

FATHER PHILIP RINALDI

TEACHER OF SALESIAN HOLINESS

by Stefano Maggio

Introductory Note

Fr. Stefano Maggio knew Blessed Philip Rinaldi, and as Central Ecclesiastical Assistant accompanied the Don Bosco Volunteers, the secular institute founded by Fr. Rinaldi. In the years leading up to Fr. Rinaldi's beatification on April 29, 1990, Fr. Maggio, too, made his contribution to the body of work, both popular and scholarly, on Fr. Rinaldi.

Lo spirito di Don Bosco nel cuore del beato Don Rinaldi is an anthology of Fr. Rinaldi's writings and conferences during his time as Prefect General (1901-1922) and Rector Major (1922-1931). It includes selections from conferences to the Daughters of Mary, a leadership group in the Salesian Sisters' Valdocco oratory, lessons on pedagogy to theology students at the Salesian house of studies in Foglizzo, conferences to the Zelatrici di Maria Ausiliatrice, the group that would become Don Bosco Volunteers, conferences and annual strenne (themes given as a type of spiritual New Year's gift) to Salesian Sisters, circular letters to Salesians of Don Bosco and letters to individuals. To this corpus Fr. Maggio adds an original study on Fr. Rinaldi's spirituality as reflected mostly in his personal correspondence.

This study¹ is the fruit of research conducted in an atmosphere of joyful anticipation of the beatification. Fr. Maggio's conversational, at times flowery, style conveys that excitement. For example, he frequently italicizes words and phrases, both his own and Fr. Rinaldi's, to draw attention to the points he is making. These are retained in the hope that, rather than being a distraction, they reflect the author's enthusiasm in studying and interpreting Fr. Rinaldi's work.

What may prove distracting are some occasional expressions that Fr. Rinaldi uses in his letters or that show up in notes that others have made from listening to his conferences. Understandably, Fr. Rinaldi did not take time to edit his letters to individuals as if they were for publication, nor did his listeners take notes other than for their personal purposes. When it became a choice between losing the flavor of the original text in favor of modifying expressions and correcting grammatical imperfections or retaining the original expressions, the choice went with the original expressions as long as the context and intended message could be discerned.

Fr. Maggio admits that deeper and more complete studies of the Don Bosco Salesian spirituality of Blessed Philip Rinaldi are wanting. He offers his final chapter as an initial contribution.

1. Presentation

[When I was preparing this book], the Rector Major² asked that I add this final chapter on Salesian holiness. It attempts to see what is relatively new in the way Fr. Rinaldi presented Christian holiness, even before Salesian holiness, to those whom he was directing.

This question first came up when I was reading the Servant of God's epistolary, to which for now I am turning and limiting my attention.

It is common in Salesian settings that, when we talk or write about holiness, we ordinarily go only as far as illustrating a formula, such as union with God, or some other means, whether it is a fundamental one, such as prayer, or, more generally, one of our characteristic devotions. This implies that our Teachers, beginning with Don Bosco, lack a theologically

¹ Chapter 8 of *Lo spirito di Don Bosco nel cuore del beato Don Rinaldi, Conferenze e scritti*, Stefano Maggio, Turin, SEI, 1990, 287-348, translated by John Puntino. All footnotes are those of the translator unless otherwise noted.

² Fr. Egidio Viganò

sound and organic vision that would form the heart and vital centre from which everything, including these devotions, would flow and radiate.

Certainly, Founders were generally not preoccupied with leaving their disciples with true treatises on their spirituality, but instead guidelines and directions and still more the example of a lived holiness. It was their sons and daughters who then concerned themselves with a reflective study of the writings, teachings and examples from their holy lives, creating theological constructs from which were born the various Schools of Spirituality.

It seems to me that the Salesians have not yet faced this issue. They indeed seem quite embarrassed about defining the theological fundamentals of their own spirituality, even when they are not inclined to deny its very possibility. Nor can our first simple approach here aspire to as much.

Fr. Rinaldi, who was not a theologian, did not envisage the problem in a theoretical way. Nevertheless, from a first reading of his epistolary, elements emerge offering a tentative outline bearing a Christocentric reconstruction. Even though his teaching remains almost exclusively within a Salesian context and bears its stamp, its Christocentric nature makes it suited for religious and lay people alike.

This observation indeed changed the perception, based on an initial reading of the epistolary, that it was largely intended for religious persons (Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians) and therefore, of very limited interest. This reflection helped broaden its applicability. The singling out, in fact, of what would come to be the vital nucleus in the concept of holiness offered by Fr. Rinaldi, allows one to make further applications of it to non-religious, for example, to members of secular institutes, and likewise to everyday lay persons. We are dealing with a pure and simple return to the Gospels, St. Paul and the New Testament in general in anticipation of the same teaching from Vatican II.

This comes as no surprise. After all, are not all the saints inspired by the Gospel? Are not the same devotions of Don Bosco referring to Jesus Christ and his Blessed Mother? Striking about Fr. Rinaldi is that he refers directly to the Person of the Redeemer, from which he knows how to make applications relative to practical life. All is inspired directly from the Gospels and in general from the New Testament, even if explicit quotes are almost entirely lacking both from Scripture and from specific authors.

Yes, there is an author that he certainly knew and promoted, who, we think, could be one of his primary and favourite sources, French author

François Maucourant. His little book, *La vie d'intimité avec le bon Saveur à l'usage des âmes religieuses* (1897), quickly became popular even among persons not in consecrated life. Fr. Rinaldi even had it translated into Italian and published by the Salesians. We see him as early as June 1917 proposing it for meditation to the small group of the first three future “Zelatrici di Maria Ausiliatrice” (QC, p. 12),³ and in June two years later he recommended it again to the same group, who by then numbered seven.

“You already know this book, but only in general, because books are not well understood the first time one reads them. Choose a point, even only one part of a point, but meditate deeply and well on it” (QC, p. 89).

He was also distributing it among the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians especially among those who needed to draw from it encouragement and confidence in the hard trials of life, as we see in the edifying mortuary letter of Sister Caterina Gaido.

Sister Caterina kept handy the little book, *Vita intima con Gesù*, which the Servant of God had given her. Several chapters were marked by a date; and the encouraging teaching of St. Francis de Sales and other Saints, cited by the author, gave her a way to correct her daily shortcomings. Discouragement, so easy to worm its way into souls who want to follow the way of perfection, was for Sister Caterina the stumbling block against which she needed to be vigilant and fight in order not to be defeated.⁴

Evidence of the wide distribution of this little work, also among the Oratory girls, comes to us from a letter that Fr. Rinaldi wrote to nineteen year old Maria Lanzio, already on her way to becoming a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians. “It makes me happy that you would read Maucourant. You are going to learn many things that will help you throughout your life” (Seville, March 5, 1919).

So, it is clear that Fr. Rinaldi knew and made wide use of this dear little book. The following data shows that it was in circulation both in France and elsewhere. In September 1919, the twelfth edition was printed

³ *Quaderno Carpanera: le conferenze spirituali di Don Filippo Rinaldi alle Zelatrici di Maria Ausiliatrice (1917-1928)*, ed. Pietro Schinetti, Rome, Istituto Secolare Volontarie di Don Bosco, 1980, abbreviated in the text as QC.

⁴ No bibliographic information is given. Fr. Maggio did not use the block quote style in his work. This translation uses it as an editorial option.

“which increased the total number of copies to 159,000, of which 89,000 were in use among women religious, and 70,000 in use among the laity, not counting the print runs in foreign languages” (Preface).⁵

This is not to say, though, that Fr. Rinaldi actually discovered a spirituality in it, for he shows signs of possessing an emerging one much earlier. Some of his life experiences guide our judgment on this. Let us recall what he confided about his years back in his village after he hastily left the boarding school at Mirabello. “In my day no young man in Lu was going to Communion. I was the only one who did so, and this was at the urgings of my mother” (CA, p. 34).⁶

His resolution of March 20, 1881 is even more explicit about his personal relationship with Jesus. “I want to save my soul. I will bear with adversities, unburdening myself only with Jesus, Mary and Joseph” (CE, p. 24).⁷

In another example during his first experience at the new house at Mathi Canavese, Fr. Rinaldi, as a new director, needed to organize the little community of his “Sons of Mary.” Fr. Ceria says

He was sighing for the moment when he would have the Blessed Sacrament in the House, whose absence had him exclaiming, ‘We seem to be abandoned by all. We are new to the place and inexperienced in office, and we lack even this comfort.’ He finally talked with Don Bosco and everything was put in order (CE, p. 50).

It is rather easy to think, then, that Fr. Rinaldi would have found in Maucourant a rather close affinity with his deep-rooted spirituality. This is the author he particularly wanted for those he was directing in order to pass on his own spirituality because in part Maucourant’s simple style makes him accessible to everyone. Fr. [Pietro] Schinetti draws attention to even greater reasons.

He was one of the ascetical writers that Fr. Rinaldi preferred because of the deep piety that inspired his works [He saw to the translation and distribution of the author’s other small works: on humility (1889), poverty (1890), obedience (1892) and chastity (1900)] and also because his

⁵ Of the Italian edition.

⁶ Luigi Castano, *Don Rinaldi. Vivente imagine di Don Bosco*, Turin, LDC, 1980, abbreviated in the text as CA.

⁷ Eugenio Ceria, *Vita del Servo di Dio sac. Filippo Rinaldi, terzo Successore di S[an] Giovanni Bosco, Turin, reprinted 1951, abbreviated in the text as CE.*

teaching was drawing largely on St. Francis de Sales through [author Fr. Joseph] Tissot” (QC, p. 63, note 115).

Now we arrive at the opinion of the first Theological Reviewer of the writings of the Servant of God, according to whom the true author and inspirer of Fr. Rinaldi was St. Francis de Sales himself, and more specifically, his work, *Theotimus*, or *Treatise on the Love of God*. Furthermore, in the final analysis, so to speak, the original sources are the Gospel, especially that of St. John with his respective letters, and St. Paul.⁸

2. Texts

2.1. *The laws of Christian sanctity*

Here, rather than following an exhaustive treatment of this introductory theme, we offer an initial reflection on it. Let us turn to a more direct look at Fr. Rinaldi’s letters, aware that in them he almost never lingers with organic and complete presentations of holiness, but almost always limits himself to offering and illustrating particular points according to the needs of individual cases and persons. This is what characterizes our work: to reconstruct from the varied and scattered material, a spiritual edifice that certainly had to be present in him as he was proposing and recommending such details not as a scholar but as a master of the spirit.

And yet, among the numerous letters we find a small one which proves the exception to the rule. Dated May 24, 1920 and directed to the young Daughter of Mary Help of Christians Sister Teresa Graziano, assistant to the Mistress of Novices, the letter would later draw immediate attention to itself for its coherent and relatively complete treatment of the concept of holiness and its components, *a real miniature treatise*. Judging its overall merit, it is worth immediately quoting it in full:

Thank you for the news, for the greetings of the Superior and for the prayers. Your plan *to want to become holy* so you can be of service

⁸ Author: Each letter will contain the date, the person addressed, and the page of the Epistolary volume. The italics are ours unless otherwise indicated. Translator: In his letters Fr. Rinaldi frequently abbreviates references to Our Lord and to Mary. Full names and titles replace such abbreviations in an effort to favour content over form. References to Epistolary pages are omitted in this translation. Bracketed entries are the author’s.

to others makes me very happy. That is it; no one can give what one does not have. You would need to have much to give something.

