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"CHARITABLE MADEMOISELLE" : DON BOSCO'S FIFTY-EIGHT LETTERS TO CLARA LOUVET

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Eugenio Valentini, SDB, in his "Presentazione" to the Fourth Volume of the *Epistolario de S. Giovanni Bosco*, states, that the letters of Don Bosco are not letters of ideas but of matters both spiritual and temporal. He writes that what is striking about this man of action is his relationship with all sorts of different people in Italy and elsewhere.¹ One such relationship is strikingly revealed in his series of letters to Mademoiselle Clara Louvet, one of the first French Salesian cooperators. The contents of these fifty-eight letters reveal Don Bosco as a spiritual guide, sensible and sensitive, practical and paternal.

"The contents of these fifty-eight letters reveal Don Bosco as a spiritual guide, sensible and sensitive, practical and paternal."

Little, it seems, is known of the life of Mademoiselle Clara Louvet except what has been recorded in Salesian sources.² Called "un angelo di

¹*Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco IV*, Torino: SEI, 1959, p. IV.

²*Bulletin Salésien*, XXXV (Janvier 1913) No. 402, p. 27; Ceria, E., *Annali della Società Salesiana: dalle origini alla morte di S. Giovanni Bosco, 1841-1888*, Torino: SEI, pp. 520-521; Ceria, E., *Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco, 1841-1888 XV*, Torino: SEI, pp. 584-610 (*The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco, Vol. XV*, New Rochelle, N.Y.: Salesiana Publishers, 1988, pp. 486-508); Ceria, E. *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco IV*, Torino: SEI, 1959, pp. 447-479; and *Clara Louvet: Coopératrice Salésienne Française et fille Spirituelle de Saint Jean Bosco, 1832-1912*, Anonymous, no date of publication. Many of the biographical notes on Clara Louvet found in the *Epistolario IV* are taken almost verbatim from Chapter XIX of *MB*

carità,"³ she was born in 1832, the only daughter of an elderly high-ranking officer in the French army from the Pas de Calais department in Northern France, in Aire-sur-la-Lys.⁴

In 1881 Clara Louvet first met Don Bosco while she was vacationing with her cousin Mademoiselle de Villeneuve on the French Riviera at Nice. From that time on she remained a true cooperator of Don Bosco, and, after his death in 1888, of the successors of Don Bosco: Don Michael Rua and Don Paul Albera. Besides helping Don Bosco through her prayers and alms, she sent poor children to the Salesian orphanage at Lille and then to Ruitz. These children she especially counseled and encouraged; some became Salesians later on, and she thus merited the title of "la mère spirituelle de Religieux Salésiens."⁵

Mademoiselle Louvet, as Don Bosco used to address her, lived a well-ordered, saintly life⁶ rather reclusive and retiring.⁷ From Don Bosco's letters we learn that he invited her a number of times to attend dedications and celebrations both in Rome and Turin. Soon after first meeting Don Bosco, she journeyed to Turin,⁸ then returned again for the feast of Mary Help of Christians in 1882.⁹ In October of 1882 she returned yet again bringing with her some donations she had collected (rather unsuccessfully) for the construction of the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome.¹⁰ She came to see Don Bosco two more times: once in

XV. Some of the material from Chapter XIX of **MB XV** is found in Clara Louvet's obituary letter in the *Bulletin Salésien* written by Fr. Paul Moitel who used testimonial letters from Abbé Sénéchal and Abbé Engrand. Both letters can be found in the *Archivio Salesiano Centrale* (ASC), **Fondo Don Bosco** (FDBMicro: 695 E3...and 696 E11...) Eugenio Ceria relies heavily on the contents of the letters themselves in writing Chapter XIX of **MB XV**. For some statements he mentions 'altre fonti' as well. Cf. **Epist. IV**, p. 457 and **MB XV**, p. 605 (**BM XV**, p. 504).

³Ceria, *Annali I*, p. 520.

⁴**Epist. IV**, p. 447. Abbé R. Sénéchal in his 1933 letter to P. Moitel writes that "She was the only daughter of Commandant Louvet who married a noble person, Mademoiselle de Lottinberges" [sic] (FDBMicro 695 C12). The anonymous biographer of Clara Louvet identifies her as "Mlle Julie Lochtemberg" (*Clara Louvet*..., p. 16).

⁵*Bulletin Salésien* 1913, p. 27.

