for him. Every attempt by Marchioness Barolo to 'own' someone as charismatic and capable as Don Bosco was in vain.

*An end to the 'professional' relationship was inevitable for Don Bosco: "I can tell you right now" he told the resolute Marchioness. "You have money and will have no trouble in finding as many priests as you want for your institutes. It's not the same with the poor youngsters. If I turn my back on them at his time, all I've been doing for them now will go up in smoke."*³⁹

Don Bosco, who experienced first hand the drama of searching for a place to live, eat... He too had suffered to find shelter to sleep and study... is empathetic, he is close to his boys who know his struggle. But his wisdom as a pilgrim always locates him on the path of seeking the will of God. The dream comes true along the journey.

³⁹ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 127 though not in the precise words indicated above.

PART FOUR

“My name is John”

Don Bosco’s pilgrim dimension already begins in his childhood. In the inner dynamics of the child and teenager, there is the harsh reality of the loss and absence of his father, which he experiences when still a child.⁴⁰

He is aware of the human situation and its difficult history. In his decisive and emotional meeting with Father Calosso, he says with transparency and a great sense of reality and courage:

*“My name is John Bosco. My father died when I was very young. My mother is a widow with a family of five to support. I’ve learned to read, and to write a little.”*⁴¹

As a teenager, Don Bosco is a pilgrim seeking a father figure, a spiritual reference point to grow and mature.

From a simple and poor family, he carries with him the experience of famine, of difficult times, especially after the death of his father.

*“But how were we to live? What were we to eat? How could we pay the rent and supply the needs of the many children who constantly asked for bread, shoes, clothes, or shirts, which they needed to go to work? From home we had brought some wine, corn, beans, wheat, and so forth. To meet initial expenses, I had sold some pieces of land and a vineyard.”*⁴²

With cap in hand

One episode in particular would mark his life.

It's February 1828, at dawn and the hills are covered in snow, in one of the coldest winters of the time. Due to conflicts with his stepbrother Anthony, his poor mother Margaret is forced to send her young son John to look for work at the farms in neighbouring villages. A fairly common practice for the time, but not in the dead of winter, when field work is at a standstill and no

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 31-32.

⁴¹ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 43.

⁴² Ibid p. 147.

one is looking for labour, available at a cheap price: the farmhands are hired only at the end of March.

John is thirteen years old and is crying as he leaves the house where he was born. After wandering through the hills, he arrives at the farmstead of the Moglias, relatives of his mother.

The conversation is heart-wrenching.

“Patience” says Luigi Moglia, who is unbending, “Go back home.

” Please, please, Mr Moglia! Take me on, even without paying me. Look,. I will sit here on the ground and I will not be leaving.⁴³”

So John, seated on the ground, starts picking up a few twigs in the yard, as if to show his willingness to work without complaining, and cries as only a child knows how to cry. At that point the man’s wife feels moved by what she sees and intercedes for him.

“Take him, Luigi, we will try to keep him for a few days!”

He would remain for almost two years as a model farmhand who see his ‘wage’ increase to 50 lire per year, because his services were valuable.

How many times he must have seen himself, when welcoming his poor crying and lost boys, with his cap in hand and his heart wounded, without money, affections, and support, and cried once more, without letting himself be seen, hiding those tears in a welcoming and generous smile.

A pilgrim also as a student!

In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* he recounts his difficulty in having to walk a long distance every day to go to school.

“Since I had done my studies privately and was starting a public school with a new teacher, these things were for me a disconcerting experience. Practically, I had to begin my Italian grammar all over before I could start studying Latin. For some time, I walked from home to school every day. But that was nearly impossible during the harsh winter.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibidem

⁴⁴ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 49

With great simplicity and honesty he confesses that it was very tough and almost impossible to continue those very demanding daily round trips.

“I had to make four trips back and forth, covering twelve and a half miles daily.”⁴⁵

John Bosco the pilgrim eventually finds a place to stay, because his health would not have withstood so much effort.

I found lodgings with an upright man, a tailor, John Roberto; he had a taste for singing, especially plain chant.”⁴⁶

A teenager in town

John is now sixteen and he arrives in Chieri, a small city close to Turin, to study. He recounts his search for a place, certainly with the help of Mamma Margaret.

“After the loss of so much time, it was finally decided to send me to Chieri, where I could continue seriously with my schooling. That was in 1830. One who is raised in the backwoods and has never seen anything beyond a few small country villages is easily impressed by any little novelty [to be found in a larger city]. I lodged with a woman from my own town, Lucy Matta, a widow with one son who was moving to the city to help him and keep all eye on him.”⁴⁷

John, had been brought up by his mother to live simply, with great faith and generosity. In recounting his experiences in Chieri, he tries not to talk about himself, the sacrifice and uncertainties he experienced in this city.

As he tells us of his exodus, in search of a place to live, the situation that John Bosco is experiencing is dramatic, speaking from a human perspective. A young lad who is determined to go as far as the impossible to study and become a priest. He is determined and flexible, courageous and humble.

“That year a cousin and friend of the Bosco family from the same hamlet of Morialdo, Giuseppe Pianta, had decided to go and open a cafe and liquor shop in Chieri. Margaret

⁴⁵ Ibid p. 49.

⁴⁶ Ibid p. 49.

⁴⁷ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011. It should say 1831. The school year began on 1 November, with a three-day retreat and ended with the feast of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga (21 June) pp. 77-78.

*seized the opportunity and asked him to accept John in his house, and Pianta offered the boy the chance to be a waiter in his shop.*⁴⁸

John Bosco agreed to do the simplest and humblest tasks in exchange for a place to sleep and eat.

“This was the year during which he had to undergo his greatest privations even as regards his already meagre and coarse meals. It has been reported that a Mr. Ceppi, an iron dealer in Chieri, pressed upon Pianta to speed things up and to provide shelter for John. True or not, the fact is that John was soon lodged with his cousin for whom he became a night watchman and performed various household chores. For this he received no pay, but he did have the free time he wanted for his studies. Besides, his cousin gave him free lodging and soup While Mamma Margaret provided the boy with bread and other food. John’s bed was a narrow strip over a small oven that was used for baking pastry. John reached it with a small ladder. But when he stretched out in these confined quarters his feet dangled beyond the thin straw-filled pallet and over the edge of the oven (BM, I, 216).”⁴⁹

It really was a very narrow space for sleeping in. A very poor little nook and cranny. But John Bosco has a dream in his heart that starkly contrasts with reality.

The faith of this young pilgrim helps him interpret life as a long journey. In his heart he learns the wonderful and essential gift for living: hospitality, a dwelling, a refuge!

A heart without limits

A central point we are presenting in this book is that Don Bosco had a profound experience of the pilgrim’s journey in search of a safe and stable place, both psychologically and spiritually.

In effect he was drawing up a broad map of his pilgrim’s journey, going from place to place in search of the fulfilment of God’s plans for him.

While undertaking this pilgrimage of deep faith, he experiences two sets of circumstances directly linked to each other: he looks for a place and, when he finds it, he wants to make it a place of hospitality. He is a pilgrim in search of

⁴⁸ Marco Bay, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri - 1831-1841*, LAS, Roma, 2010, p. 58.

⁴⁹ Marco Bay, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri - 1831-1841*, LAS, Roma, 2010, p. 59.

a place to live, where he can take care of his boys, start an oratory, and carry out God's plan.