From this comes the necessity *to draw near to Our Lord*, who is the source of grace, virtue and holiness. Only he can warm us, sustain us and give us true life.

So *let us draw near* to him: 1) with aspirations and prayers; 2) with meditation; 3) with the Sacraments, above all with Holy Communion.

Courage, Sister Teresa, because the mission of making holy religious and true Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is the noblest one that can be accomplished in this world. It is precisely to give souls to Jesus, who, like Jesus Christ, then give themselves to saving souls. It is a mission for which I would like to live and die. Since I have not been given this treasure, I hope that Sister Graziano may know how to appreciate it and accomplish it with all her might.

Nevertheless, may you not forget that to draw near to Jesus is to participate in all that is his, including the humiliations, the garden, the thorns, the Cross. Hold firmly, my daughter, above all to these things, never abandoning them, never looking to anyone else.

Anyone can see the importance of this snapshot for our purpose here and to understand how, with such an outline well in hand, it was not difficult while reading the other letters to collect little by little the various pieces – enough to fill up a bag – that would come together to form a complete mosaic.

It follows, from the task we have undertaken, that holiness according to Fr. Rinaldi is directed to and focused on the Person of Jesus Christ, who becomes its compelling heart and centre. He made use of expressions that indicate the spiritual relationship to establish with Jesus Christ: *Our Lord Jesus Christ, Our Lord, the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ*. These are the many alternative expressions that recur in his writings, almost always abbreviated the same way, blamed on the haste of penning many letters in one day. They acquire various and not random shades of meaning, such as, to draw near, to follow, to imitate, to love, to become united with. Fr. Rinaldi attributes to this last expression a complete theological-mystic value, very far from a simple intellectual significance that the traditional expression “*union with God*” could suggest. To these expressions we add *to serve*, even if the word itself does not appear, in as much as the Servant of God

presents holiness always under its essential *apostolic* aspect, as indeed it appears also in the cited text, “*to become holy so you can be of service to others.*”

He preferred verbs to nouns, thus highlighting action, as befits the work of personal sanctification (“to want to become holy”); verbs, that, all together, especially if arranged on a musical scale, may suggest a willingness to describe and give rhythm to the various traditional phases of the spiritual life, from the purgative to the illuminative to the unitive. It is clear, as we saw, that Fr. Rinaldi never tried to give a complete theological construct on holiness, nor is it our intention to press the point of these last considerations. We will, in fact, for the purpose of clarity keep this logical order in our reconstruction. For the same reason we will proceed in steps, so that the full concept of holiness envisaged by Fr. Rinaldi will become clear only at the end.

Let us begin, by way of introduction, with some considerations on holiness in general. Fr. Rinaldi, keeping things simple, uses a very clear and precise vocabulary, speaking explicitly of *holiness* while avoiding the more nuanced and less comprehensible terms such as *spirituality*. Regarding *true holiness*, “Do not be satisfied with being *good*, become *holy*”, he wrote to the Provincial, Sister Rosalia Dolza (November 24, 1928). And some months before he wrote to her, “I am happy that you desire to *become holy*. Remember however that it *costs much*. You must *suffer*, but it does not matter” (January 20, 1928).

Since we are dealing then with true holiness in the *Christian* sense, the consequence is that it is not nor can it be merely a *human* work. “... few souls understand this work well, and many believe they have to make it a *drudgery*, that is, they have to huff and puff and sweat, etc.”

Instead, “this work, first of all, *must be left to the Lord to do*, not impeding him with our will, with our self-love; making it too much our own” (to Sister Orsolina Molinari, October 14, 1915).

More complete and straightforward is the first thought in another letter.

Interior work needs our *cooperation*, but let us not forget that what must direct it is the *grace of God*. Let us abandon ourselves with confidence to the work *of grace*, not disturbing it with our worries, with our “me”, with unrelated curiosity. *Let Our Lord work; let us bend*

ourselves to the slightest breath of the Spirit of God (to Sister Lina Stracco, after 1919).

Fr. Rinaldi makes an effort to explain to the *Postulants at Giaveno* the ultimate nature of this work of Our Lord by using an image. “*Jesus wants to imprint his image in each one of you. Jesus will paint it within you. Prepare for him the fine and soft canvas. He will create a masterpiece*” (July 12, 1915).

And in his rich conference in the same place, he describes at length the laborious and, in fact, harsh treatment which hemp undergoes before it becomes “the fine and soft canvas.”

After these brief considerations of a general nature, we move on to illustrating the various aspects under which Fr. Rinaldi presents holiness.

2.2. *Draw near to Jesus, “source of grace, virtue and holiness”*

We mentioned above the biblical foundation that one notices, almost breathes in, in the language that Fr. Rinaldi uses when he writes on holiness. Now we can easily verify this by beginning with the verb “draw near” (in Greek, *prosérchomai*, Latin, *accedere*, and Italian, *avvicinarsi*) which directly or indirectly always refers to Jesus Christ. It suffices to quote the famous passages from the letter to the Hebrews (4:14-16; 7:22-25; 10:19-22; 11:6).

Now, the text that is most explicit and closest to our context is that most famous one, of a baptismal nature, from the First Letter of St. Peter:

So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation; for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. *Come to him (ad quem accedentes, draw near to him)*, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to *offer spiritual sacrifices* acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (2:1-5).⁹

⁹ Bible translations will follow Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (RSVCE) unless otherwise noted.

In the letter to Sister Graziano already quoted, when Fr. Rinaldi speaks of “humiliations, the garden, the thorns, the Cross”, one notices precisely the long journey of holiness that he outlines and assigns to the young sister. It is even to the heights of a life transformed “into a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” as St. Peter indicates.

In other letters the Servant of God gets more specific about the various stages of approaching Jesus Christ. It starts with the soul’s need to negate its previous activity.

“*Clear away the obstacles and draw near to the Lord*, and you will see [that] you will easily work, be it also sometimes with effort, but you will work in harmony with the Spirit of Our Lord, and the Lord will bring you up on high” (to Sister Orsolina Molinari, October 14, 1915).

“*Draw near to the Lord* and you will see that strength comes” (to Mrs. E. C., October 4, 1922).

“*Let us draw near to the Lord* and from Him things will go well for us and for others” (to the same, May 18, 1928).

“Studies, school, labours, sufferings and consolations are the many steps *for ascending and drawing yourself to Our Lord* whom we should know, love and serve as much as possible in this world” (to Sister Cecilia Lanzio, September 13, 1929).

“I am happy that I can still congratulate you for your Profession, which *brings you ever closer to the Good God*; I wish you great progress in holiness; act like Martha and Mary” (to Sister Marta Gastaldo, October 27, 1930).

And we can stop here. As you see, already in the verb *to draw near* Fr. Rinaldi condenses a whole plan for holiness, and not only one step or part of it. It will be clearer for the verbs that follow.

First, let us grant ourselves now a concluding remark on the more or less dependence of Fr. Rinaldi on Maucourant. One looks in vain in this author for an adequate confirmation of the rather eye-catching part Fr. Rinaldi gives to the expression *to draw near to Jesus*. Only two small

phrases can be plucked from an attentive reading, but both are introduced in the discussion in different contexts and in a secondary form. The first concerns the fruit of the first sin that left in the spirit of men that “terror of divine things *that impedes them from drawing near with trust to God*” (*Vita intima con Gesù*, p. 49). The second lies inserted in a thought of St. John Chrysostom, according to which “nothing draws us so much to God and makes us so intimate with Him, as this fidelity” in following his will.

Too little, then to draw from it a true and proper dependence.
Fr. Rinaldi does it himself!

2.3. Follow Jesus: by way of the Cross (see Luke 9:23)

Undoubtedly clear is the biblical character of this verb (*akoloutheo*), which readily identifies with the famous passage on following Christ, appearing almost exactly word for word in the three synoptic Gospels, with its more integral form in Luke 9, 23. “And he said to all, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up *his cross daily and follow me*’” (see Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34).

The centrality that *the mystery of the Cross* assumed in the rest of the New Testament in agreement with this pronouncement of Jesus is well noted, particularly with the “theology of the Cross” that St. Paul fully elaborated and proposed to Christians. He synthesizes it with the doctrinal expression, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and *him crucified*” (1Cor 2:2); and with the personal statement, “I have been *crucified with Christ*; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20); and completed with, “But far be it from me to glory except in the *cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14).

Another somewhat necessary text is the first letter of Peter with the Old Testament reference to the famous song of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah (52:13ff). “But if when you do right and *suffer* for it you take it patiently, you have God’s approval. For to this you have been called, because *Christ also suffered* for you, leaving you an example, *that you should follow in his steps*” (2:20-21).

Remarkable, then, is the centrality and the fullness of the mystery of the Cross in the spiritual teaching of Fr. Rinaldi. Against the background of what traditional asceticism commonly terms *Mortification*, he shows a greater adhesion to the evangelical-biblical teaching just described.

We offer, therefore, a sufficiently abundant documentation on these varied, yet substantially similar, expressions so as to discover in them one of the primary ideas of the Servant of God, and therefore of the Salesian charism, of which Fr. Rinaldi is an authoritative bearer and interpreter.

Let us begin with the precious letters to Sister Teresa Graziano. “If at times it costs and causes suffering to follow Our Lord, let us remember, my daughter, that in paradise we will be greatly rewarded. It is well worth suffering some little things here, in order to enjoy God in eternity” (April 7, 1920).

Fr. Rinaldi very often calls to mind this last teaching, in accord with the vital concept of the Paschal Mystery of *Death and Resurrection*.

The same message recurs in another note to Sister Teresa, this one, without date, on the occasion of her father’s death. “*We follow Jesus Christ Our Lord on the road of sorrow*. Courage! Let us also increase in his love.”

Recall the thought already mentioned to the Provincial, Sister Rosalia Dolza about holiness. “Remember however that *it costs much*. *You must suffer*, but it does not matter” (January 20, 1928).

After excusing himself with the missionary, Sister Lina Stracco, for the long delay in responding to a previous letter of hers, he urges

... and since then how many things have happened! External changes to everything, to feasts, persons and things. How was your spirit affected by so many *changes*? I can only imagine it, but you remember that this was an opportunity for you to meditate on the need to have only one point of support in the missions and in life. We must *seek Our Lord Jesus Christ* who does not change, and remains forever our aim, our life and our glory (during 1929).

Generally, the language of the Servant of God avoids harsh tones, favouring rather a gentle manner that proves effective. On the back of a holy card of the Child Jesus he writes to Sister Graziano, “May Sister Teresa Graziano bring to the Holy Child a bouquet of lilies and roses *with their thorns*” (December 18, 1922).

In a note to her from Nizza Monferrato he writes, “One runs the race for the glory of God with Paradise as the goal. Onward without being concerned with the *little thorns*. Let us pray for each other so that we may reach that goal” (May 14, 1924).

Another more effective way to present suffering is *to have something ready to offer the Lord*. And in this his resourcefulness is admirable. Included among the documents are some letters sent to young Sister Rosetta Dadone whose obedience took her from Turin to far-off Sicily. Let us pluck the best flower from the bouquet. “Little by little you will overcome even the effects of the changes; and the memory of all your dear ones, without erasing them from your mind, but rather making even more of an impression, will become *less painful* and a benefit for your soul” (July 17, 1914).