⁶Ceria, *Annali I*, p. 520.

⁷*Bulletin Salésien* 1913, p. 27.

⁸**Epist. IV**, p. 447.

⁹**Epist. IV**, p. 448; **MB XV**, p. 552.

¹⁰**Epist. IV**, pp. 452-453; **MB XV**, p. 587 (**BM XV**, p. 488).

1885,¹¹ and for a final visit in 1887 on the feast of Mary Help of Christians.¹²

Eugenio Ceria, SDB, editor of the *Epistolario di Don Bosco*, tells us that Clara Louvet's admiration for Don Bosco was such that from their very first meeting she kept both her purse and her spiritual life open to him. And Don Bosco, like a "*buon papà*," responded paternally and candidly, explaining his many financial needs to her.¹³

It would seem that no two persons could be so contrary in family background, upbringing, character or temperament. While Don Bosco was of humble origin, living a very active and energetic life among the poor and the abandoned, Clara Louvet was born of a noble family, rather delicate in health, with a sweet and quiet disposition, timid, almost timorous.¹⁴ Despite these contrarities, theirs was a deep, friendly relationship.¹⁵

The extant letters Don Bosco wrote to Clara Louvet between January 1882 and September 1887 now number fifty-eight.¹⁶ In the *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco IV* we find fifty-seven of these letters.¹⁷ Forty-six of the original letters are found in Rome at the *Archivio Salesiano Centrale*, Via della Pisana. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have five original letters in their *Archivio Generale* in Rome.

¹¹*Epist.* IV, p. 468.

¹²*Epist.* IV, p. 477.

¹³*MB XV*, p. 585 (*BM XV*, p. 487).

¹⁴Eugenio Ceria says that Clara Louvet was tried by interior sufferings, "*pene interiore*." The nature of these interior sufferings is not specified. Possibly she was troubled by scruples. The mysterious reference to "*altre fonti*," privileged and unspecified sources mentioned in the *Epist.* IV, p. 457, remains unsolved.

¹⁵*Bulletin Salésien* 1913, p. 27. Cf. Abbé Sénéchal's letter to P. Moitel, Lille, Nov. 20, 1912, FDBMicro: 695 E3....

¹⁶Clara Louvet told Fr. Paul Moitel, a French Salesian who owed his Salesian vocation to her, that she had destroyed a certain number of letters because she judged them "useless" since they only emphasized the receipt of her almsgiving. For her, it was important to keep those that contained Don Bosco's advice, to re-read them, meditate on them, and once again find comfort for her soul. Cf. *Clara Louvet*..., p. 29.

¹⁷Ceria in Chapter XIX of the *MB XV*, mentions only fifty-three letters, all but three in the original French, p. 584 (*BM XV*, p. 486). But by the publication of the *Epist.* IV in 1959, three more letters had surfaced. One letter, written in 1886 is found as part of L. 2631, "*Lettere da spedirsi ai Cooperatori dopo la sua morte*," p. 391, *Epist.* IV.

The contents of Don Bosco's letters to Clara Louvet reveal much about Don Bosco's own character: his interests and curiosity, his attitudes, his humor, his sensitivity and delicacy in dealing with women, and his beliefs and opinions. Revealed too is the portrait of a man who can laugh at himself while at the same time paternally instructing, correcting, exhorting, and guiding another to a closer union with God.¹⁸

We see in Don Bosco's letters a broad range of topics: people, events, politics, missionary activities, his boys, even disasters. He asks how was Mademoiselle Deslions, who traveled with her to Turin in 1882.¹⁹ How is Abbé Engrand's health?²⁰ Are her servants serving her well, and is she patient in dealing with them?²¹ How is her health, he wants to know, and can she travel now?²² Is everything going well? Is she coming to visit him soon?²³ Is she bringing someone along? and when will she be arriving?²⁴

The letters to Clara Louvet also reveal Don Bosco's sense of humor. It is revealed principally in his attitude concerning almsgiving and his own shaky health. In the earliest extant letter dated January 1882, a few months after Clara Louvet had visited Turin and left Don Bosco a generous donation, Don Bosco writes about visiting her: "As regards my voyage to Aire in April, that should give you time to prepare some more money. Isn't it true, O charitable Mademoiselle!"²⁵ When Don Bosco received 10,000F from her in less than two months,²⁶ he writes again: "O Mademoiselle, if everybody came to me in these days bringing such bouquets, I'd be another Rothschild. But for me there's only one Mademoiselle Clara Louvet, and I'm very happy about it." In a joking

¹⁸Cf. E. Valentini in the 'Presentazione,' *Epist. IV*, pp. VI-VII.