In personal, real, challenging everyday experience, between living as a pilgrim and then as an educator who welcomes, cares, and offers hospitality, Don Bosco experiences all of this through faith, his interpretation of God's action found in the Bible,⁵⁰ and the way in which some Biblical figures (like Moses and Abraham) have experienced this situation.

A place in the heart

With his profound personal experience of searching for hospitality, John Bosco becomes someone who provides hospitality. From this experience as a pilgrim in search of a place to live, study, work, and welcome his young people; from his experience of welcoming the poor young people who come to Turin in search of work, a home, and bread; from his testimony as a pilgrim seeking God to fulfil a dream... comes his true belief: to love is to offer hospitality, to educate is to create an atmosphere of hospitality.

The historical set of circumstances in which Don Bosco lived was marked by poverty, hardship, famine, family tragedies, economic and political instability, and young people migrating from rural areas to seek work in big cities.

At Valdocco, Don Bosco's experience is one of tirelessly searching for a safe place to provide hospitality for his poor boys. There he opens a house of hospitality based on welcome, trust, reciprocity, love, and self-giving. The Valdocco setting is initially poor in terms of facilities, but deeply rich in hospitality.

The first Salesians growing up in the Oratory at Valdocco live a very simple life, working, taking care of the house, receiving some support and help from the first collaborators. Hospitality is at the heart of their lives.

This dynamic of Don Bosco the pilgrim is important to better understand how he educates the Salesians to be missionaries, to go out, to found new houses, to be pilgrims with the young.

⁵⁰ For a study on the influence of the Word of God on Don Bosco's life, see Fr Morand Wirth, *Don Bosco et la Bible*, where he presents a study on the influence and on the texts of the Old and New Testament used by the Saint, pp. 46-85

For him, hospitality is not just a social and charitable action. On the contrary: his way of welcoming reveals his spirituality deeply transformed by the experience of his own life, of a young person seeking a place to live and study.

Don Bosco deeply incorporates the foundational experience of being a pilgrim and guest in this world in his life and faith. Educating is giving hospitality to young poor people who are nevertheless pilgrims in life.

From a biblical perspective the individual who seeks a place to live is a true stranger, foreigner. The people of God were a foreign people. Don Bosco's boys were foreigners.

Behind the condition of being a guest, there is a profound existential reality: feeling like a foreigner, that is having to learn about new people, the place, living conditions, adapting to the new rules of the place, giving up certain personal things, and, above all, knowing how to let go, feeling that life is fragile, that we depend on others.

PART FIVE

The unsettling voice of the young

The genesis of Don Bosco's experience as an educator originates in practical terms from this great truth: who is the other for him? What does it mean when a poor young person looks you in the eyes? These are questions seeking meaning that interprets reality starting from faith and one's view of God.

What or who is a guest?

The guest is essentially a stranger, a foreigner, someone coming from outside.⁵¹

The genesis of biblical hospitality is found in the history of the people of God, who leave their land to enter a new land; therefore, in the Bible, the human condition is the condition of the stranger, the foreigner. *"The foreigner in the Bible is above all an anthropological figure."*⁵²

In the Bible, the foreigner is the orphan, the widow, the hungry, the one who has nothing to wear, the sick, the prisoner.⁵³

The other, in their weakness, their silence, their nothingness, their impoverishment and need, is a profound challenge for me. *"Therefore, the most disturbing voice is that of the victim whose silence continues to question beyond their own existence."*⁵⁴

When John Bosco was nine years old, he is forcefully confronted in his dream by the stark reality of others: there are youngsters engaging in physical fights, shouting hurtful words, but also undergoing a remarkable transformation from being like wolves to becoming gentle like lambs.

⁵¹Carmine di Sante. *Lo straniero nella Bibbia. Saggio sull'ospitalità*. Editrice Città Aperta.

⁵²Carmine di Sante. *Teologia dell'Ospitalità*. Ed. Marco dal Corso. *Biblioteca di Teologia Contemporanea. Queriniana*. Brescia. 2019, p. 40

⁵³Cf. Mt. 25:31-46.

⁵⁴Carmine di Sante, *Teologia dell'Ospitalità*. Ed. Marco dal Corso. *Biblioteca di Teologia Contemporanea. Queriniana*. Brescia. 2019, p. 41.

Deeply touched by the reality of others, Don Bosco's entire life becomes a search for humanity. He is passionate about the individual, the deep meaning of living, loving, and being happy.

But fear? Never

This encounter with reality that leads him to question human nature begins early at home. At home John as a young boy experiences the harsh reality of losing his father, the difficulties with his older brother, the need to leave home to study.

In his moving account in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* about the emotional and social impact experienced upon the death of his father, we can see his ability to empathise with his mother.

*He "died, aged only thirty-four, on 12 May 1817. I do not know how I reacted on that sad occasion. One thing only do I remember, and it is my earliest memory. We were all going out from the room where he had died, and I insisted on staying behind. My grieving mother addressed me, 'Come, John, come with me,' 'If papa's not coming, I don't want to come,' I answered. 'My poor son,' my mother replied, 'come with me; you no longer have a father.'"*⁵⁵

Don Bosco tells how she broke down and started crying. Son and mother are closely bound in a deeply loving empathy.

*"Having said this, she broke down and started crying as she took me by the hand and led me away. I began crying too because she was crying. At that age I could not really understand what a tragedy had fallen on us in our father's death."*⁵⁶

Do Bosco experiences human fragility and the fragility of life: the death of a father still young, the harsh reality of losing an emotional reference for the mother and children, the difficulty of a family that must now manage life without a head of the household.

Two experiences of loss!

⁵⁵ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁶ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 32,

*“This event threw the whole family into difficulty. Five people had to be supported. The crops failed that year because of a drought[and that was our only source of income. The prices of foodstuffs soared.”*⁵⁷

It is now up to his mother to run the family. Mamma Margaret, a woman of great faith, work ethic, sacrifice and keen human sensitivity, embraces the new reality of widowhood with tenderness and determination.

Little John learns from Mamma Margaret how to be sensitive towards humanity. He learns from her how to put himself in someone else’s shoes. It was not difficult to understand what it could mean for a widowed mother to take care of all the children while not ignoring the emotional and physical management of life.

Whether it is in the faces of the abandoned and fearful young children in the dream, or in the reality of family life and in his own experience of losing a parent, Don Bosco learns the foundational importance of not being afraid, but of seeking the face and fragility of the other without fear.

In biblical language the other who challenges me is God’s message for me. Carmine di Sante quotes Lévinas in his text on the genesis of hospitality: *“In this blatant nudity, he interprets the original place of the appearance of the Absolute and the indelible signs of its presence.”*⁵⁸

Don Bosco cultivates a strong spiritual attitude in his growth as a pilgrim is seeking hospitality, focusing on reaching out to others, especially the vulnerable, the disadvantaged, and the neglected.

Don Bosco’s encounter with the poor and fragile Bartholomew Garelli is a true archetype of his pedagogy. In this encounter, considered the beginning of the Salesian Oratory, we find the greatness of the Saint of the young who recognises humanity in the young Bartholomew – in his face the face of God, in his presence as a pilgrim in search of home and bread, in his response which is the voice of God. Don Bosco meets himself in Bartholomew Garelli,

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁸ Carmine di Sante. “Teologia dell’Ospitalità”. Ed. Marco dal Corso. *Biblioteca di Teologia Contemporanea. Queriniana*. Brescia. 2019, p. 41.

remembers his life without a dad, relives his journey as a pilgrim in search of hospitality.