A little more than a month later, on her name day, he remembers her along with the other Rosettas of the Turin Oratory in his greetings.

I do it all the more willingly inasmuch as I know that a rose, beautiful as it is, *has its thorns*, and I think that you also will have your thorns, especially as you find yourself in a new setting where the devil will come to prick you in a thousand ways. Be attentive, my dear daughter, not to be fooled. Take it as a rule that your *imagination intensifies sufferings* and paints a gloomy and scary picture. Laugh at these fantasies, turning them to your advantage in the name of the Lord. *After sadness comes cheerfulness*, which I wish you with all my heart as I pray for you (August 30, 1914).

Shortly afterwards he feels the need to write to her again.

All your fears *and sufferings* perfectly correspond with the condition of your spirit, your education and even your vocation. If you did not have *those sufferings*, you would not be Rosetta, and I would doubt your good outcome. It would be a sign that you do not have heart, that you are not sensitive, that the devil counts your vocation as nothing.

Being sensitive means that everything affects you, and this will help you to feel so many other things that will benefit your soul. *Love for your family makes you feel their absence*. The devil, who sees that you escaped from him, *has to pursue you*. Be at peace, dear daughter, that all will be well.

Your health has declined a bit; your head aches, and so does your stomach. Your letter reminds me of *how much even I suffered in times past*. Keep in good spirits, trusting that just as I got through it all, you will get through it all... *and then you will know how to console others* (September 2, 1914).

He even makes use of a comparison with soldiers going off to war, building up the image of hardships, injuries on the field, of death, “with no comfort after long torments, in the fray, trampled underfoot, or neglected in some corner.” Then he applies it to her.

You see, Rosetta? You, too, are now on the field, *only your battle is with yourself*. You are *destroying self-love and yourself* in order to win souls, serve the Lord, obtain the glory of heaven. Courage. *Let nothing disturb you*. Remember that for the glory of the world *others suffer more than we*” (May 18, 1915, during the first days of the Great World War).

Another daughter to whom the Servant of God offered tender care was Maria Lanzio. She was the second of three sisters taken under his fatherly care, especially since their father remarried soon after the death of their young mother.

During the months in which her vocation was taking root, she received a note from Seville from the Servant of God who was on a visit to Spain. “Courage, Maria, watch that you bear well your *crosses and sufferings*, which I think you are encountering right now. *Life is sown with setbacks* and these are occasions for us to prove our virtue” (March 5, 1919).

In January of 1923, Maria is already in the Novitiate, while her older sister, Cecilia, also embracing her vocation, was on her way to the United States as a missionary, and her younger sister, Albertina, remained alone in the family home with her stepmother. Good Father Rinaldi wrote to her from Lanzo.

You did well to write me. It is natural that you are deeply saddened by the separation. Cecilia and Bertina are *dear to your heart*; if you did not feel their absence, your heart would be as cold as ice. On the other hand, *by feeling this way, you have more to offer the Lord*. Be generous therefore.... Take advantage of the solitude, of the *sacrifice*, make yourself more perfect and more good. What you write does not surprise me, in fact, it actually seems very natural to me (January 1923).

With the older sister, Cecilia, who was more mature, the wise director and father did not fear to address her in a more explicit way. “I am happy that now you are *totally the Lord’s*. Now the devil will still do all he can, but I hope that we will always prevail. Let us remember that *the Cross will be our portion*. Let us love it and attach ourselves to it, so that we can save ourselves and many souls” (October 12, 1922).

Regarding her upcoming perpetual profession, Fr. Rinaldi wrote,

Now in that (letter), I wrote briefly about *knowing how to suffer*. *The Cross is the way to heaven: ‘qui vult venire post me tollat crucem suam.’*¹⁰ We are in good company with the Cross. This does not eliminate that the Lord Himself *helps us to carry it* thus making it sweet, gentle, dear, and our consolation and glory... *Even Don Bosco had his crosses*, but let us never forget that *he carried them with a smile on his face* and with full confidence in the Lord (April 13, 1929).

After the death of the Servant of God, Sister Cecilia was asked to write some of her memories for a biography. From the USA she confided in Fr. Ceria.

I have a precious *notebook*, in which, as I was aware of the holiness of my guide, I wrote down as literally as possible each time those expressions of his that impressed me most and that I thought would help me in the future. I am reporting some of those which show the loftiness of that chosen soul of his (CE, p. 495).

We will draw also from the “Little Notebook” and the corresponding page in Ceria. Regarding the Cross, he wrote to her this way: “*Ask for the Cross of Jesus, and ask him also for the strength to carry it*” (CE, p. 497).

Writing to the troubled lady E. C., he wrote, “*Everyone has his cross to bear*. Strive to carry it as Our Lord, who fell under the Cross, *but always got up*” (Catania, August 16, 1916).

¹⁰ He who wishes to follow me, let him take up his cross; see Matthew 16:24.

At times his tone is strong, especially when he is confronting someone who is resisting God's Will, particularly with regard to vocation. This is the case with Celestina Dominici, secretary of the *Daughters of Mary*, who could not resign herself to the fact that she was not admitted to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. So, the good father, who held her in high esteem and favoured her, wrote to her.

I am reading with pleasure your very dear letter, containing a *beautiful rose with its thorns*. These thorns would serve you well *if the devil would not pierce you with them*. And it is just he who is piercing you with them, because he does not want you to enjoy the peace and quiet [of the mountains] and gain some health. Do not give him the satisfaction of suffering because of him. *You know where God wants you, and this is enough*. You can do endless good in your position [as a certified seamstress with many young women apprentices whom she was forming to live their Christian faith in a vibrant and joyful way]. You will not lack interior peace; *you will have the rest in paradise*. What do you think, that you will live another hundred years on earth? Be at peace, all this will pass quickly. *You will return then to doing God's will*. For now, enjoy the peace of these days. (September 10, 1912, Don Bosco Volunteers Archives).

In contrast with the strong tone toward Celestina, Fr. Rinaldi shows great understanding toward Miss Teresa Musso, another of his spiritual daughters. She too is troubled by the question of vocation, but remains docile in his hands. An excellent licenced obstetrician, she ended up choosing the single vocation and later joining the Don Bosco Volunteers. She was awarded the Gold Medal for Meritorious Service after 40 years of long and sacrificial service, and lived until July 10, 1966.

The following selections come from among those letters found in the epistolary. How he insistently returns to the theme of the Cross!

The Lord wants nothing more than to purify you with this new illness. He desires *patience in suffering* and in awaiting [an FMA vocation], and you have only *to accept* what he is providing. Let us accept everything, therefore, from the hands of the Lord (November 4, 1909).

At all times keep in mind that *you will find the Cross always and everywhere*. We must sanctify ourselves under the Cross *just like the Most Holy Virgin*. It is at the foot of the Cross that she rose to the greatest holiness (February 6, 1914).

Remember that *we all have a cross*. This is yours. I feel sorry for you; I would have wanted to take it away from you, but since I cannot, I will keep you in prayer. Have courage; in time *we will be rewarded* for doing good, and this will not be long in coming (February 27, 1918).

Courage. Keep your spirits up because there is suffering everywhere in this miserable world. Fortunate is the one who knows how to suffer (July 8, 1918).

I see that with every cross that comes the Lord then supports you one way or another. It is really true that the Lord permits trials, and that they are never greater than our strength. Remain devout despite everything, because life passes and the good remains with us and will follow us into eternity. I remember you always (August 6, 1920).

Your life is *sown with many sufferings* and just as it happens to all the souls that must be great. It is true that even little souls suffer... but very differently. Courage. Raise your mind and your heart, and *hope*. With your honesty of life you will have the recompense of the Lord, who takes account of all that escapes the human eye (December 4, 1920).

How much good the Servant of God steadily spread over the years by accompanying one by one his distant daughters through letters so rich in human understanding and supernatural priestly charity!

He gave evidence of this to the oft-remembered Sister Teresa Graziano on the occasion of the death of her father and then on the death of one of her dearest sisters.

How difficult the path of virtue gets at times! *How heavy the Cross some days!* I would like to help you carry it or at least make it lighter for you, *but how difficult it is*. One ends up doing nothing. However, I will pray much to the Lord for your good Sister, your Mother and for Sister Teresa. The Lord, *when he presses with a heavy hand he does not oppress*, rather he provides for our growth and softens

our suffering. Let us abandon ourselves to his infinite goodness (June 8, 1925).

The humble Coadjutor Costantino Stefanoni received a message still richer in fatherly tenderness.

With pain and with prayer, I followed *your long Calvary* back and forth from the house to the hospital, and now I rejoice with you for your faith in our Blessed Don Bosco and for the good state of your health. *Deo gratias!* [He passes away only some years later, on April 18, 1935 in Milan at the age of 50.] Take care to have your faith and charity grow. We will continue to accompany you with prayer.

Surely suffering purifies us and bring us closer to the Lord, and through your suffering you realize that you have not suffered in vain. How clear it is that one ascends to heaven by way of Calvary and the Cross! May the Lord bless you, so dear to us; be always a worthy son of Blessed Don Bosco” (February 6, 1930).

So, according to the teaching of Fr. Rinaldi, in line with the most orthodox ascetical tradition, *the Cross does not have value in itself*, but accomplishes a double task: *purification and sanctification* of the individual and *apostolic fruitfulness*. The first brings to total detachment *even to immolation*, the second disposes one to *total donation* of oneself to one’s neighbour with the greatest disinterest. Fr. Rinaldi tirelessly encourages both by giving the example.

We begin with the latter. In writing to Fr. Antonio Candela, of the Superior Chapter on Visitation in the USA, he thus pronounces with the authority of Pope Pius XI, “Without a spirit of *mortification* we will never preach Jesus Christ, the Pope told me” (April 17, 1927).

In a positive sense and with fatherly affection, he reminds Fr. G. Antonio Pinaffo, Missionary in Siam-Thailand († August 25, 1971),

This is the miracle of the missionary, *to sacrifice oneself as did Our Lord Jesus Christ*. Your life lets me see that the love of souls and of the Lord develops *with continuous mortification*. If you only knew how well I remember it, and how well I remember you! Tell it to Fr.

Caraglio, that the Lord watches over him *and counts all his sufferings* (February 16, 1930).

And remembering the austere Gospel symbol of the seed, he admonishes the first Daughters of Mary Help of Christians missionaries in India, in the person of Sister Giulia Berra, who was for many years a collaborator of the Servant of God in the Oratory of Valdocco.

I am happy that you have arrived in Assam. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are *like the seed*. In order that it bear the plant and the fruit – and let them remember it well and not forget it – it will have to be *buried, to decompose* and then, little by little, *come to life*. Here is what you need to do, *but do it with cheerfulness, do it with the spirit of joy of Don Bosco, do it without considering the sacrifices*. Forward in Domino. How many baby girls are awaiting redemption through the work of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians]! (December 31, 1923).

It is the impetus that makes one think of the *Resurrection of Christ!*

From two other Mission territories came the laments and preoccupations of his sons faced with the fruitlessness and almost uselessness of their labours. The admonition becomes solemn and acquires a tone of prophecy in the person of Fr. Galdino Eleuterio Bardelli, Missionary in China († Hong Kong, November 10, 1982, 99 years old) and recipient of a good packet of letters with which Fr. Rinaldi follows and accompanies the enthusiastic youth.