¹⁹*Epist. IV*, L. 2714, 5/31/82, p. 448.

²⁰*Epist. IV*, L. 2765, 6/12/87, p. 478.

²¹*Epist. IV*, L. 2755, 7/27/86, p. 473.

²²*Epist. IV*, L. 2765, 6/12/87, p. 478.

²³*Epist. IV*, L. 2732, 12/21/83, p. 459.

²⁴*Epist. IV*, L. 2719, 2748, 2753, 2762.

²⁵*Epist. IV*, L. 2713, 1/82, p. 447.

²⁶*Epist. IV*, L. 2714, 5/31/82, p. 448 (2,000F); L. 2715, 6/17/82, pp. 448-449 (5,000F). It doesn't add up to 10,000F as Ceria states in the *Epistolario IV*, p. 448, but perhaps a letter is missing.

manner which belies his seriousness and disguises his intent to express his attitude towards the use of earthly goods, he continues, "My aim has always been to do everything possible to detach the hearts of my friends from these miserable worldly things and lead them to God, to eternal happiness. Mademoiselle, I want to make you rich, or better, to transform the fruits of this earth, so rarely preserved, into eternal treasures."²⁷

In another letter he reveals an engaging, if not humorous way, of dramatizing a situation. When in need of 2,000F, he receives the requested sum from Clara Louvet: "But what's this? It's the good Lord who has suggested [that she] send her offering."²⁸ Again when Clara writes that she wants to send an offering of another 2,000F, Don Bosco replies, "You write me that you want to send me an offering of 2,000F on some occasion. But since we find ourselves and especially at this moment in need of money, I believe that it would be better to send the offering, so you can therefore anticipate a hundredfold, and we can save ourselves that much sooner."²⁹ Another time he uses this dramatizing technique: "If you're going to be elsewhere when I come to Aire, I may as well defer my trip for another time, but if you were to tell me, 'But I'll have some money to give you when you come'...then I say prepare the money."³⁰ When Clara Louvet was asked to attend the laying of the cornerstone of Sacro Cuore in Rome, she evidently wrote back worried about what to do with her precious possessions during her absence. Don Bosco replies, "Entrust them to someone who performs that type of service or, better yet, if you want to be doubly sure, give them all to Don Bosco who'll watch them, or better still, who'll use them promptly so that thieves can't touch them." ³¹

Don Bosco could be also flippant about his own health. In closing one letter written in 1884, he almost casually mentions that "*Ma poitrine est un peu fatiguée...*"³² A little? Ceria recounts in the *Memorie biografiche* that Don Bosco was certainly understating his real condition which was quite serious. An extraordinary prostration had

²⁷*Epist. IV*, L. 2715, 6/17/82, p. 449.

²⁸*Epist. IV*, L. 2716, 7/15/82, p. 450.

²⁹*Epist. IV*, L. 2717, 8/10/82, p. 451.

³⁰*Epist. IV*, L. 2723, 1/18/83, pp. 454-455.

³¹*Epis. IV*, L. 2734, 1/26/84, p. 461

³²*Epist., IV*, L. 2735, 2/14/84, pp. 461-462. ["My chest is a bit tired."]

caused a tear in his stomach that was complicated by bronchitis and spitting of blood ("*sangue da pezzuola*"). Phlebitis set in, coupled with a weak pulse and general disorientation. His fever increased and, after spending the night without sleep, an egg-shaped swelling formed at the base of his stomach, and the swelling of his legs increased. Ceria uses this letter to Clara Louvet to demonstrate Don Bosco's "tranquility of spirit."³³ Perhaps the understatement "*un peu*" reveals more his lighthearted attitude towards his worn-out body, for this attitude is again revealed in yet another letter. In it he tells Clara that he was at Pinerolo to cure his laziness!³⁴

Perhaps Don Bosco worried more about Clara Louvet's health than his own. In explaining the fire of January 24, 1885, which destroyed one complete building at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco,³⁵ Don Bosco adds that God would provide. But, instead of asking for funds, he immediately changes the subject: "I recommend one thing only: take care of your health."³⁶ As to fasting and abstaining during Lent, he rigorously forbids Clara to do it, telling her that fasting and abstaining are for sinners like himself.³⁷ Another letter gives this recommendation: "In your last letter you spoke of your health and your plan to make a journey to Italy to cure it. Nothing could be better."³⁸