“My good friend, what’s your name?”

“My name’s Bartholomew Garelli” the boy replies, timidly.

“Where are you from?”

“Asti.”

“Is your father alive?”

“No, my father’s dead.”

“And your mother?”

“My mother’s dead too.”

“How old are you?”

“I’m sixteen.”

“Can you read and write?”

“I don’t know anything.”

“Have you made your first communion?”

“Not yet.”⁵⁹

This encounter reveals the spiritual dynamic of Don Bosco as a pilgrim: in the other, he finds himself; Bartholomew is the echo of love in his fatherly heart. He sees God in the other! He enters into the spiritual dynamic in which his “self” his “ego” his “being” is transformed into “being for the other”.

Along his spiritual journey, living and loving the poorest, Don Bosco dedicates himself intensely to others. Day and night we find a Don Bosco who intensely and passionately seeks the other.

For Don Bosco, educating is taking care of others, because God dwells in the human being! For him the other is every young person, especially the poorest of them.

Total care

Don Bosco defends the dignity of his poor boys with all his strength.

The fact of having firsthand experience of life’s fragility, what it means to be a guest, leads him to deeply integrate the care of others into his being and spirituality. A poor boy is a guest in this world. This is a fundamental ethic for him.

⁵⁹ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, p. 103-104.

His writings reflect the deep conviction of an educator who sees God in poor young people. This is why he said with great conviction, *“It is enough for them to be young for me to love them.”*

Don Bosco’s hospitality is integral, complete: it is care for the individual in their entirety. For him, every young person must be loved because they are a child of God and must be happy.

Called by God to educate poor young people, he walks with them to find a safe place. He offers himself and gives of himself to young people because they are the true image of God.

A wounded people

Faced with the reality of loss, of the search for a place to live, the human individual is free to make choices: to face up to everything to find their own place in the world or to abandon reality and flee from it.

In the Bible, God – through hospitality – educates his people to experience their humanity in a profound way: *“If God reveals himself to Israel and chooses it as a people, it is to open up to this people – and through this people to humanity – the human being as a hospitable human being.”*⁶⁰

Based on this, biblical anthropology is profoundly constructed by the figure of the human being taken in and made welcome.

According to the Bible, responsibility is responding to the other who was not chosen: every other person who crosses our path, asks for solidarity and empathy.

We have various parables of Jesus in the New Testament expressing hospitable humanity.

The parable of the Good Samaritan⁶¹ for example, expresses the categorical importance of taking care of others with compassion and dignity because the presence of God resides in the man who is robbed, injured and abandoned.

⁶⁰ Carmine di Sante. “Teologia dell’Ospitalità”. Ed. Marco dal Corso. *Biblioteca di Teologia Contemporanea. Queriniana*. Brescia. 2019, p. 45.

⁶¹ Cf. Lk 10:25-37.

The Good Samaritan found himself in the other; he experienced God's love in unlimited proximity and solidarity.

The fragile human being, the face of the young poor person seeking love, the individual who is hungry and searching for a place to live... In all of this, Don Bosco is interpreting the dream he had at nine years of age and is giving meaning to the second part of the dream fulfilled several years later.

In fact he is seeking to fulfil his mission which finds meaning in the other. Following the example of Jesus the Good Shepherd⁶² who cares for his sheep with love and compassion, Don Bosco, deeply sensitive to the situation of the youth of his time, seeks out youngsters, contemplates their face, feels their heart, and seeks a place for them to live and be fulfilled...

He is someone able to interpret the reality around him with great critical ability and foresight. For this reason he sees the sociological, cultural and political context in which young people live. Analysing Don Bosco's work, we see how he is able to conduct a careful analysis of youth demographic data. He knows how to make a coherent diagnosis of their living conditions and interprets this with a gaze of faith in a broader Christian view of things.

Don Bosco goes deep because, as a priest, starting from a horizon of faith in God, he has a very clear gospel perspective on the value of life, of the human person, of the strength of their talents, and the importance of promoting youth involvement and activity.

Don Bosco, attentive to the reality of the poor youth in Turin, seeks a space to welcome and educate them, a place that allows them to sleep, eat, play, pray, sing, and learn a trade.

“Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his first Oratory which serves as a model; it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves.”⁶³

⁶² Cf. Jn 10:1-21.

⁶³ *Salesian Constitutions no. 40.*

A door that is always open

The biblical basis of hospitality starts with the awareness that the people of God are landless and without a place to live. This is therefore a biblical anthropological approach: the human being – as a human guest – shows solidarity with others.

This is the fundamental condition: feeling like guests opens us up to the search for and meaning of the other in our lives. By finding ourselves and God, we encounter the other. This path of moving out of oneself towards the other constitutes a profound spiritual journey.

God is revealed and promises a land. In giving the land to his people, God educates them to live in mutual brotherhood. God categorically ensures three things above all: that he loves his people, promises them the promised land, and that this land always belongs to God.

Living hospitality is therefore what defines the identity of the person who believes in God, who knows that everything one has is a gift from God and, precisely for this reason, belongs to him.

“But if my very identity is hospitality, It follows, then, that my own individual, original and unique identity is an ethical fact: I am not just what I am, a brutal fact, but I am what I am willing to become in the complex relationship with the other, where hospitality plays a significant role. Our identity is not a given, it is a task, a moral task. Living is not a random event; it is responding to a call, precisely opening the door to the guest, allowing oneself to be unsettled by the tension between law and justice, but also finding in the welcome of the guest the sense of blessing in our lives.”⁶⁴

In God’s pedagogy as he dialogues with his people, he who must set out on a journey is the one who learns to be a guest in the land that God has given him; thus, the one who inhabits it is considered a “stranger, a foreigner”.

The experience of living faith as the people of God is always dynamic, creative, open, and free. Being foreigners does not mean not belonging. On the contrary: it means belonging completely to God because God is a guide who loves, cares for, walks with us.

⁶⁴ Placido Sgroi. “Teologia dell’Ospitalità”. Ed. Marco dal Corso. *Biblioteca di Teologia Contemporanea. Queriniana*. Brescia. 2019, p. 84.

By always putting God at the centre of our being, the profound significance of the guest – who does not possess material things – sees belonging as linked to a gift.

As we know from the Bible, idolatry was the great temptation of God's people. The idolatry of the self leads to an attitude of selfishness, individualism, materialism, and indifference toward others. It is a way of living that can destroy the sense of community, of being a people of God, of faithfulness to his word. The idolatrous human being seeks power and dominion: such a person is individualistic, their land is theirs alone, they fear life as a pilgrimage, and they are closed to the gift of hospitality.

The antidote to idolatry is hospitality!

Bound to selfishness, the people were at risk of seeking other gods, living in idolatry, and forsaking the true God, Yahweh.

Among the various forms of idolatry there is always power, money and ethical relativism. God's pedagogy proposes a completely different path: living as a guest requires great inner freedom, obedience to God, and fidelity to his call because only he is the truth.