You are, my dear sons, our first martyrs of *China*. Remember that to be martyrs it is not necessary to shed blood, *suffice it to die for Our Lord Jesus Christ*. You who work zealously for the glory of God want it at the cost of whatever sacrifice, and do not hold back, *you are our martyrs*.

Your sacrifice is perhaps less preached on earth, but is of extraordinary usefulness. You are charting the path for us to keep; *you are preparing future conversions. You are sowing seeds, others will do the reaping*. Courage, dear Fr. Bardelli (August 11, 1929).

And here the good Father remembers Don Bosco's slow martyrdom in life, which blossomed and matured in the triumphant celebrations of his Beatification (June 2, 1929).

No less solemn, demanding and prophetic is the warning he gives in writing to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, head of the first missionary outreach in Japan begun in 1925.

You must be satisfied in the first years with *sowing seeds*, with *labouring*, with *suffering*; the harvest will be *late* and possibly *at the same time ruined*. Do not be dismayed. God asks of you *work, sweat and sacrifices*. He is "*Deus qui incrementum dat.*"¹¹ The most dreadful sacrifice is that of seeing the *futility of our efforts*. To this sacrifice perhaps will be reserved *immense and resounding graces*, which will constitute in turn the harvest of one who did not sow, *but the reward will be all yours* and will be "*merces magna nimis.*"¹²

You must lay the foundations of our work in a great mission [= nation?]. Understand the nobility of this enterprise; sense the responsibility of it. Then let the foundations *not be yours* – not Paul's, Cephas' or Apollo's, but all Salesian, all Don Bosco's. Be faithful, therefore, and I would say scrupulous in observing the Rules and Regulations which will be studied, meditated upon, deepened, practiced *mordicus*,¹³ with tenacity, constancy and cheerfulness.

Woe to abuses, to laxity, to defects. *What you are now and will be is what the Congregation will be in Japan*. The Superiors, in sending you, opened their hearts to the most gratifying hopes. *Be the mainstay of our life....* (August 10, 1931).

In truth, once won over by Don Bosco Fr. Rinaldi, the man and the religious, was never satisfied with small measures, much less so when he composed these pages within four months of his death.

Nor was he so on the home front of the sanctification of souls guided by him. A series of sketches distributed in chronological order from 1915

¹¹ "God who gives the increase," 1 Corinthians 3:7.

¹² "An exceedingly great reward," Genesis 15:1.

¹³ Tenaciously.

until a few months before his death will show this. The journey is in a straight ascending line.

The directress of the Postulants at Giaveno, Sister Caterina Petrini, handed down to us the summary of a “Conference of Reverend Fr. Rinaldi” from 1915, which is a small masterpiece, completely centred on the hemp plant, to which a reference was made earlier. Although the work is a bit long for us to quote, it merits to be reported, since it aids in better understanding the symbolic method, so dear to St. Francis de Sales, and familiar as well to the Servant of God and fruit of his spirit of observation. It also speaks of his demands when it comes to formation in holiness, which recalls the comparison between the various ways Don Bosco rumbled a handkerchief in his hand and the *abneget semetipsum*¹⁴ of the Divine Teacher.

Who knows how many times you observed a *field of hemp* in good soil, without ever comparing yourself to those plants. You are plants that grow prosperous by means of abundant heat and irrigation.

You watch over that *stiff hemp* in a stream of clear water and you dry it in the sun; then you pick it and you will see it reduced to strands that, combed and finished, produce a *rough and tortured canvas*.

To remove this roughness, it gets thrown into water, *beaten repeatedly* and stretched out in the sun. In this way that canvas becomes soft and serviceable for our purpose. *Do you want to paint on it and make it more refined? Repeatedly*, wet it, *beat it*, rinse it and you will have it as you want it.

We, I was telling you, are something similar; *we are plants that are flourishing* and from whom one wants to draw out that delicate thread, which in order to obtain it *you have to work, and work without respite*, without restraint, *beating* here and *squeezing* there and, in turn, rinsing. *Here*, in the Novitiate *you are in the retting process*, the breeze that purifies you are the Sacraments, the word of the Superior, the Rule in which you are immersed. Not only this, though; *Jesus also wants you to put in your effort*.

And when you leave the Novitiate, you will still be a rough canvas. *Let yourselves be rubbed and beaten*, confident that you will lose your rough and unpolished condition and you will emerge supple

¹⁴ “Let him deny himself,” Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23.

in the hands of your Superiors. *Bend and allow yourselves to be bent*, if you want to get that flexibility that will make you live well again with others, for whom you must live.

The sun will make you warm and white, and this sun is *charity* which comes from on high, which makes you love one another without distinction, without preference, without favouritisms.

Jesus wants to imprint his image in each one of you. Jesus will paint it within you. Prepare for him the soft and fine canvas. *He will create a masterpiece* (Giaveno, July 12, 1915).

Will it be said that this is a nice piece of rhetoric, rather capable of discouraging anyone with his excessive severity? It is rather a general and concrete long-term program in tune with Luke's text which has guided us and guides us in this paragraph. *He, Jesus, is the true Exacting One!*

For the rest, a little letter to another group of Postulants in 1922 demonstrates that his severity would not be arbitrary and irrational.

I am happy to know they are all animated by the desire to do well and to complete their religious formation. Tell them *not to be dismayed by their defects*. Let them work at removing them, in order to be transformed, to become perfect; but let them know that in order to correct oneself radically from a defect *there needs to be much time and great patience, and one does not always succeed*. The Lord knows that certain defects humiliate us, and so we must do what may help us to conquer them. I say so, because the Lord always helps us, if we pray with humility (Giaveno, April 24, 1922).

Fr. Rinaldi's method was to propose high goals and to push the most generous ones toward them. We recall the little *Giornale dell'anima* of Celestina Dominici in which, after the usual meeting with the Servant of God, she reports in a note of March 8, 1915, a thought of Bishop Gay which was so dear to him, namely, *the cross here below, joy on high, love everywhere*. She was still tormented by the problem of vocation.

Oh! Lord, if it not be for You, I would not bear so much pain. *Help me to drink the bitter chalice* which you are presenting to me, *help*

me to drink it to the dregs... In everything, may I always do *the holy will of God*; in all things; oh, yes, may Your Will be fulfilled – *fiat! fiat! fiat!*

And she finishes her note, “How tired I am, my God! *And yet it is for Your Love that I want to suffer*, and to You I offer the *many sufferings* that afflict me. Jesus, help me!”

Then she adds more on the same day.

You cannot fast, you are even prohibited from abstaining from meat, but *you are not prohibited from sacrificing yourself*, from suffering opposition and pains, from doing good, from doing the will of God *immolating yourself*. I will seek, my God, to please You. Give me your grace (Stefano Maggio, *Celestina Dominici*, p. 25).¹⁵

The *immolation*, at which the wise Master is pushing and pulling, begins to take shape. In a short letter to Celestina a year later, we have yet another example. Fr. Rinaldi exhorts her to follow her suffering brother to the mountains in order to escape the stifling heat of Turin.

I am happy that your brother is going to the mountains, and even more, that you may be going also. *You must do this* in order for you to regain your energies and resume your work for the glory of God and the good of your neighbour [the girls of the Oratory and those of her seamstress workshop].

And since she laments not feeling any spiritual fervour, the Good Father urges,

Go then in the name of the Lord. Do not be dismayed about lacking vigour, fervour and other good things. Piety and faith and holiness can be had also with sadness, suffering, agony and repugnance

¹⁵ Maggio Stefano, *Celestina Dominici. La figlia prediletta di Don Rinaldi, 1875-1964*, n.d., n.p.

for the Cross as Our Saviour had in the Garden. Jesus was never holier than in that hour (July 18, 1916, DBV Archives).

One would search books in vain for such a bold phrase. In it one senses the Servant of God, himself immersed in sadness for the adverse happenings at the Oratory, which one year hence will push him to present the Rector Major, Fr. Paul Albera, with a letter of resignation from the office of director (October 26, 1917).

The proposal of *immolation* does not leave the mind and heart of Celestina herself, for during the following March she entrusts to her diary this little terse but, knowing the person, sincere note: “Jesus! as the lamb on the altar? Oh! yes, *on the altar of sacrifice I will let myself be slaughtered, but I will not complain.* But that I may have strength, courage; that I may know how to suffer *without others knowing about it*” (same, p. 33).

It is the habitual teaching of Fr. Rinaldi, which we encounter again in the famous short letter to Sister Teresa Graziano from which we began.

Nevertheless, may you not forget that to draw near to Jesus is to participate in all that is his, including the humiliations, the Garden, the thorns, the cross. Hold firmly, my daughter, above all to these things, never abandoning them, never looking to anyone else (May 24, 1920).

That is what the spiritual authors call *the virginity of sorrow* (P. Aymard). We will come across it again.

Gradually, this exercise carries the need of detachment from oneself and from created realities together with the donation of all to the Lord in the act of the offering. These we find inseparably united.

In a conference to the *Zelatrici di Maria Ausiliatrice* about detachment, Fr. Rinaldi has this very strong message. “Examine yourselves with diligence, and if you find attachment to something, *shatter it all*, in order to give yourselves generously and perfectly to the Lord, and *to imitate St. Francis de Sales* in total detachment from earthly things” (February 2, 1922, QC p. 176).

Fr. Schinetti fittingly comments,

We immediately note the *extreme force* of this ascetical affirmation of Fr. Rinaldi to the Zelatrici, in full accord with the famous affirmation of *St. Francis de Sales*, “If we were to have only one fibre of affection in our heart that was not for Him and from Him, we would instantly tear it out” (to Mother Jane. Frances de Chantal 1606; *Opere XIII*, 200) (QC, p. 176, note 275).

Writing to Mother Eulalia Bosco, at Nizza Monferrato, Fr. Rinaldi recommended, “Tell those novices that I remember them and commend them to the Lord. May they be generous with the Lord; *may they give him all without reserve*, and resolve to *sacrifice everything*, especially self-love, for his glory and the good of souls” (July 31, 1923).

The plan is complete and well organized.

A letter to Maria Lanzio at the end of her postulancy moves along the same line. “In this last month of postulancy do what you can to prepare yourself to be *all for Our Lord Jesus Christ*. No longer hold back any special thing for yourself, *but strip it all away*” (July 1924).

At the same time he was writing to her sister, *Cecilia*, in the United States, where she was preparing for her first profession.

I thought many times of your desire to make yourself holy, *to immolate yourself for Our Lord, to give him everything*. I was reflecting that you were now completing your promise, the offerings, and I prayed so that you would be generous [she will make vows on August 29]. The time, passing by, must leave us better and rich with treasures, which neither the thief, nor the moth cannot destroy (July 29, 1924).¹⁶

To the Director of Novices at Portici – Naples, Fr. Felice Mussa, the Successor of Don Bosco was entrusting this message: “May they [the Novices] seek to imitate him [Don Bosco]. Let them remember that they must *follow Our Lord Jesus Christ in the footsteps of our Blessed*. Their holiness must be that of Don Bosco” (December 26, 1929).

¹⁶ See Matthew 6:20.

He regularly turns his special attention to the three Lanzio sisters with a real fatherly tenderness, and he will confide the reason for it. To Sister Cecilia, as she is preparing for perpetual profession, he writes as a testament,

My Good Daughter, I have a thousand proofs that God wants you *all for himself*; do not refuse him *anything, never* resist him; *love* the Lord and *let him do what he wants by you*. Be generous... Always remember me and pray that we do not let ourselves be deceived by the shortcomings of the exterior life (August 20, 1930).