The biographer of Clara Louvet says, "let's thank heaven that this precious correspondence has been preserved for us; for without it a special aspect of Don Bosco would have escaped us..."³⁹ And a particular aspect of Don Bosco revealed in these letters to Clara Louvet is his obvious sensitivity and delicacy shown to her. One finds in Don Bosco a reserve in writing to women, but he cannot hide his concern and affection for her.⁴⁰ Don Bosco thought of her often. When the cholera was raging

³³Ceria, *MB XVII*, pp. 29-30.

³⁴*Epist. IV*, L. 2737, 8/10/84, p. 462.

³⁵Ceria, *MB XVII*, p. 297.

³⁶*Epist. IV*, L. 2746, 2/1/85, p. 467.

³⁷*Epist. IV*, L. 2747, 2/21/85, p. 468. Ash Wednesday in 1885 was on February 19.

³⁸*Epist. IV*, L. 2748, 2/27/85, pp. 468-469.

³⁹*Clara Louvet...*, p. 72.

⁴⁰There is a remarkable contrast in the salutations addressed to Count Colle, a French Cooperator who lived in Toulon, who was one of Don Bosco's greatest benefactors and friends. Don Bosco even wrote the biography of his son Louis, who died at an early age, an only

both in Italy and France in the summer of 1884, he sent her, as he did to others, an "antidote" for the cholera: 1) wear a medal of Mary Help of Christians; 2) say the prayer: Mary Help of Christians, pray for us; and 3) go to Holy Communion frequently.⁴¹

When in Pinerolo at the Bishop's residence for a needed rest, Don Bosco writes to Clara: "My health has obliged me to suspend every sort of occupation. Just now I'm beginning to do something, and I find the need to write the first words to you, O charitable Mademoiselle."⁴² In one of his last letters that Don Bosco wrote to her in 1887, he reveals both his great sensitivity and his deep affection for her. He capped it all off with a marvelous compliment. Clara Louvet had traveled to Turin in 1887 for the feast of Mary Help of Christians which was to be Don Bosco's last. On their parting, Don Bosco had sensed both her great sadness at seeing him so drained of his strength and her intuition that she would never see him again.⁴³ After recovering some of his strength, he wrote her a very intimate and touching letter:

After you stayed with us, I detected that you were close to tears at your departure. That has given me pain. Perhaps you didn't quite understand my words, for I always gave you my assurance that our relationship here on earth would not last; but in life eternal we forever pass our days in true joy and never lack those things we desire: in perpetuas aeternitates.

Right now the heat of Turin is unbearable, and so I have come to enjoy the refreshing climate of Valsalice which has invigorated me. Here we lack nothing except your presence to renew our strength....⁴⁴

child. Don Bosco addresses Count Colle as '*stimabilissimo*,' as '*mon très cher et bon ami*' or similar endearing terms. But to Madame Colle and Clara Louvet it was always '*Charitable Madame*,' '*Charitable Mademoiselle*,' or the like.

⁴¹*Epist. IV*, L. 2736, 7/9/84, p. 462.

⁴²Perhaps we can't take Don Bosco's word literally, for since coming to Pinerolo he had already written four letters: one to Cav. Vincenzo Levrot (L. 2583, 7/19/86); one to the president of the Catholic Work Club of Bergamo (L. 2584, 7/22/86); one to Count Colle (L. 2828, 7/25/86); and one to the Cooperators of San Nicolás de los Arroyos (L. 2585, 7/25/86). Still the thought is there!

⁴³*Epist. IV*, p. 477. Ceria's annotation to L. 2765, 6/12/87.

⁴⁴*Epist. IV*, L. 2765, 6/12/87, pp. 477-478.