From this perspective, Valdocco is the house of the human being who loves. In the educational experience of Valdocco, Don Bosco tackles the human aspect: for him, in every young person there is a heart that loves and wants to be loved; every boy looks for a father who can take care of him.

Valdocco becomes the hospice of charity; a home of welcome where young people find food, friendship, God, and a reason to live.

We are all guests in this world

Guided by a biblical perspective,⁶⁵ we can say that the people of God lived their pilgrimage in constant search of a stable place. God chooses his people during the journey. God reveals himself, loves, and accompanies his people along the way. In this process of always being on the move, a fundamental aspect emerges in the way the people of God live their spirituality: the people experience hospitality. It is God himself who educates his people to live a life of faith in a continuous experience of openness towards others, as a true education of the heart.

Firstly, God gives his people a land where they can live, grow, and multiply. But there is a condition: the land belongs to God. It does not belong to the people. At this point, a clear request already emerges that the entire people of God must accept. A request that touches on the human condition and the way in which people relate to themselves, to others and to the land..

This is valid for all time and for every human being: if the earth is not ours, we are all guests in this universe. This is the starting point of hospitality. God establishes an eternal covenant of love, is faithful, and gives us everything, but the earth is not ours. We are “guests”.

Human brotherhood stems from this attitude: life is a gift. The universe with all the things created by God is a gift. Gratuitousness is the expression of the freedom to be and share gifts because everything belongs to God.

⁶⁵ *“The five books of Deuteronomy in practice recount the foundation of hospitality. By creating Adam and Eve and placing them in the garden of Eden, God reveals his love as Creator, offering them the freedom to grow and multiply, to know the law of good and evil, and to understand that their condition is one of being guests. So hospitality begins with the story of Creation. This dynamic continues subsequently in the other four books of Deuteronomy. God educates his people to live deeply as guests in their own land. It is in this situation that the people of God are loved and experience God revealing himself. These texts are unified and coherent narratives that appear in the five books of the Bible (Pentateuch). It is an intuitive narrative of the human being as human who offers hospitality”* (Carmine di Sante). *Per una teologia Biblica dell’ospitalità. Statuto epistemologico ed etico, nella teologia dell’ospitalità*, p. 44.

Every person is sacred

Biblically, God give his people land, but the land is God's, not the people's. This means that God is the Lord of everything and that his sons and daughters are called to live on earth with a great sense of gratitude, freedom, brotherhood, and solidarity with others.

This is the foundation of charity to others: we are all brothers and sisters, created by God to live in this world, but we must not feel we are the owners of things, because they are all gifts from God and everything belongs to him. In Don Bosco's spiritual writings, in his teachings, in the Salesian Constitutions,⁶⁶ he always emphasises that the Salesian Congregation is a gift of God to young people.

All that we are and have is by God's initiative.

“With a feeling of humble gratitude we believe that the Society of St Francis de Sales came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God.⁶⁷ Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth, ‘that part of human society which is so exposed and yet so rich in promise’.”

For Don Bosco, life is a gift and we must place it at the service of others in this world, saying: *“The Lord has placed us in this world for others”*.

Behind this view of things lies an attitude of profound and convinced faith: we are passengers in this world. We came here for a mission. Everything belongs to God.

In Don Bosco's spirituality, this truth is very clear:

“He loves us, cares for us calls us and accompanies us in this world to carry out a mission and he awaits us in eternity.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Salesian Constitutions*, no. 1.

⁶⁷ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesian Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 30.

⁶⁸ The teachings of Don Bosco's spiritual life are deeply rooted in biblical spirituality, Church doctrine, and tradition. Cf. *San Giovanni Bosco. Insegnamenti di vita spirituale. Un'antologia*. Introduction and notes by Aldo Giraud. LAS. Roma, 2013.

We, his creatures, are “guests” in this world. Those who deeply feel this way learn to love and to welcome others.

Collaborators of Creation

Don Bosco developed a spirituality whose centrality is very clear: God looks after, accompanies, sees, welcomes, and loves.

In all his writings and teachings, he has a fundamental and founding idea: we are just passing through this world to fulfil a mission, and after this pilgrimage, we will reach paradise. This is a profound conviction of his, part of everything the Saint lives and teaches: life is transitory, we are here only temporarily. This is why it is important to live well, be happy, and place ourselves at the service of others.

Don Bosco often talked about self-denial, simplicity, poverty, and the fragility of life. This existential condition places us before the fragility and transience of life. Acknowledging that we are guests in this world means living with great detachment from self and others.

One element that emerges from viewpoint of being guests before God is our way of seeing and relating to others. If we are guests, if we are not the owners of this land, this earth, even the other is a guest and finds themselves in the same situation as I am. I am not superior to the other because what I have is not entirely mine.

Everything belongs to God: the gift of life, family, the land, nature, material goods, accomplishments, everything is a gift from God and everything belongs to him.

This perspective places us in an attitude of humility and equality with others. There is an urgency in welcoming the other: the poor, the migrants, the sick, the needy, because they and I are one.

This attitude is a starting point for a social ethic of openness and commitment to others.

“There is also a place for you!”

In the New Testament this dynamic returns, because the person is always the same in their psychodynamics.

Jesus, in his preaching, calls the people to leave behind the idolising of power, money, ethical relativism, and selfishness to live faithful to God with all their hearts. The beatitudes are a true and proper antidote to individualism and selfishness.

Jesus applies God's pedagogy in a very original way: we are all pilgrims in this world. An ethics of personal freedom comes from this perspective. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is an archetype of this view of God revealed in the other, in the weakest, in the stranger.

Jesus, aware that everything belongs to God, speaks about the simplicity of life.

“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.”⁶⁹

“The truth will set you free” Jesus said. And the truth passes through him, through the Father's promise, because God reveals his Wisdom to the simple, to the humble, and to the poor.

In his pedagogy, God is always loving and concrete. This is why the viewpoint of hospitality is a true synthesis of the life of those who believe in God.

Hospitality expresses true faith, the freedom to live in this world without clinging to the things of this world, to practise the spirituality of welcoming, of fraternal sharing, of caring for others who suffer, of living daily life as a gift and gratuitousness. This obviously requires commitment in practice, a change in mentality, a continuous placing of oneself at the service of others.

Identity is a true exercise of Christian life. It is a way of being that is always found in the other, in the brother or sister.. From this point of view fraternity becomes a natural consequence of believing in God. This absolutely does not mean that the individual loses their uniqueness, subjectivity, and autonomy.

The experience of faith in God enriches all these aspects because they are experienced in encounters with others. The thing that concretely defines my

⁶⁹ Cf. Mt 6:26-29.

life of faith is my experience of charity and communion with others. I cannot learn and develop my life of faith without the presence of the other.

The other, then, becomes my being in God

“We are guests because only the relationship with the other frees us from the prison of a closed and anonymous identity and gives back our irreplaceable uniqueness, whose name is responsibility. Our originality, our irreducible individuality, does not arise from an act of self-identification, but from the fact that an irreplaceable responsibility for the other is assigned to me.”⁷⁰

Hence the importance and responsibility of humankind, of the Christian, which is revealed in the human fulfilment of two halves that are held together in balance: charity and hospitality, obtaining a concept of the world that is at the same time in line with reality and spirituality.

⁷⁰ Placido SgROI. “Teologia dell’Ospitalità”. Ed. Marco dal Corso. *Biblioteca di Teologia Contemporanea. Queriniana*. Brescia. 2019, p. 82.