One senses that the Father is navigating in a full mystic ocean and, as an eagle, wants to carry away his beloved daughters with him.

A few months later he returned to writing to her.

The news that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are beginning a real Mission in *Tampa* and that it is entrusted to Sister Cecilia makes me very happy. Deo gratias! *Our little existence must be consumed for the Lord and for souls...* Courage in difficult moments, but a courage that means faith, hope, charity, and that puts into action all diligence and *the complete sacrifice of one's own person*. Here is a *limitless* program as the zeal for souls ablaze with love of God. Sisters, seek it with patience, making yourselves loved among yourselves, comfort each other, closing your eyes to your defects, which you will do your best to turn into virtues (December 2, 1930).

It seems as though one is hearing here the voice of the Apostle of Love at the end of his life.

He addressed on the same day a two-part message to Sister Maria Lanzio, one for the Postulants for whom she is the Assistant. "Be attentive to the *spirit of interior mortification*, that is of self-love, of taste, of one's will, or better, of that which one does not see exteriorly, without also overlooking *some external thing, but without giving it much importance*" (the *Virginity of sorrow?*). The second message is for her, that she prepare herself for her perpetual profession.

For Sister Maria *it is natural that by now she seeks only the Lord*, the Lord who is in the heavens, and in the Eucharist, and in her heart, seeking him in all three places where he really is: in the glory of the Saints, or in the Body, Soul, Blood and Divinity, or present *as our Head, our life*.

That being said, the VOW to consecrate to him the thoughts, words, works of one's whole life is very useful. It would be true that *nothing would be lost [undertaken?]¹⁷ or made except that it be for Our Lord Jesus Christ*. I would counsel that this VOW be placed *in the hands of Mary Most Holy*, to whom one should recommend oneself often. On our own, we would do just the opposite (March 13, 1931).

It seems that he is dealing with the special *Vow of Greater Perfection*, not so much recommended by the one who had the experience of it. Rather, the Servant of God was able to permit himself to counsel it with a creature whom he knew and was guiding from her childhood. One day, observing her stand out with creativity and a spirit of initiative among a group of girls her own age at the Oratory he muttered, "That one there will make an ideal mistress of novices." And so she was from 1934 for a good 24 years! (Giuliana Accornero, *Storia di Albertina e sorelle*, pp. 59-60).¹⁸

He was not able to see her in action with his own eyes, but he had the great joy of seeing the triptych of the *Lanzio Sisters* reaching their dream destination. On July 10, 1931 he wrote from Turin to the two closest ones.

Good Srs. Maria and Albertina Lanzio, thank you for your letters. I will be even more pleased with one's admission to perpetual vows and the other to vestition.¹⁹ *Deo gratias!* I hope not only to see you again on that occasion, but to take a most active part in it. Meanwhile, let us pray to Mary Help of Christians and Blessed Don Bosco that you prepare yourselves well. *Be you generous in little sacrifices, bearing them for love of the Lord*. I am accompanying you

¹⁷ The typed transcription of Fr. Rinaldi's letter reads, *perdesse* - lost. Fr. Maggio is suggesting that what Fr. Rinaldi wrote is *prendesse* - undertaken, which would give greater coherence to his thought.

¹⁸ Giuliana Accornero, *Storia di Albertina e sorelle*, Rome, Istituto FMA, 1983.

¹⁹ The ceremony of clothing a person with a religious habit.

and am recommending to your prayers yours in Corde Jesu.²⁰ Rev. Filippo Rinaldi.

Less than a month later the last message for Sister Cecilia was sent from Turin. It had all the flavour of a *Nunc dimittis*.

I thank the Lord for the good that you were able to do in Tampa during this past scholastic year. It is the first attempt of a missionary style that you are trying out in the United States. It must teach you to do even more and better.... Be attentive, good Daughter! I await more news next year. *Seek souls*.

In these days Sister Maria is here in Turin for her perpetual profession and Albertina for vestition. Both are fervent. They will write the rest. *I feel the need to thank the Lord because he has gathered all three of you there in the house of the Madonna and because father has found his companion* [Francesca].

How good the Lord is! *I would like to tell you so many things, but I cannot*. I do not have the time. Still I will never forget the three sisters who one sad morning [March 4, 1918] remained orphaned at my side. Let us pray that one day we can find ourselves reunited in Paradise. *Up there the fears, the melancholies will be ended and all will be happiness and love*.

In Corde Jesu, Rev. Filippo Rinaldi (August 2, 1931).

It is enough to look at the date. The Servant of God is a few months away from his earthly end (December 5, 1931). He does not know it, but he feels it. In his last letter to the beloved daughter, a faraway missionary, there lingers an aura of veiled sadness and melancholy, but at the same time of holy joy for having finished his earthy mission, not only regarding the three sisters, but also for all his great family of Don Bosco, in the midst of so many conflicts, misunderstandings, sufferings of every kind, physical and moral, which made of him a true *victim of love*, conscious and generous, ready to receive the prize of Paradise, where “the fears, the melancholies will be ended *and all will be happiness and love*”.

²⁰ In the Heart of Jesus, a frequent Closing of Fr. Rinaldi’s letter.

One senses here the echo of another victim of love of Jesus the Redeemer, *the apostle Paul*, also longing for the prize after a turbulent and troubled life.

As for me, my blood is ready to be poured out as a libation, and the time to set sail has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept the faith. Now there remains only the crown of justice which the Lord, just judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me, but also to all those who *with love* await his appearing (2Tim 4:6-8).²¹

At this point we could naturally raise the question, Why does the Cross occupy so ample and central a place in the spiritual teaching of the Servant of God, Fr. Philip Rinaldi?

a) A first response comes to mind: for a close and conscious consistency with the Gospel and the whole New Testament. We have found very many echoes of it also when explicit citations do not appear, even up to his last letter to Cecilia.

b) Then there is, for the one who knows in depth the life of the third successor of Don Bosco, that which can be called a personal motive. Without wanting to enter into the details, we make use of a text of Bishop Gay, quoted by Maucourant (p. 182), which beautifully portrays the history and life of Fr. Rinaldi.

We should accept *all kinds of crosses*: crosses of the body, crosses of the heart, crosses of the spirit, crosses of the soul; temporal crosses, spiritual crosses, crosses of sufferings, of temptations, of privations, of disappointments, of contempt, crosses that come directly from God, crosses that come from God through creatures; crosses from Superiors, crosses from equals, crosses from inferiors, crosses that arise from our depths and that throw us into confusion and torment.

All these crosses, or mostly all, some more some less, were present in the earthly existence of the Servant of God and afflicting him. So now that the Church has taken the supreme decision of declaring the heroicity of Fr. Rinaldi in the exercise of all the Christian virtues, we can well say

²¹ Fr. Maggio is following the Italian Conference of Bishops' translation which does not correspond completely with RSVCE or any major English translations.

that one of the more heroic virtues was exactly that of patience in accepting and bearing all sorts of crosses always with the serenity, cheerfulness and joviality of his beloved Father, Don Bosco. The cited documentation is none other than a small part of his teaching for others, even if we often see him include himself in the number with a sincere “we”.

Also, he was not just a preacher; his life was consistent even to the point of heroism with what he was teaching. The Biographies demonstrated this even though they lacked the names and enriching details of witnesses, which for obvious reasons of prudence and Christian charity were not included. Above all, the depositions during the canonization process, as referenced in the whole content of the volume of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints titled *Positio super virtutibus* (1985) with the precious *Informatio* (pp. 1-209) from which the conviction about the heroicity of the new Venerable (Decree of January 3, 1987) matured, likewise demonstrate it.

The memorable Fr. Peter Schinetti, student and admirer of Fr. Rinaldi, when responding to and being grateful for the communication of the plan for this work on Fr. Rinaldi, even for this last chapter, expressed himself thus:

Truly, there is still much to discover around this personality, and it gives me pleasure to see interest being expressed in this regard by various sources and also from those in high positions of responsibility.... I am also in full agreement on the details that you indicated regarding [the presence of the Cross in the teachings of Fr. Rinaldi], including, naturally, that which, in unsuspecting times, someone [he] had pointed out as *part of the Salesian charism*: the *victim* aspect (moment), having so much *historical and existential* data that point in this direction (Treviglio, May 31, 1987).

c) This victim component in Fr. Rinaldi seems present and well documented. But the Servant of God himself helps us to consider it also proper to the Salesian spirit and charism, in as much as the reference to Don Bosco is also constant. We are limiting ourselves to only three witnesses. The first has been quoted above in the message to the Novices in Naples. “Let them remember *that they must follow Our Lord Jesus Christ in the footsteps of our Blessed*” (December 26, 1929).

The second is contained in a short letter dated August 2, 1918 to Sister Teresa Graziano and to her Postulants, in which alluding to “the great

and unshakable edifice” of the Salesian Work, he continues, “Don Bosco, hidden, poor, small, *neglected*, was chosen to accomplish the works of God.”

We find, however, a richer and more explicit text within a letter partly related to and directed to the Salesian, Fr. Bardelli, from which it becomes clear that his gaze remains habitually focused on his Father, Teacher and Model.

Fifty years ago, we saw our Blessed Don Bosco suffering, struggling, forgotten, accused, to the point of being suspended from sacramental ministry. Today he is Blessed in heaven, and Turin and Rome and the world bestow on him such honours that are far beyond all expectation (August 11, 1929).

Interesting also is the continuation of this letter, because it also refers to the little Calvary of the missionary, due to misunderstandings and oppositions, attributed by the good Father to the fact that “*unfortunately not everyone knows Our Lord Jesus Christ, nor Don Bosco and his spirit*”, an association itself quite explicit and eloquent.

d) There is one last point, to which the reply has already been given here and there. No accusation can be put forward against Fr. Rinaldi for excessively insisting on the topic of the Cross in his teachings, almost as a form of spiritual masochism. We have already spoken of his desired consistency with the Gospel message and with the entire New Testament. It is also noteworthy that he never omits to follow up his reference to the Cross with a reference to the Resurrection: *Paschal Mystery*, either under the form of the redemptive and apostolic value of suffering, or under that last refuge of remembering Paradise in harmony with the example of his Blessed Father. Bishop Gay’s famous saying so familiar to him (*the cross down here, joy up there, love everywhere*) confirms it.

And we conclude with a testimony of Sister Clotilde Morano from the canonization process, derived from a letter of Fr. Rinaldi to her. In making reference precisely to certain misunderstandings which she was facing in her situation, the Servant of God replied to her, with a not too veiled allusion to his more bitter and piercing sufferings. “One of the greatest sufferings in Community is *when you are not understood by the Superiors. You have no one to fall back on.*”

Now, here is his usual wingbeat. “And that is when you need to *abandon yourself all the more into the hands of the Lord*” (*Positio*, p. 876).

It remains to fathom the vast field of Temperance and Mortification in the private life of the Servant of God. That is not our task. For this, you can resort to the *Informatio* on the heroic virtues, as well as to the Biographies.

2.4. *Imitating Jesus: model of humility and meekness (see Mt 11:29)*

Following Jesus means to fashion one's conduct after his, to listen to his teachings and to conform one's life to that of the Saviour. This section then comes as the natural complement to the preceding one, also because it brings to light the interior dispositions with which we must follow Jesus even to Calvary.