His thoughtful consideration is also seen in the little gifts that he would send her from time to time. In a New Year letter he promises to send a holy card of St. Louis IX of France (which he does). He also promises to visit her in Aire (which he doesn't). He concludes by assuring her that nothing bad will happen to her during the coming year.⁴⁵ He also enclosed a small 10 cm. cross with an ivory corpus surrounded by a crown of thorns. When she asked about the significance of the thorns, Don Bosco explained, rather obscurely that the thorns prepare one for the flowers, but that only time would tell.⁴⁶ Although we see no mention of Don Bosco sending grapes picked from outside his windows at the Oratory at Valdocco, Ceria makes mention of it;⁴⁷ and the biographer of Clara Louvet adds that Don Bosco also had the Salesian sisters send his beloved cooperator some lovely fruit from the Piedmont countryside.⁴⁸

While Don Bosco's letters to Clara Louvet show a man both sensitive and affectionate, they also reveal Don Bosco, the spiritual father, guiding souls along the path of perfection. The letters to Clara Louvet give us an example of a practical, simple type of spiritual direction, not directed towards his boys in his schools, but rather directed toward a lay person immersed in the everyday life of the world. Don Bosco dedicated himself to saving souls whenever and wherever he could; he lived his motto: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*. His spirituality emphasized ultimate and final union with God in heaven; it was eminently eschatological. Life for him is but a road to another more lasting life, where by doing good works, receiving the sacraments, being joyful and calm, we gain our eternal reward and save our souls.⁴⁹ It is in the context of this theological perspective that Don Bosco wrote to Clara Louvet. And it is in these letters of spiritual direction that we discover a man of God, deeply spiritual, single-minded, practical, humble and saintly.

It is in this perspective of heaven, eternity, and paradise that we must read the Don Bosco letters of spiritual direction to Clara Louvet.

⁴⁵*Epist. IV*, L. 2752, 1/16/86, p. 471.

⁴⁶*Epist. IV*, L. 2717, 8/10/82; cf. *Clara Louvet...*, p. 55.

⁴⁷Ceria, *MB XV*, p. 602 (*BM XV*, p.501).

⁴⁸*Clara Louvet...*, p. 69.

⁴⁹Cf. Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica, Vol. II: mentalità, religiosa e spiritualità*. Roma: LAS, 1981, pp. 13-17; also cf. Chapter I, II, VI, X, XII of this same book which especially elaborate this thought.

Don Bosco urged Clara from the very first letter to go to Holy Communion as often as possible adding, rather wisely, that if for any reason she can't go to communion, she should not be troubled.⁵⁰ Evidently, Clara Louvet had doubts about receiving communion so often. She must have told Don Bosco that she felt her communions would become routine or mere habit. But Don Bosco insisted: continue to take Holy Communion every morning. Don't worry whether it will become a habit. "When a habit is good," Don Bosco continues, "and guides us toward our goal, we should follow it and practice it."⁵¹ A month later he wrote again: "You say in your letter that it bothers you very much to receive Holy Communion every morning because you're weak. Remember that very delicate food is for the weak and moreover when one's stomach is weak, one should be given the proper food. Do you understand me?"⁵² It is this same letter that Don Bosco emphasized the need of a good confessor. He tells her he doesn't have to remind her of the necessity of a good confessor: pick one, or keep the one you have, or be patient until one comes along. In this very same letter Don Bosco says he has a secret to tell her. He wants her to support his spiritual works and also those works useful to the Church and society, works that last and gain souls for the Lord.⁵³ This thought follows closely with Don Bosco's idea of the Salesian Cooperators, i.e., to work for the Church, for good morals and for society.⁵⁴ In his blessing he continues this theme of good works: "Do the good works that are possible for you."⁵⁵ In 1886 Don Bosco answers some questions of Clara. His gentle guidance, practical and moderate, continues: "Always do these good works that you have at hand without making commitments to the

⁵⁰ *Epist. IV*, L. 2713, 1/82, p. 447.

⁵¹ *Epist. IV*, L. 2716, 7/15/82, pp. 449-450.

⁵² *AG/FMA and ASC* L. 2651c4..., 8/19/82. The original of this letter is found in the Archives of the Salesian Sisters in Rome. It was discovered after the publication of the *Epistolario IV*.

⁵³ *AG/FMA and ASC* L. 2651c4..., 8/19/82.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Cooperatori Salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società*, Torino: Tipografia Salesiana, 1876: "Noi cristiani dobbiamo unirli in questi difficili tempi, e di comune accordo promuovere lo spirito di preghiera, di carità con tutti i mezzi, che la religione somministra per rimuovere o almeno mitigare i mali che ad ogni momento possono metter a repentaglio il buon costume, senza cui va in rovina la civile società". (p. 4) in *Giovanni Bosco Opere Edite, Vol XXVIII* (1876-1877), Roma: LAS, 1977, p. [258].