PART SIX

An evangelical and educative hospitality

Don Bosco's hospitality is manifested in taking care of others, in welcoming a young orphan, and in caring for him so that he can develop as a human person, loved by God, with the mission of responding to God's plan in his life.

For him, taking care of the body and soul of a poor, young stranger is a task that touches the heart, that is, love and responsibility for others.

Hospitality for Don Bosco, therefore, consists of responsibility and commitment to find the means and resources necessary to build a place to welcome them, provide food, a place to sleep, to play and have fun, books to study, a teacher to teach them a trade.

Hospitality is manifested in social responsibility, creating an educational environment in which good Christians and collaborators are involved in the human, Christian, and vocational education of young people.

Hospitality translates into preparing the young people welcomed within its walls to read, write, learn a trade, to enter society and find a job to support their own lives.

Hospitality, for him, is also establishing a joyful atmosphere where educators are friends of the young people, where relationships are built on trust and familiarity, where young people learn to play musical instruments, to sing, to perform, to experience the liturgy in its beauty and spiritual magnificence.

A Salesian house of hospitality!

Starting from his personal experience as a pilgrim and the one who establishes this environment of educational hospitality, ingeniously Don Bosco creates social friendship as the basis of his educational system and the awareness that each of us is a gift from God, unique.

Only in relationship does the individual develop and learn to live in fraternal community. From this fundamental element springs the great sense of placing life at the service of others.

At the psychological and spiritual level we can say that Don Bosco, despite his strong temperament, empties himself to let the other become part of himself. Hospitality for Don Bosco is the foundation of brotherly love, the giving of oneself to others. His love knows no bounds. Various studies have sought to highlight this unconditional love for the young, the full sense of welcoming diversity, and the absence of judgement of the people who stood before him.

In the Oratory, despite there being many young people of different ages, origins, and personalities, he knew how to love each one in such a way as to make them feel special.

In an imaginary circle, he understood how to connect with the other's emotional depth of soul. Each of them represented a page of a different book, and because every human being has a reality that must be listened to.

Don Bosco believes and love. He loves and believes. This gives him the ability to naturally integrate the grace of uniting what is deeply human with what is deeply holy.

“Don Bosco loved us in a unique way”

One of the most vivid and strong testimonies of how Don Bosco loved comes from Father Paul Albera, his second successor. In one of his circular letters addressed to Salesians, he describes how he felt Don Bosco's love:

“Don Bosco loved us in a unique way that was typically his: we felt an irresistible charm about him which words cannot express or make understandable to those who have not had the opportunity to experience it.”⁷¹

Father Albera goes on to say:

“His love attracted, conquered and transformed our hearts. He attracted us to himself with the fullness of supernatural love that burned in his heart. Its flames absorbed and unified the little sparks of the same love stirred in our hearts by God's hand.”⁷²

⁷¹*Lettere Circolari ai Salesiani*, Torino 1922

⁷² Ibid.

The hospitality Don Bosco showed is deeply marked by great love, the love of a father, the love of a friend, the love of one who spends his life for others.

When Don Bosco fell seriously ill while still a young priest, his boys begin a veritable novena of prayers and personal sacrifices for his recovery. We see at this moment the great expression of love that heals, the loyal love the boys had for Don Bosco.

He captivates his boys, plays and sings with them, accompanies them in their formation, prays together with them creating a family spirit. The boys, consequently, can only be deeply touched by this way of being: a priest who puts himself completely at their service and who enjoys being with them.

Love is the hearth of the home

In Don Bosco's experience of hospitality with his boys, love is a hearth that welcomes, bread that is shared, a space inhabited by the heart. Because Don Bosco's hospitality does not only consist of welcoming young people to a place where they can sleep and eat. It is all of this, but it is much more: it is the hospitality of a father's affection, of loving welcome, of the act of one who is faithful, and who establishes the presence of Divine Providence in the observable universe.

Don Bosco's profound way of loving defines his ability to create an atmosphere of hospitality, to prepare better ground. He creates bonds with his boys and opens up a horizon of possibilities and growth for them to become Christian individuals in the service of others in society.

Like a good shepherd who loves and gives his life for his boys

The image of the Good Shepherd,⁷³ which is associated with Don Bosco as the Father and Teacher of the young, expresses the true agape love of the Saint for his boys.

Psalm 23 says that the Lord who is my shepherd "*prepares a table before me...*". This welcoming rite shows love given, which brings happiness to others in God.

⁷³ Cf. Jn 10:11-18.

Starting from his spiritual experience, Don Bosco develops a real school of hospitality, of active love in Valdocco.

Deeply marked by this vision of welcoming young people in the Salesian house, in his writings he develops this Gospel perspective of the pilgrim in search of God, of the guest who creates an environment for welcoming and loving.

Salesian pedagogy is identified with all his actions, and his actions with his personality; ultimately, Don Bosco's interiority focuses on his heart. "Education is a matter of the heart." A heart that loves and welcomes as God welcomes.

Valdocco would be a Salesian house of hospitality for the Salesians. Don Bosco educates his Salesians and young people to live in the school of Gospel hospitality.

Every young person dreams and has the right to a home, a school, an education, to learn a trade, regardless of their social status.

For Don Bosco, living the Gospel by welcoming, accommodating and creating a place and environment for young people is the great message of his calling. Don Bosco firmly believes that in every young person, especially the poorest, there is a need for hospitality, because it is universal and evangelical.

The first Salesian missionaries who left for the Americas were deeply marked by this vision. The Salesian Charism becomes the foundation in welcoming, in creating a youth centre where the essence of listening becomes a model of teaching.

Valdocco is the mother house of hospitality. The Salesian charism, God's gift to the Church, comes from this house; it is God's gift to the young.

Valdocco is the source of the charism and our option today and always.

For us, having a deep desire for the growth of our charismatic identity means returning to the roots of the Salesian spirit, to our Salesian sources, to the Valdocco option,⁷⁴ to our origins.

⁷⁴ Pascual Chavez Villanueva. *Il Carisma Salesiano*. Rassegna CNOS, settembre-dicembre 2022, p. 39.

From Valdocco, a charismatic source of a dream, of an experience, of a gift, we walk with the young and with the times, towards eternity. Valdocco is the house of the dream: the dream that inspires dreaming⁷⁵ yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Don Bosco contemplated the glory of God and taught us that we are in this world to serve others.

We are in this world as guests, on a pilgrimage towards another place, heaven: where God is Father and welcomes us because we are guests in his Eternal Home.

⁷⁵ Ángel Fernández Artime, Strenna 2024. *“The dream that makes us dream.” A heart that transforms “wolves” into “lambs”*. Valdocco, 2023.

PART SEVEN

With the sun in our face

Don Bosco believes that everything is created by God and we are his creatures, nothing is ours. We are guests of God on this earth and in this world.

He is deeply convinced that God loves every young person and that everyone is called to respond generously to this gift, to develop as a free person in God and be profoundly happy.

Gratuitousness is God's gift and for this reason it is necessary to live with joy, responding to this gift: doing our duty, working, living in joy.

For Don Bosco, life is transient and passes quickly; we are in this world for a mission: we must put our heart and our whole life into the things of God, because everything is transient: places, people, human and material goods, but God remains.