Is it not the case that, above all, in two circumstances Jesus exhorts his disciples to imitate him: when he presents himself as the “meek and humble of heart” par excellence (Mt 11:29), and when, after having washed their feet, he encourages them to follow his example (Jn 14:12-16)? Both examples deal with a form of humility enlivened by love, which becomes service.

Over the centuries Christian asceticism made imitating Jesus an object of meditation deepened above all by the Word of God and its practical exercise in everyday life. Conclusive proof of this presents itself in the teachings and examples of the Saints. We seek to gather this proof in Fr. Rinaldi, who abundantly offers us both.

He presents the first big principle to Sister Teresa Graziano for the novices for whom she is the Assistant. “*Let them imitate Jesus in as much as it will be possible for them. May Jesus Christ be always before their eyes, as he was under the eyes of Mary Most Holy*” (December 20, 1923).

To Sister Marta Gastaldo he presents the extreme consequences of such imitation, which must not hold itself back even in the face of the Cross. “*The trial has begun. You must persevere even when difficulties arise. These the Lord permits and at times wills them in order to perfect us, fortify us and make us His imitators in carrying the Cross. Courage. Confide greatly in the Lord*” (March 21, 1921).

To Sister Caterina Gaido he proposes the true and ultimate end of imitating Jesus. “*Let us take courage, so that we can imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ and go on doing good ourselves*” (August 21, 1921).

To the Salesian missionary Fr. Giuseppe Antonio Pinaffo he offers, in short, the sublime example of Don Bosco, so exalted by Pius XI in those days surrounding the Beatification.

“Let each one remember that he will represent Our Lord Jesus Christ the better we imitate Him; and so that we do not make a mistake in the matter of time, place and manner, let us propose to imitate our Blessed. With truth he really speaks to us. *Imitatores mei estote sicut et ego Christi.*²² Keep going” (December 26, 1929).

The Servant of God is never vague in his teaching, and here is how it unfolds with regard to the imitation of Christ. He clearly puts attention on it, in writing to Sister Carolina Cerrato, by referring to the same teaching of Jesus. “May the Heart of Jesus give you a *meek and humble* love. Pray, also, the same for me” (June 19, 1916).

To Sister Teresa Graziano and to her novices he declares true humility, bearer of happiness and of full abandonment. “...I am writing to you to tell you to be happy this year, each of you, with that happiness that is born *of true humility and of full abandonment to the Divine Heart of Jesus*” (January 15, 1917).

He was able to permit himself with the novice Sister Maria Lanzio to envision a very demanding plan of holiness founded in humility.

Be you attentive to the formation of the spirit; *above all to self-love*. Humiliate it within you. *You must imitate the humility of the Heart of Jesus*. All the rest is vanity and foolishness. Do not lose a day of your novitiate without progressing in the *Spirit of God*; that is, in piety, in charity, in *humility of heart*, in sacrifice, in *renouncing yourself*. *Make Maria disappear, so that only Our Lord, who wants you holy* in mind and in heart, in soul and in body, *remains* (March 24, 1924).

True humility should lead to full confidence in the Lord, as he repeats to Sister Teresa Graziano in a short letter. “I am happy that you are presently beginning your [Retreat]. It should mark a progress in *distrust of*

²² “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ,” 1Cor 11:1.

self in order to confide more in the Lord, to see oneself smaller so as to see the Lord greater” (August 25, 1929).

Along with humility, Jesus indicated *meekness* as a special object of imitation, which precisely under the dual aspect of calm gentleness and indulgent moderation characterizes Christ (2Cor 10:1) and must also characterize his disciples. Fr. Rinaldi expresses this great truth in his simple, but effective, style in a note to Sister Caterina Gaido. “The more good you become, the better. *It is better to be a violet than a thistle*, even though one is feared and the other trampled” (Liguria, no date).

Humility and goodness create the charm that gladdens the heart of Fr. Rinaldi writing to his nephew Filippo. “Paul was a beautiful soul; *above all humble*: we need to have this virtue be preserved in everyone. *As long as young people will be humble, there will be less evil in the world*. Woe if they were arrogant, and even we, poor elders, woe if arrogance enters us” (October 8, 1931).²³

We have to be grateful to Sister Caterina Petrini, directress of Giaveno, who, just as she preserved for us a short conference of Fr. Rinaldi to the postulants on hemp, so she preserved these *Thoughts* on humility. This simple but effective synthesis of his teaching is totally inspired by the Gospel.

Jesus wants the *little ones* near Him, and you are the smallest, if your heart is not puffed up with pride or with presumption or with another miserable state, which I cannot believe you have.... For goodness sake, be attentive to *imitating the humility of the Heart of Jesus*. *I prefer you dead than proud*. Make yourselves *little* before Jesus, and keep yourselves small, which you are doing, poor little daughters! Also, among your companions.... *We are nothing*, my good little daughters, and we must *be little useless creatures, bloated with defects, but always close to Jesus*, to Him who is our strength and our life. Therefore always pray to him, *be happy even if you were bad and at fault*. *Jesus loves you as you are...* (July 12, 1915).

He also speaks a similar message to mature persons – his confreres and priests – to whom he presents humility as the best means for success

²³ Paul Rinaldi, twin brother of Fr. Peter Rinaldi (1910-1993) of the Eastern United States Province, died as a young seminarian brother on June 25, 1929. Filippo was their father.

in their apostolate. Thus he wrote to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti in Japan. “Here is what God wants from you. You must make yourselves *children* in learning the language: be such in spirit. *Humility will smooth all your ways*, will enlighten the mind, freeing you from smoke and stench, *will render the practice of charity easy and constant*” (August 10, 1931).

He reminds Sister Linda Lucotti, new Provincial of Sicily, “The Lord has entrusted to you a portion of his flock. Love them as He himself would. Love has resources all its own for obtaining good. *Do not put trust in your talents, but in obedience*. Let us make ourselves religious *of faith*. Move ahead cheerfully in the name of the Lord” (December 21, 1922).

He makes a similar appeal to the missionary in China Fr. Galdino Eleuterio Bardelli. “*Do not look at your gifts and your merits.... There is more to do. Then the one who acts is Our Lord who uses whoever offers himself. Think less about yourself and more about Our Lord Jesus Christ.... Be attentive: do not give way to melancholy [daughter of haughtiness]*” (July 20, 1927).

Likewise, in another situation, he offers a motive of tranquility. “*Continue your interior formation without getting dismayed by your defects. They make the Lord’s goodness stand out more*” (August 9, 1930).

On a different note, he gives a severe lesson to Sister Cecilia Lanzio. “To become discouraged by one’s defects shows *a lack of faith in God*, too much trust in ones’ efforts” (*Little Notebook*, n. 8, CE, p. 496).

And to the one who was complaining about the few fruits of his missionary zeal, Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, he recalled with both admonition and comfort, “Read and meditate on the positive story of the apostolate of Sts. Peter, John and Paul.... They all died *surrounded by a few beggars*, in imitation of the Master, who nevertheless was and is the life of the world” (August 10, 1931).

He gives another lesson in humility and love of the Church to all directresses through the Superior General Sister Luisa Vaschetti. “To the directresses I would very much recommend: *Let them be more submissive to the directives of parish priests regarding Catholic works. Let them not believe themselves masters, but servants of the Church*. This, without diminishing zeal and charity but by adapting them” (August 17, 1930).

From this long and articulate spiritual effort on humility there matures and exudes the charm of simplicity so loved and recommended by Fr. Rinaldi. He writes about it to Cecilia Lanzio, still a very zealous

eighteen year old oratorian about one of her little compositions for Communion.

Thank you very much for *Communion*. It is a *simple* composition, in the style that I would always want you to preserve. I am sending you poems in different meters, all with a Christian spirit, although not always with that *simplicity* that I just recommended to you. Take from them whatever is beautiful, but keep your way of feeling and expressing. Courage, my little daughter; even poetry can serve the Lord, if it is used well (July 13, 1914).

He made it the object of a special recommendation to Fr. Giuseppe Vespignani for the Salesians. “See that even the superiors preserve *Salesian simplicity*. It seems that they are making noise and standing on their own importance. For heaven’s sake, *let us stand by Don Bosco*” (February 27, 1925).

Commenting on the scene of the Child Jesus in the Temple for the postulants of Giaveno, he embroiders a beautiful image of simplicity and humility united together.

Jesus was listening in the temple.... We could never teach, unless we ask questions in order to know what we need to do. *Let us look at Mother Mazzarello*. She did not know how to move without first questioning. *She was simple and humble*; and if the Institute developed so well, it is not by the knowledge, intelligence, etc., of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, but rather that they owe it to their Mother, because in her true *simplicity and humility*, *she first inquired with Don Bosco*, then listened, then acted and in this way, she was not mistaken. Do you want to know those who grow in wisdom and grace? Those who question and listen. *Behold the model of Jesus the Adolescent*” (Giaveno, August 4, 1922).

At this point it will be instructive to see if and in what measure Fr. Rinaldi practised the humility he was teaching to others. Let us limit ourselves to only a few cues gathered from the epistolary, taking into account its various degrees. In the first degree humility is modesty which opposes vanity. To the Superior General Sister Caterina Daghero, who with

the others on the General Council were rejoicing at his nomination as Prefect General at the behest of Fr. Rua, he responded in a tone of sincere humility.

I need you to help me *not to do*, so that this runs on account of the Lord and his Holy Mother, who each day are working wonders at the hand of Don Bosco and... of Fr. Rua. What I need is *not to undo*, not prevent, not hamper the course of divine mercies. *Pray that we do not destroy the Works of God* (April 9, 1901).

Humility that opposes pride stands at a deeper level; it is the attitude of the sinful creature, conscious of his miserable state before the omnipotence and holiness of God, in whom he still confides. The humble person in fact recognizes having received from God all that one has (1Corinthians 4:7). A worthless servant (Luke 17:10), nothing by himself (Galatians 6:3), but with God's help, he feels he can do everything. "*I can do all things in him who strengthens me*" (Philippians 4:13).

Here is Fr. Rinaldi responding to Father Antonio Candela who confided in him his trepidation at having to accept his appointment to the General Council. "Still, come peacefully to Turin. *Knowing our miserable state*, we entrust ourselves to Mary Help of Christians, to whom I commend you and from whom you should expect the necessary graces. *Don Bosco then will do the rest...*" (November 28, 1925).

Then, there is the humility of one who also knows how to lower oneself, in imitation of Christ (Philippians 2:3 ff). In a short letter to Father Pietro Tirone, Catechist General, whom he himself appointed to that office, we find this moving profession of sincere humility.

Dear Fr. Tirone, in my words there must be arrogance, or rudeness, or something boring that irritates others. *See what is there*, maybe what we do not even imagine, and *appraise me about this and anything else*; so that it does not happen that, while I am recommending charity and unity to everyone, I may not be the one who is at fault with those who are closest to me. *I await this charity from you*, which you will do me as you should, *without fear of irritating my self-love, which needs to be humiliated*. Yours in the Sacred Heart Rev. Philip Rinaldi (no date).

It seems as though we are witnessing a scene from *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*.

It is clear how from this fund of humility there should gush forth full trust in the help of the Lord for every good work. So he wrote to Fr. Carlo Braga, Provincial in China, who was insisting on having new missionary personnel. “We are seriously working for missionary personnel, but you cannot imagine how much it costs us. Only time and *the grace of God* bring them forth, mature them, fill them with his gifts. *We have only to work*” (August 7, 1931).