⁵⁵ *ASC*, 2651c4..., 8/19/82.

future."⁵⁶ This balance and reasonableness is brought out again in another letter which answers Clara's questions. Writes Don Bosco, "I received your very beautiful and dear letter here in our Salesian school in Alassio. The things you write to me about are nothing in comparison with eternity. . ." He goes on to tell her to go to the French Riviera for the winter for it will do her good and will relieve her worries. Don Bosco then exhorts her to persevere in her good works.⁵⁷

There came a time in Don Bosco's correspondence with Clara Louvet when he had to give very definite direction on vocation. Perhaps it was inevitable for Clara to become very close to the Salesian Sisters. In Don Bosco's letters we see evidenced a gradual progression of friendship. When she came to Turin, she stayed with the Salesian sisters.⁵⁸ In his letters he sends the prayers and the regards of the sisters.⁵⁹ He mentions a retreat with the sisters at Nizza-Monferrato.⁶⁰ Finally, Clara asked Don Bosco about becoming a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians. In a letter begun by Don Bosco and later finished by Don Rua, Don Bosco is very firm yet at the same time leaves the future possibility open when he replies: "At this moment you don't have a religious vocation, but you do have the vocation to be a saint. Continue as you are; you are on the road to Paradise."⁶¹ Ceria quotes Don Bosco further on this situation: "She was thinking about entering the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians ; and so she asked the Saint [Don Bosco]. With a smile on his face, he told her, 'Age, health, your position all create an insurmountable hurdle to fulfilling your pious desires.' And she acquiesced."⁶² The fact was that

⁵⁶ *Epist. IV*, L. 2760, 12/26/86, p. 475.

⁵⁷ *Epist. IV*, L. 2756, [8/12]/86, p. 473

⁵⁸ *Epist. IV*, L. 2713, 2719, 2748.

⁵⁹ *Epist. IV*, L. 2713, 2723, 2732, 2745.

⁶⁰ *Epist. IV*, L. 2721, 2754.

⁶¹ *Epist. IV*, L. 2741, 11/22/84, pp. 464-465.

⁶² Ceria, *MB XV*, p. 605 (*BM XV*, p. 503). There is a question whether these are the very words of Don Bosco to Clara Louvet. Certainly the words echo those that appear in the 1876 edition of the *Cooperatori salesiani*... in Chapter III, "Scopo de Cooperatori Salesiani": "*Perciocchè molti andrebbero volentieri in un chiostro, ma chi per età, chi per sanità, o condizione, moltissimi per difetto di opportunità ne sono assolutamente impediti. Costoro anche in mezzo alle loro ordinarie occupazioni, in seno alle proprie famiglie, possono farsi Cooperatori e vivere como se di fatto fossero in Congregazione.*" Cf. *Giovanni Bosco Opere Edite, XXVIII*, p. [260].

Actually, the source of Ceria's quote is found in Abbé Sénéchal's letter to Fr. Paul Moitel: Lille, 10/19/33. In this letter Abbé Sénéchal is answering Moitel's request for

Clara Louvet was already forty-nine years old when she first met Don Bosco. At the time of Don Bosco's letter of November 22, 1884, in which Don Bosco tells her she has no vocation to become a religious, but only to become a saint, she was fifty-two years old. Certainly, her age was a factor in Don Bosco's guidance. Her health had never been good; her eyes, it seems, were a problem. Don Bosco's worry about her health gives some evidence of this. Her condition as a landowner with tenants also seems to have been a factor in Don Bosco's discernment that religious life was not for her.

From the letters of Don Bosco it would seem that indeed Clara Louvet did have a vocation, that of a Salesian Cooperator. His insistence on doing good, charitable works for Church and society;⁶³ his spiritual plan of life;⁶⁴ her call to become a saint;⁶⁵ his effort to detach her from attachment to earthly goods⁶⁶: all point to Don Bosco's desire to make her a model Salesian cooperator and a saint.