Do everything for the glory of God!

Don Bosco often used the expression “*Do everything for the glory of God.*”

In his grand vision of building the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, his conviction that the Basilica was for the Glory of God was the result of a very strong imagination.

When it comes to Don Bosco's spirituality, many scholars of the Saint of the youth are careful to maintain a close connection between the deeply human and the deeply holy.

Don Bosco's holiness is an understanding that goes straight to the heart.

He lived his spirituality in everyday life, in simple prayers, the prayers of the people, experiencing the value of joy as an expression of holiness.

A very realistic description of Don Bosco's holiness was given by Bishop Carlo Chesis:

“Don Bosco practised the ‘martyrdom of daily work’, building his holiness step by step, amid many human adversities and abundant supernatural aids. It was not a holiness that just happened, but was built day after day with peasant-like constancy. Not even the

*martyrdom of blood just happens. It is the outcome of a martyrdom already celebrated in life through charity for God and one's neighbour.*⁷⁶

Don Bosco, as a pilgrim of God, concretely lived out what Jesus taught about the criterion for the salvation of a believer:

*“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”*⁷⁷

His spirituality was loving, welcoming and concrete!

Don Bosco's holiness

There are several studies on the holiness of Don Bosco.⁷⁸ We are not about to enter into the theological and canonical issues of the Saint's holiness, but I would like to emphasise some important aspects of his holiness in the light of what we have reflected upon in this text.

Don Bosco, a pilgrim, who in his search for God and his glory experiences the human and spiritual reality of being a guest and therefore is hospitable in turn, begins a Congregation to accommodate young people in everything that they are.

We can speak about Don Bosco's holiness by considering his experience as a child, who carries a dream in his heart. He studies, lives, suffers, and loves in order to fulfil that dream: his continuous search as a pilgrim to the promised land of Valdocco; the creation of a spirituality of welcome and hospitality for his poor young people; his holiness lived and witnessed.

So, let's start here with Don Bosco's holiness, starting from his faith in God as a pilgrim, guest, and saint who gave hospitality to the very poor. This is the greatest and most significant expression of his holiness.

⁷⁶ Marco Bay, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri - 1831-1841*, LAS, Roma, 2010, Prefazione di S.E. Mons. Carlo Chesis - SDB - Vescovo della Diocesi di Civitavecchia, p. 7.

⁷⁷ Cf. Mt 25:35-36.

⁷⁸ Andrea Bozzolo. *La Santità di Don Bosco. Teresio Bosco. Don Bosco visto da vicino*. Editrice Elle di C. Leumann - Torino, 1996.

Don Bosco practised his spirituality with a profound sense of Church. He lives in the Church, starting from the Doctrine and teachings of the Church. From various studies on Don Bosco's holiness, we know that he was a man of profound prayer life, intense pastoral work, and dedicated service to others.⁷⁹

The rays of his light

Don Bosco was a man of the Church!

His holiness has been recognised by the Church! Basically, holiness is the gift of a person who believes in God, lives and practises faith, hope, and charity. The document *Lumen Gentium* presents the Church's theology on holiness: the universal vocation to holiness that is fundamental for the life and mission of the whole Church.

The central point of holiness is that it is the perfection of charity, that is, the deepest and most true expression of the mystery of love and faith, lived in the heart of a person. It is the free act of faith of a person who loves God wholeheartedly and seeks to live out this gift in service to others.

The holiness of Don Bosco was deeply lived in the grace of God, in response to the gift of the Holy Spirit in his life, in the experience of the mystery of the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ, in his immense charity for the poorest, in his great love for Mary and for the Church. *Holiness as the perfection of charity: holiness is characterised as the perfection of charity.*⁸⁰

The young priest, originally from the Becchi, lives holiness in an original way with his young people, and in Valdocco he generates a spirit of life and action rooted in the Gospel which later becomes Salesian spirituality and pedagogy. This original gift of Don Bosco's holiness is a gift for the Church and for the world.

Don Bosco's holiness was a lifelong thing: it was built up along the path of faith that he walked, on his way of responding to the signs of God, on his

⁷⁹ Eugenio Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*.

⁸⁰ *Lumen Gentium* no. 39.

charism, on his culture; we could say it was built up on his identity as a peasant, a simple man, an artist, a communicator, a founder.

Don Bosco lived a divine gift, embodied in his life and in his personal circumstances.

Don Bosco received the gift of the Salesian Charism from God, through the Holy Spirit. So to understand Don Bosco's holiness within the immense and rich mosaic of the Saints, it is important to emphasise the gift he received as a Holy founder.

Don Bosco's holiness, recognised by the Church, is a wonderful gift. It is an official attestation of his virtues, of the Salesian Charism and of the entire Salesian Family. This holiness has been testified to by people who knew Don Bosco.

Until his last breath

Don Bosco is the Saint of pastoral charity. The reading of his apostolic life clearly reveals that he completely dedicated himself to his boys. "*My last breath will be for my poor boys*", the Saint said.

At Valdocco, Don Bosco lived an experience of holiness from his heart as a Good Shepherd.

Don Bosco welcomes, loves, cares, sets the table, provides food, knows how to listen to his little lambs, takes care of abandoned youth, shows the right path, lives in profound joy.

Don Bosco's holiness is deeply bound up with caring for others, living this path in complete Divine trust.

In a setting where young individuals embraced Christian life with simplicity, they were able to cultivate a deep connection to the Eucharist by participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and showing devotion to Our Lady and St Francis de Sales.

The Church teaches that holiness is above all a response to the gift of God's love. It is not a personal conquest. It is not a categorical moral commitment

or a psychological stance of self-improvement. On the contrary it is a response to God's love, to his grace experienced in faith, hope, and charity.

Don Bosco had a profound love for Jesus Christ. He followed him and gave his life for him. He carried the mystery of Christ's Cross in his life. He had been the good servant who ultimately offered everything for him through his love and dedication to the young.

In faith Don Bosco lived and participated in the Mystery of the Life, Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, of his Redemption. His holiness is the expression of his life lived in the mystery of love of the Redeeming Christ.

This holiness attracted his Salesians and his boys. It is an everyday holiness. It matures in his way of relating, educating, guiding his pupils, making difficult decisions, surrendering to Divine Providence while seeking the Glory of God.

Don Bosco lived his holiness at home with his young people, in the daily activities of the Oratory, in his travels, in his writings, in his immense work of founding the Salesian Congregation.

Don Bosco lived a simple, practical, profound and joyful kind of holiness. This is why he left a deep impression on everyone: from Father Rua, his successor, to the young people of the Oratory.

Holiness as charity in practice is the mature expression and visible and concrete element of living faith and hope.

Charity is the fruit of holiness which enriches the life of the Church.

PART EIGHT

“We knew him...”

Many Salesians, young people, and lay people got to know Don Bosco up close: they witnessed his way of being, living, praying, loving, educating, and dedicating his life to serving his boys.

Surely they all had something to tell about Don Bosco’s holiness. Here I include some testimonies from Don Bosco’s canonisation process, as reported by Father Teresio Bosco⁸¹.