And we end this review of testimonies on humility with a reference to apostolic charity. It is Fr. Rinaldi who opens up with Sister Lanzio, “*Humility must not prevent charity*” (Quadernetto, CE, p. 497).

Sincere humility lifts up, it does not dishearten.

No less sincere and disarming is his profession – of humility – which he expressed to Mrs. E. C. in one of the frequent moments of misunderstanding.

Dear Madam, with great mortification I read your esteemed letter. I am forced to confirm what I have long felt within myself, which is that *I do not have the qualities to accomplish the very delicate mission that You Yourself are expecting of me*. I have to convince myself as well that my head is not equal to my heart. I feel sorry for you that you have always had so much goodness and trust in me. *May the Lord make up for my inadequacy* and grant you what he who is sincere, however he may be judged, did not know how give you, Fr. Philip Rinaldi (May 15, 1920).

Note that from 1913, the Servant of God was always looking to win with patience and humble goodness the trust of that difficult penitent, forever a victim or her unfortunate and touchy temperament. And the effort will last until the death of the good Father, so lamented then after she was deprived of it.

The epistolary has preserved for us as well another pearl of humble simplicity truly...Salesian, which represents the reciprocation of the service received and which the Superior renders to his secret monitor and friend, Fr. Pietro Tirone.

Dear Fr. Tirone, Happy Easter. Tonight, at one o'clock when Fr. Giraudi arrived with all care to be quiet so as not to disturb anyone, there fell from his hand I don't know what. I woke up, and, well, I could not get back to sleep. I take this opportunity to tell you that when I recommend to you to become perfect, it is because I feel the need that our confreres find in the superiors open hearts that may bind them ever more *to Don Bosco and to God*. I do not intend one bit to tell you that you are full of defects! However, now that you are asking me for specifics, I will tell you what was noted. 1st during the Superior Chapter they pointed out to me: *He is too German, he is too hard-line*. 2nd in the houses of formation they told me, *He is too serious, he does not attract*. 3rd the Sisters pointed out to me, *He is too dogmatic, and preaches long*. This is the substance. As you see, it does not deal with love nor rudeness nor affectation. I find you are very proper with me. *What should you do?* Consider Fr. Rua. When he was Prefect General he came across rigid, austere, of few words, and he did not enjoy a great deal of confidence even from the young Salesians. *When he became Vicar and then Rector Major*, without changing character, he acquired so much fatherliness and amiability, such that you know how he was esteemed and loved, *despite the fact that two or three did not reconcile themselves with him as long as he lived*. You do the same. Seek to dress yourself with more fatherliness and preserve the *yes yes, no no* as Fr. Rua and Don Bosco were doing. *Prayer obtains everything; pray*. For the rest you can be convinced that I am happy with you, because I chose you; I who have known you for many years.

Ask Fr. Minguzzi [provincial of Rome from 1929 to 1930] if he believes you [Visitor] should visit or do some necessary thing in his place. Then insisting that he rest, counsel him to withdraw somewhere [such delicacy!]. May the Lord bless you. Always keep in mind yours in Corde Jesu Rev. Philip Rinaldi (April 20, 1930).

For other witnesses to the humility exercised to a heroic degree by the Servant of God in all his years as a superior, it will be enough to resort to the very well documented volume on the *Positio super virtutibus* and on the very long chapter which the *Informatio* dedicates to it, as mentioned above.

One can object that spontaneous humility cannot count as that provoked by others. Yet, we know that all his years as Prefect General (1901-1922) were afflicted with misunderstandings, disagreements,

humiliations. The biographies of Fr. Ceria and Fr. Castano often make subtle mention of them. The biography of Fr. Castano dedicates a half page, sufficient to make us intuit the great trial accepted and always overcome with a great spirit of faith.

No one would have thought that in the exercise of so fruitful a ministry, of which it is impossible to measure the breadth and abundance of fruits, Fr. Rinaldi faced *disappointments and disagreements*. Not everyone was pleased that the Prefect General, who, while inspired by the example of Don Bosco, would dedicate so much time and care to the ministry and was open to such a broad and continuous spiritual charity. In Fr. Rua's times, no difficulties arose. These surfaced *under Fr. Albera*, who also had a very high regard for his first collaborator. Sometimes, however, as Fr. Ceria acutely observed (p. 174), "*Fr. Albera saw certain things about Fr. Rinaldi with other people's eyes.*" That is, there was one who was judging with less benevolence the Servant of God's best efforts in his ministry and was casting doubts in the Rector Major's mind. Right from the beginning of Fr. Albera's rectorate Fr. Rinaldi, who sensed the situation and declared himself willing to renounce all, had decided not to change his course of action. *Only obedience could have taken him away from the apostolate*. However, this never happened. Though he suffered from a certain reserved attitude expressed in words that indirectly affected him, he continued to be a gift for souls. *The price he paid in humiliation and suffering brought about much good*. Fr. Rinaldi knew this and none of it dismayed him (CA, pp. 115-116).

On October 28, 1917, he wrote, "I will be more vigilant so that the confessional and especially women do not divert me from a truly Salesian life according to Don Bosco" – here, then, is where the comments came into play –. "For this I need to pray much. Alone I am incapable of keeping on the right path. Mary Help of Christians help me" (CE, p. 145), (CA, pp. 115-116).

One knows, in any case, that misunderstandings and humiliations began before that year, within and outside of the Oratory, at different levels, and on various occasions on the part of the girls, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Salesians.

Fr. Castano continues

Perhaps, then, it makes sense what Fr. Ricaldone, an eyewitness, carefully relates during the canonization process. “Once the late Fr. Albera, not well informed, gave him in Council, *more than a remark, a real reproach*. Fr. Rinaldi, who could have clarified and defended himself, did not say a word. That same day, going out into the city, I allowed myself to recall with him the unpleasant fact. *Fr. Rinaldi remained silent and did not want to speak about it*” (CA, p. 116).

However, we are not without some of his direct, if somewhat veiled, testimony through which his inner suffering – a real agony of spirit – appears. At the bleakest time, which culminates in his resignation as director of the Oratory by means of a letter from Ivrea on October 26, 1917, to the Rector Major, Fr. Albera, he opened up about his suffering with Mrs. E.C., almost groaning as Jesus in the Garden of Olives. “In confidence I will tell you that *I had one of the greatest sorrows that one can have in life during the past days. It has to do with the worst disillusionment that a priest and superior can have*” (Turin, September 13, 1917).

Nor were they the only sufferings, for when writing to Sister Caterina Gaido, he expressed himself in this way.

I returned for the Retreat and I am well. It will help us to forget that which we should be forgetting. *All that is ugly, that is bad, that harms us*, it is our duty to forget it. Don Bosco wanted that we would always have before us what cheers and motivates us toward the good, encourages, does good. Such a great educator was Don Bosco! (August 14, 1919).

And again to Mrs. E.C., “You ought know that for some time I am somewhat disturbed by stories of one kind or another, so that I am experiencing a revulsion for hearing even allusions and the like being spoken” (July 10, 1920).

This was the mettle of the Servant of God’s virtue, who even as Rector Major continued be the object of some ill will, manifested in some cases in the form of mockery even in public, by highly cultured confreres, with hints about his having been a “Son of Mary.” The details were observed and given as a testimony.

Yet in his heart the spirit of the Virgin visiting St. Elizabeth rang out, and at certain moments he was no stranger to the main verses of the *Magnificat*. Fr. Ricaldone himself was able to attest in the canonization process,

We saw him always humble in comportment, in speaking and in acting. As I already said, *he had a very low opinion of himself*, and I do not remember hearing him speak of himself. He considered himself unworthy every time he was promoted to some office. In the last years, when he saw that his strength was fading away, he had in mind to give up the office and *to present his resignation to the Holy See. His humility was always shrouded in goodness and with sweetness*. He was always hospitable, and by his way of acting one understood that he considered himself the Servant of everyone. I add that his humility was properly understood, and did not impede him from taking his place, whether as Director or as Provincial, Prefect General and Rector Major, *with due decorum*. And while he himself practiced humility, and all the other virtues of which I spoke, he did not fail to inculcate them with loving and strong insistence to the Confreres (*Summarium*, nn. 293-294, 1032-1033).

And it is really true that the Lord never fails to extol the humble of heart, just as He, not infrequently did also on earth! As with all our heart we hope, and for this we pray.

2.5. *To Love Jesus: observing his commandments (see John 14:15)*

As always, even in this specific field, Fr. Rinaldi does not dwell on theoretical considerations on love, but goes each time to the heart of his subject – holiness – guided always by the Word of God, and especially by the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels and of the disciples in the New Testament.

He begins right away by identifying holiness with the love of Jesus, writing for example to Sister Maria Lanzio with the Novices of whom she is the assistant.

I bless with a fatherly heart the Superior and the Novices of this House. Still, I would like to know if they have begun *to become holy*. *Who loves Our Lord the whole day? Who always renounces her*

tendencies *in order to follow only Our Lord Jesus Christ? Become holy now and truly holy*. Courage good daughters in Our Lord Jesus Christ (January 9, 1927).

And many years earlier he was playing the same theme with greater breadth and a real lyrical dash writing to the novice Sister Teresa Graziano and through her to all the novices of that year. After having spoken of charity in general and of the duty of loving everyone in Jesus, he went on in this manner.

Love Our Lord, above each and every one. Really love him, always love him, love him everywhere, love him with your whole heart, with your whole mind, with your whole soul, with all your senses; nay, if you want to love all others well, love *first and – I would say – only Our Lord Jesus Christ*. *Learn from his Heart how to love*.

Nor does he ever neglect the practical aspect.

If you love Jesus, *you will easily conquer your terrible enemies*, who are self-love, your sensitivity, your imagination, a real madhouse that makes you see so many things that are not true, yet bother you. Courage, my good Daughters, *love Our Lord and watch out not to love yourselves*, your daintiness, your susceptibility. *Loving Jesus, you will always love your neighbour* (June 1917).

To Sister Cecilia Lanzio he illustrates the breadth that love of Jesus needs to take on and the various means for making it a reality.

In everything we are seeking only God and the salvation of souls, never vanity and human glory. Be careful, my daughter, be careful. We must not give *a thought, a breath, a beat of the heart* to others outside of Our Lord Jesus Christ. For Him *study, work, teach, suffer, be despised, die*, but with a smile on the lips and joy in the heart, *it is to be solely for Our Lord* (March 17, 1924).

Instead, in a simple note of greetings to the novice Sister Teresa Graziano, he dwells on the motives that make our love for Jesus right and proper. “*Jesus loved Teresa* by coming down from Heaven, lowering himself even to you, destroying himself in the Eucharist, dying on the Cross. *If Teresa wants to love Jesus as much*, may she do what He has done! *Courage, my dear; they are works and not thoughts*” (January 27, 1917).

In the famous *Little Notebook* of Sister Cecilia Lanzio we find two thoughts, very dear to Fr. Rinaldi, that insist on the same concept expressed in different words. The first, “If we belong to Jesus, he can make of us *what he pleases*. *Becoming inebriated* with his love, he makes us feel that *he wants us*; leaving us cold and in temptation, *he tries our fidelity*” (CE, p. 496).

This is the language of a mystic!