In conclusion, how should we characterize the relationship between Don Bosco and Clara Louvet as revealed in these fifty-eight letters? Certainly, the letters reveal Don Bosco as a sensitive and affectionate human being who paternally and practically guided a soul toward a life of perfection. But revealed also is a "true friendship" that St. Francis de Sales talks about in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*. In the third part of the *Introduction*, de Sales says that "...Perfection consists not in having no friendships, but in having only those which are good, holy, sacred."⁶⁷ Moreover, this friendship shows a great affinity to the spiritual relationship of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal. It is interesting that the obituary letter for Clara Louvet as submitted by Paul Moitel to the *Bulletin Salésien* includes a note from Dom Guéranger that speaks of friendship "*au dessus des régions de la chair et*

information not on Clara Louvet, but on someone who was closely connected with her, Abbé Engrand. Abbé Sénéchal makes the following reference to Clara Louvet, even though from the letter, it seems out of place: "*Elle [Clara Louvet] lui demanda de la recevoir dans la congrégation des filles de Marie Auxiliatrice. Il [Don Bosco] rit de la proposition. 'Votre âge votre santé et votre condition sont un obstacle insurmontable à la réalisation de ce pieux désir.'*" (FDBMicro, 695D4...)

⁶³ASC, 2651c4..., 9/19/82.

⁶⁴Epist. IV, L. 2730, 9/17/83, p. 458.

⁶⁵Epist. IV, L. 2741, 6-7/11/84, pp. 464-465.

⁶⁶Epist. IV, L. 2734, 2744.

⁶⁷Francis de Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, New York: Image Books, 1972, p.

du sang";⁶⁸ but rightfully so, this section was edited out of the published obituary⁶⁹ for the quote from Dom Guéranger makes no sense without a following comment of Dom Sénéchal which Paul Moitel left out of his draft, which compares the friendship of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal to that of Don Bosco and Clara Louvet.⁷⁰ However, the biographer of **Clara Louvet**... does not fail to make reference to this comparison referring to Clara Louvet as the Philothea, the addressee of Francis de Sales' **Introduction to a Devout Life**.⁷¹ It is in this same third part of the **Introduction** that we find an appropriate description of the friendship of Don Bosco and Clara Louvet which perhaps summarizes quite well the content of Don Bosco's correspondence to Clara Louvet: "If your mutual and reciprocal exchanges concern charity, devotion, and Christian perfection, O God, how precious this friendship will be! It will be excellent because it leads to God, excellent because its bond will endure eternally in God. How good it is to love here on earth as they love in heaven and to learn to cherish one another in this world as we shall do eternally in the next!"⁷² These words of St. Francis de Sales, in my opinion, seem to be echoed in one of Don Bosco's letters to Clara Louvet: "I always gave you the assurance that our relationship here on earth would not last; but in life eternal we shall forever pass our days in true joy and never lack those things we desire: in perpetuas aeternitates."⁷³

⁶⁸Dom Guéranger quoted by Paul Moitel in FDBMicro 695D10.

⁶⁹**Bulletin Salésien**, XXXV (Janvier 1913) No. 402, p. 27.

⁷⁰"Ces amitiés surnaturelles ne sont pas rares dans la religion; car l'amitié est une vertu. S. François de Sales en parle délicieusement dans son traité sur la vie dévote. Lis-le, si tu as le temps. Il rappelle l'amitié de notre Seigneur pour Marthe et Marie--de S. Paul pour Ste. Thècle--de St. Ambroise pour Ste. Monique--et on pourrait citer par dessus tant la sienne pour Mad. de Chantal fondatrice de la Visitation. L'amitié suppose l'affection réciproque et le dévouement mutuel. Pour bien connaître les liens affectueux qui unissaient D. Bosco et Madlle. Louvet, il faudrait pouvoir lire les nombreuses lettres que le Vénérable lui a écrites." (FDBMicro, 695E6) Don Sénéchal is quoting freely from de Sales' **Introduction**..., Part Three, Chapter Nineteen on "True Friendship," p. 176 in the Image Edition.

⁷¹"Dieu avait décidé de donner à Mademoiselle Louvet un guide spirituel qui, à la manière de S. François de Sales, la détacherait petit à petit des choses du monde, tout en la laissant dans le monde. Nouvelle Philothée de XIXe siècle, elle recevrait du saint prêtre, soit à l'occasion de leurs rencontres, soit par lettre, les conseils du guide le plus sage; un guide à la fois aimable et ferme. En retour, elle serait la coopératrice et la bienfaitrice de ses oeuvres." (**Clara Louvet**..., p. 25)

⁷²de Sales, **Introduction**..., pp. 174-175.

⁷³**Epist. IV**, L. 2765, 6/12/87, pp. 477-478.