Bishop John Baptist Bertagna emphasised how life in God was at the core of the Saint’s life: “*Don Bosco always seemed to speak only of spiritual matters and the Glory of God in every circumstance.*”⁸²

Mr John Villa, a pastry chef, who surely experienced Don Bosco’s fatherly love, recalls that “*Don Bosco’s method of education was entirely paternal. To put it briefly, he was a loving father in the midst of his sons.*”⁸³

Immediately after, in all simplicity, he mentions a companion of his who had known Don Bosco:

“*Everyone knew that he walked in God’s presence. One day, a companion of mine told me that one could not deny, in contemplating Don Bosco in all his outward demeanour, that he was always, so to speak, face to face with God.*”⁸⁴

John Bisio, who entered the Oratory at 26 years of age and became a merchant, was by Don Bosco’s side for seven years; he declared that he owed everything to the Saint, and speaking about Paradise, he used to say:

“*Several times I heard him say, “What a pleasure What a pleasure it will be when we are all in Paradise”. Je was my spiritual director for eleven years, and if I am now what I am in terms of my soul and position, I owe it all to Don Bosco.*”⁸⁵

⁸¹ Teresio Bosco, *Don Bosco visto da vicino*, Editrice Elle di Ci. Leumann - Torino, 1996.

⁸² Ibid p. 52.

⁸³ Ibid p. 59.

⁸⁴ Ibid p. 60.

⁸⁵ Teresio Bosco, *Don Bosco visto da vicino*, Editrice Elle di Ci. Leumann - Torino, 1996. p. 63.

A farmer, George Moglia, when meeting with Don Bosco for the last time, testified with great simplicity how the Saint entrusted everything to God:

“Don Bosco died a few years ago at the Oratory in Valdocco. I saw him some months prior to that. I found him sitting in a large armchair, exhausted but patient and youthful. When I asked him how he was he told me, “Eh, we are in God’s hands.”⁸⁶

Father John Cagliero, Bishop and Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia, testifies in his will to Don Bosco’s trust in Divine Providence:

“In the 35 years that I was by his side I don’t remember having seen him even for a single moment discouraged, annoyed, or worried about the debts he was often burdened with. He would often say, “Divine Providence is great, and as it cares for the birds of the air, so it will care for my boys.”⁸⁷

Michael Rua, Salesian priest, Don Bosco’s successor, testifies to Don Bosco’s way of contemplating God.

“Sometimes, accompanying him late in the evening as we went to rest, he would stop to contemplate the starry sky, and he would detain us there, oblivious of his tiredness, to talk about its immensity, omnipotence, and about divine wisdom. At other times, in the countryside, he made us observe the beauty of the fields, meadows, the abundance of fruits, and spoke to us about the goodness and providence of God.”⁸⁸

A decisive contribution to Don Bosco’s Cause was made by Father Philip Rinaldi, who on 29 September 1926, writing to the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Rites, attested among other things:

“And here, Your eminence, allow me to add my inner conviction that the Venerable was truly a man of God, continually united to God in prayer.”⁸⁹

G.B. Lemoyne, Don Bosco’s biographer, writes:

“The Divine power, which breaks forth silently and almost hidden, in Don Bosco’s life is such that not everyone perceives it. He manifested the extraordinary with such simplicity that it seemed almost of milder splendour, less abstruse to our poor nature.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibid p. 35.

⁸⁷ Ibid p. 125.

⁸⁸ Teresio Bosco, *Don Bosco visto da vicino*, Editrice Elle di Ci. Leumann - Torino, 1996. p. 168

⁸⁹ *Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco (Blessed ... Saint) John Bosco*, p.. 167.

⁹⁰ Ibid p. 157.

These testimonies given for Don Bosco's Canonisation express a holiness lived and shared with people. Don Bosco was very simple, transparent, and concrete in his way of living faith in the service of others.

The statements of everyone who knew Don Bosco confirm how he walked the path of holiness through his personal pilgrimage, his way of living faith as a good Samaritan who seeks out lost youth and welcomes them with his hospitality.

From the dream at nine years of age until the end of his life, Don Bosco walked with his feet on the ground, with his heart in God and with his boys. He walked contemplating the face of each individual and contemplating the face of God.

In the Salesian Constitutions⁹¹ we find a precious article that sums up who Don Bosco was.

“He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; And he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living ‘as seeing him who is invisible.’”

Unless the seed dies

“That morning Don Bosco chose to go down to the church to say Mass at the altar of Mary Help of Christians. No less than fifteen times after he had started the Holy Sacrifice Don Bosco had to stop, overcome by powerful emotion, which caused him to shed tears.... There appeared before my eyes the scene when at the age of ten I dreamt about the Congregation. I could actually see and hear my mother and brothers, as they argued about the dream... At that time Our Lady had said, ‘In due time you will understand everything’⁹²”.

We have very few pieces of information about the last Eucharistic celebration held in 1887 in Rome at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. What really happened in those numerous pauses interrupted by uncontrollable weeping is unknown.

Without a doubt that moment represents a fundamental link between past and future. A temporal ring connects the dream at nine years of age with the one that followed when he was twenty-nine years old. Don Bosco paused during

⁹¹ Cf. no. 21.

⁹² *Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco (Blessed ... Saint) John Bosco*, vol. XVIII, p. 288.

the holy Mass a good fifteen times; failing to celebrate Mass because he was overcome by emotion.

What matters is his silence, speaking through his invisible gestures, expressing the project that God had entrusted him with.

Don Bosco, the wandering pilgrim who had travelled so much and struggled, founded a Congregation, built churches and buildings, devised a pedagogy for abandoned youth.

And finally, God's pilgrim, like Moses, beholds the Glory of God in the desert he has travelled through. That young man who was looking for a shelter to eat and sleep, founded the Valdocco shelter. From this place, the seed of Don Bosco's work is born, which will grow throughout the world.

That moment in the Eucharist touched him so profoundly. For him it was a special moment of thanksgiving, of glory given to God, filling his whole being because everything he has accomplished is the fruit of a life lived for love: his selfless love for others.

He remembers, weeps and gives thanks. It is a moment in which he is assailed by a multitude of feelings that fill this journey with meaning, which, despite many thorny difficulties, invites him into the presence of God.

God ensures that his children find some moments of comforting testimony: holiness is an uphill path to be sought on this earth, and because of all this Don Bosco was a master of life.

“She went ahead...”

The Lady's presence is a constant and central reference point in the dream. Don Bosco tells us in his second dream: *“She went ahead.”*

It is interesting to note how “She” leads, gives direction, encourages him... Don Bosco confesses that, *“Worn out I wanted to sit down by a nearby road... but the shepherdess invited me to continue the trip...”*⁹³

⁹³ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesian Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 110.

The trip will lead to a place where there is a large courtyard with a portico around it, where he saw a Church. The images intertwine and form an impressive passage:

“After another short journey I found myself in a large courtyard with porticoes all round. at one end was a church.”⁹⁴

It is beautiful to note that immediately after talking about the place where there was a church, he surprisingly speaks about the transformation of a great number of the animals into lambs.

This transformation is an extremely important step for Don Bosco precisely because there, God’s and Mary’s intervention in the lives of the youngsters takes place. He deeply integrates this truth into life and spirituality: God acts first. She, the Shepherdess, wants it.

“I then saw that four-fifths of the animals had been changed into lambs And their number greatly increased. Just then, several shepherds came along to take care of the flock; but they stayed only a very short time and promptly went away.”⁹⁵

From his dream at nine years of age to the one when he was a young priest in Turin; from the years of apostolate as an educator and founder, Don Bosco was thoroughly Mary’s man. The words *Totus Tuus, o Maria* are very suitable as a description of Don Bosco.

Don Bosco is Mary’s man day and night: he prays, meditates, loves, entrusts, and dedicates everything to her, the Shepherdess of his dream. She who guides him on his priestly path; she who is his Helper, the tender Mother whom he calls the true Foundress of the Salesian Congregation.

“She has done everything”

Don Bosco’s holiness is profoundly marked by a genuine and strong devotion to Mary. His love for Mary, which began in childhood, matured and grew until his last moment, at the hour of death.

In the second dream, the Saint has a vision of the Church of Mary Help of Christians twenty years before its construction. As we know, Don Bosco

⁹⁴ Ibid p. 110.

⁹⁵ Ibid p. 110.

worked with huge commitment and sacrifice to build this Basilica dedicated to “She who has done everything.”

Mary is Don Bosco’s guide. She is his Mother and Teacher. She is an emotional and spiritual reference, constant and full of wisdom. Mary, who appeared in a dream when he was nine years old, would always be with him, never to leave him, to guide him and help him on his journey.

During times of darkness and despair, Mary symbolised the Mother: the one who bestows life and will always embody the ancient and profoundly intimate connection that gives rise to the mystery of her and our existence, bridging the gap between the finite and the infinite.

Don Bosco’s devotion to Mary is revealed in his life, in his writings, in his educational pedagogy, in his messages to collaborators, practically in all of his being. The words “*She has done everything!*”, were for Don Bosco a profound conviction of faith.

When building the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco poured out his great love for the Virgin Mary, his gratitude that gradually marks the transition between the invisible and the soul, between the human spirit and the certainty of Divine Mercy.

Because of all this we recognise in Don Bosco his authenticity, the inexhaustible example of someone who, in seeing the other, has known how to express the purity of love in action.

The gift of time

It was certainly with much emotion and deep gratitude that Don Bosco wrote this passage of his dream at nine years of age:

“At that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand her, because I did not know what all this could mean. She then placed her hand on my head and said,⁹⁶ “In good time you will understand everything”.

⁹⁶ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle, New York. 2011, p. 35.

An emotional memory of the dream at nine years of age which unfolded over the course of his life as a pilgrim, in search of the fulfilment of God's plan in his life.

A powerful prophecy born in the heart and soul of John Bosco who followed his path like Moses to find the Promised Land of Valdocco.

A fraternal home, welcoming hospice, education, and joy in God: the young will sing of the gift of a father who walks with them.

Joyful hope germinating from Don Bosco's holiness and spreading throughout the world.

Shining holiness of the one who sought to fulfil God's plan for him from the beginning to the end of his life.

“Everything is accomplished!”

A brilliant light bursts through from above – it is the glory of heaven illuminating the vastness beyond, a sight so grand that two eyes alone are insufficient to comprehend the universe that is unveiled:

*“That morning” his secretary tells us “Don Bosco wanted to go down to the Church to celebrate at the altar of Mary Help of Christians. No less than fifteen times during the Divine Sacrifice he stopped, caught up in strong emotion and shedding tears...”*⁹⁷

When the secretary asked Don Bosco why he was so moved during the celebration of the Mass, the Saint made a wonderful revelation, an expression of his great Marian heart:

“There appeared before my eyes the scene when at the age of ten I dreamt about the Congregation. I could actually see and hear my mother and brothers, as they argued about the dream...”

At that time Our Lady had said, *‘In due time you will understand everything.’*⁹⁸

No one knows the profound silence, the tears and the peace of Don Bosco in the intense liturgy of that morning. It was only in that deepest part of the soul that a serene sea was beginning to form, after all the time spent in doing, creating, and thinking. Everything now was so close.

⁹⁷*Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco (Blessed ... Saint) John Bosco*, vol. XVIII, pp. 288-289.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 288-289.

Yes, one needs a sharp and clear eye to discover that faint light of those who know how to walk close to the earth. Mary, in her greatness belonged to humanity, now Don Bosco was close to the heartbeat that pulses in the depths of being. Step by step the meaning was taking shape and the images became real.

The dream of a lifetime, which he had in October 1844, where an entire life had been devoted to its construction, was tangible like the Body of Christ in that final Eucharist.

The Body was the bread given, all the love shown to young people, the good fortune of having had a space where they could help each other. In the journey we are making today with Don Bosco and the young, may the words “as seeing him who is invisible” resonate deeply within each of us.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Andrea Bozzolo. *La forma di santità*, (ed.). *Sapientiam dedit illi. Studi su Don Bosco e sul Carisma Salesiano*, LAS, Roma, 2015.

Andrea Bozzolo. *La Santità di Don Bosco: ermeneutica teologica delle deposizioni nei processi di beatificazione e canonizzazione*. LAS, Roma. 2015
https://archive.sdb.org/ENG/Documenti/2014/pdf/_1_10_29_4_30_.pdf

Ángel Fernández Artime. Rector Major. Strenna 2024. “*The dream that makes us dream.*” *A heart that transforms “wolves” into “lambs”*. Valdocco, 2023.

Carmine di Sante. *Lo straniero nella Bibbia. Saggio sull’ospitalità*. Editrice Città Aperta, 2002

Carmine di Sante. *Teologia dell’ospitalità*. Marco dal Corso (ed.), Biblioteca di Teologia Contemporanea, BTC 196. Queriniana, Brescia, 2019.

Eugenio Ceria. *Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco (Blessed ... Saint) John Bosco*, vol. XVIII. Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York, 2003.

Eugenio Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*. Trascrizione di Teresio Bosco, Elledici, 2003.

G.B. Lemoyne, *Vita di San Giovanni Bosco*. Vol. I - Nuova Edizione a cura di Don Angelo Amadei, SEI, Torino, 1983.

G.B. Lemoyne. *Biographical Memoirs*, vol. II. Ed. Extra Commerciale, S. Benigno Canavese, 1901.

Jacques Loew. *Pregheiera e Vita. Grande Modelli*. Edizione Morcellana. Brescia. 1991

John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle. New York, 2010.

Marco Bay, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri - 1831-1841*, Prefazione di S.E. Mons. Carlo Chesis - SDB - Vescovo della Diocesi di Civitavecchia. LAS, Roma, 2010.

Morand Wirth. *Don Bosco et la Bible*. LAS, Roma, 2016.

Pascual Chavez Villanueva - SDB, *Il Carisma Salesiano*. Rassegna CNOS, settembre-dicembre 2022.

Placido Sgroi. *Teologia dell'Ospitalità*. Ed. Marco dal Corso. Biblioteca di Teologia Contemporanea. Queriniana. Brescia. 2019.

Paolo Albera, *Lettere Circolari di D. Paolo Albera ai Salesiani*, SEI, Torino 1922.

Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, Istituto Storico Salesiano, Roma - Studi 20, vol. I- II, LAS, Roma, 2009.

San Giovanni Bosco. *Insegnamenti di vita spirituale. Un'antologia*. Introduzione e note a cura di Aldo Giraud. LAS. Roma, 2013.

Teresio Bosco, *Don Bosco visto da vicino*, Elledici, Leumann - Torino 1996.

**This book has been originally published by the Publishing House –
Elledici – Turin – Italy – August 2024.**

Copyright by the author.