The second is more simple, but no less effective. “*To love the Lord when the heart is calm and serene* and everything invites us to Him, is no great merit. Instead, it is meritorious to stay equally united to Him *when everything distracts us*, and in ourselves there is irritation and confusion. In these moments *true virtue* stands out” (CE, p. 497).

Lastly, to the novice Sister Teresa Graziano, with a comparison with the Prudent Virgins, he already infers the duty to radiate the love that we bring to Jesus on those who approach us.

Look to ignite in your heart *true charity*. *The lamp of the Prudent Virgins*: it is the heart on fire with love for the Lord. None from this House should have it extinguished. There let the love of God exist, *and true love of God*, that which does not burn and destroy, but which *illuminates, warms and sweetly moves* however many draw near to us. With this love and heat you will not fear exterior evils [a reference to the disasters of the First World War], and you will progress *in the true spirit of Don Bosco* (January 15, 1917).

Passing then more appropriately to the truly practical aspect that love for Jesus should assume, Fr. Rinaldi could not but adhere to the most sure Christian asceticism, synthesized by *Maucourant* in this way. “The book of holiness is titled: *Do the Will of God*. Our encounter with God takes place *in His will*. There we are united with each other, we understand each

other, we take the first steps in intimacy, since ‘*love is the fulfilling of the law*’²⁴” (p. 96).

This is why the Servant of God insists so many times and in the most diverse situations on the Will of God.

Foremost in the *Little Notebook* of Sister Cecilia Lanzio, “*To be holy means to do the will of God*, and this is done by properly fulfilling one’s duty, *in every moment of the day*” (CE, p. 495). Or, in other words, “*To do one’s duty with simplicity, with a serene countenance, is the most pleasing homage that we can give to God and the best way of becoming holy*” (CE, p. 495). And with the austerity of the language customary in the Saints, “*No discipline or fast imposed by ourselves by our own will is greater than a day of work done according to God’s will*” (CE, *ibid.*).

This is why, in defining the spiritual direction that Fr. Rinaldi was giving to his penitents, Sister Maria Lanzio testified, “*His was a simple and plain, gentle, strong and clear direction.... He demanded a little at a time and he wanted above all to get down to the practical: performance of duty, generosity in daily sacrifices, zeal in doing good*” (G. Accornero, *Albertina*, pp. 50-51).

To Sister Marta Gastaldo, a missionary in the Andes, he wrote, “*Go forward calmly, with simplicity and cheerfulness, willing to do God’s will to the point of sacrifice*” (August 30, 1926).

With Fr. Giovanni Barile, also a missionary and ill († at La Paz July 31, 1961, at 91 years of age), the address became less sober and more pronounced. “*How it would make me happy to know that you have recovered. Yet, let us also say, non mea voluntas sed tua fiat.*”²⁵ The Lord knows better than we. *His will is full of goodness*, more than ours, so, *non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.*²⁶ However, pray to our Blessed and to Mary Help of Christians that they would think of us.”

And he concludes with an exclamation so rich in faith and abandonment. “*We have such a need of confreres according to the spirit of the Lord and of the Blessed.... Where we may not reach, the Lord will reach*” (January 13, 1930).

With Celestina Dominici the good Shepherd returns with patience to underline the great value of the will of God for our sanctification.

²⁴ Romans 13:10.

²⁵ “*Not my will but yours be done,*” Luke 22:42.

²⁶ “*Not as I will, but as you will,*” Matthew 26:39.

I am happy that your health is getting better and better, so that you can still do a little good in this world. The desire of a life harvest is pleasing to the Lord, and you have to cultivate it; *but above all doing the will of God is perfection*. In the past you have not been whimsical; be assured that *you have cooperated with his designs*. For the future, be it little or much time, it does not matter; but that which we should do is to *love the Lord, save souls and become holy*.

And he concludes with an echo of Saint Paul. “Courage. Just a little while longer. *Then we will be forever with the Lord in Paradise,*”²⁷ (DBV Archives).

In this his presentation, Fr. Rinaldi, in the end, does nothing else than follow the teaching of Jesus, so explicit in the Gospel of Saint John, and with a marvelous crescendo.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” (John 15:10).

“You are my friends, if you do what I command you” (John 15:14).

“He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who love me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 14:21).

And Jesus gave us the most complete and total manifestation of Himself with his heroic adherence to the Father’s will and with the commandment of charity. Both the one and the other offered for our imitation. We have spoken of the first. For the second we will only mention what we will develop later.

The first part of the impassioned exhortation to Sister Teresa Graziano and to the other novices to love Jesus Fr. Rinaldi had properly directed to charity. The virtue of Jesus,

...*Charity, love!* How great and admirable a virtue is this very one! Preserve it in your heart. Remind yourselves that it is that *which makes you more pleasing to Jesus*, who came from Heaven just to teach it to us, *and it is his virtue*. Preserve it always, my good daughters, *if*

²⁷ See Hebrews 10:37 and 1Thessalonians 4:17; 5:11.

you want to do good to your neighbour. Always love everyone without distinction, great and small, good and evil, close and far off. But do not love them with words, love them by consuming yourselves as candles lit to illumine and warm your neighbour. Love your Sisters, Superior and little girls and young girls that you have in the house; love them as Jesus loves, and then you will feel what a good thing it is to live in Community.... Above each and every one, love Our Lord..." (June 1917).

With Sister Cecilia Lanzio, as always, but especially in his last years, the Father of her soul indulges in confidences.

Your letter pleases me, because it gives me *intimate news* that I was happy to know. I was feeling the need to know just how are Cecilia's *soul and heart and health and peace*. I am happy that you are very busy and that you are working for souls. Giving of oneself to doing good *is a necessity, if we truly love the Lord*. I want to believe that you are working, really motivated by the love of God. What is wanting; I take it so much to heart that you love the Lord! *Each day I am more convinced that only this is a good*, in fact the only good, and that the height of the good is *to love the Cross and Jesus hidden in the Eucharist*. Are you loving him, and loving the *Cross even when reciting poems or doing dramas*, be they in the sweet Italian language or in quirky English? I hope so. *Burn the lamp...* Remember me to the Lord, *in the Heart of whom we must always find ourselves* (Rome, January 23, 1928).

So the way remains open to send us on to illustrate the last word in the series with which Fr. Rinaldi puts forward his teaching on holiness: *to serve*, an essential and decisive task for Christian and Salesian holiness.

First, however, to reach this conclusion it will be necessary that the soul reach the summit of the practice of its love of Jesus, that is, to unite oneself, becoming one with Him.

2.6. *Uniting oneself to Jesus: Life in Christ and with Christ (see Romans 6:1-11)*

Fr. Pietro Schinetti has cause to affirm, “Truly there is still more to discover about this personality,” and he continues, “One more time Fr. Luigi Castano is correct in saying that the *renewal* (‘recovery’ they are saying...!) of spirituality and of the Salesian spirit *necessarily passes through Fr. Rinaldi!*” (letter of May 31, 1987, from Treviglio).

We found proof and confirmation of it in the preceding pages, and we will find it perhaps yet more forcefully in those that follow. We will deal with knowing the teaching of the Servant of God on “union with God,” so beloved and so inculcated, but to know it *deeply and completely*, avoiding the superficiality that he so much abhorred.

A more organic and complete treatment of this topic is found in a particular way in the *Strenne* to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, especially those in the last years, with the abundant commentary of the Servant of God. We presented them among the documents.²⁸ Here we want to stay within the pre-set limits of the present chapter, composed *from the epistolary*, with some sporadic exceptions.

We will see, though, that even with the usual method of selections detached and distributed in different contexts, and with the inevitable repetitions, we will find the whole of the substance, and set it out with greater liveliness and freshness. From it all there emerges a “*union with God*” which becomes “*union with Jesus*” totally different from the fruit of an almost prevalently *intellectualistic* operation, but rather a teaching well rooted in the more solid theology of the Mystery of Christ, so deeply illustrated by St. Paul from Gospel data.

Now here is the living and fascinating itinerary which leaps forth from only a small portion of the files. First of all is the solid and indispensable foundation as it was mapped out for the provincial of Milan, Sister Rosalia Dolza, in the wake of the unmistakable teachings of the dear Father, Don Bosco.

Let us seek to fight always the same battle: *death to sin, long live Our Lord Jesus Christ! Make it come alive* in your sisters, in your novices, in your older and younger girls, among your *friendly and enemy* peoples. Be faithful, therefore, to the *spirit of Venerable Don*

²⁸ Chapter 5 of the book.

Bosco, of St. Francis de Sales, of the Society, which is a spirit of charity which is the same as that of the Heart of Jesus (November 24, 1928).

He repeats the same warning when writing to Sister Giulia Berra, missionary in Assam. “Love the Lord very much; *abhor sin* and let yourself be guided by the one who will put you by his side, here [in Turin] or in China” (May 7, 1922).

It is the Gospel spirit, then, elaborated in its turn by St. Paul in so many forms, as in that classic exposition extensively elaborated in the letter to the Colossians, and alluded to by Fr. Rinaldi when writing again to Sister Rosalia Dolza on the occasion of Easter.

*For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God,*²⁹ thus far St. Paul, and which the Church repeats to us throughout the Easter Octave. May the spiritual life be always favoured, even by the one who has to bustle about. Let the Sisters accustom themselves *to live with Our Lord Jesus Christ*, in Church and at work.

He does not hide his fears about a certain situation, which he addresses next in the same letter. “The interior life is *somewhat neglected*, yet *Jesus Christ is in us* and we must *live in Him; if we do not have Jesus Christ in us we would be dead.*” Then he continues, “Let the thought of Jesus Christ *in us* be a familiar one starting from the novitiate. It is enough to remember the words of Our Lord, ‘He who eats my flesh,’ the Bread of Life, that is Communion, ‘*abides in me, and I in him.*’”³⁰ An emphasis of Fr. Rinaldi, that he urges thus. “In the private encounters³¹ accustom yourself to recall *this idea or truth* to the Sisters. Do it with great prudence, but prepare yourself to repeat *this teaching* to your Sisters.”

In the end there emerges the usual teaching of the Servant of God, in line with Don Bosco, for whom piety, union with God, the interior life must be directed toward the apostolate. So, he concludes his letter, “Be aware then that this thought not distract you from the duties of assistance, studies, etc. For the rest be as cheerful as you can” (April 24, 1930).

²⁹ Colossians 3:3.

³⁰ John 6:56.

³¹ Often called *rendiconto* or manifestation in older Salesian literature.

We recall a similar appeal addressed to Sister Marta Gastaldo, making a play on her name in reference to the Gospel and seeking to resolve the famous question of the relationship between the active and contemplative life. “...act like *Martha and Mary*; work to *serve Jesus*, but remember that Jesus must be *your food and your pastime* [a bold and uncommon expression!]; *active with the hands, contemplative in the heart*. *If you live by faith*, the trials as much as the joys will bring you to this” (October 27, 1930).

Now, the Good Father’s main concern is always to inculcate the interior life first. He intends to do this by setting it on the most solid doctrinal basis of the Word of God, which in the following case is that of Jesus in the Gospel (John 15:1ff) through the famous parable of the *Vine and the Branches*. Thus, he wrote to Sister Ottavia Bussolino, in Argentina, to help her resolve an agonizing question.

For you to work [apostolically], *stay united as the branch to the vine*. United with *grace*, united with *prayer*, with the mind, with the heart, with *Holy Communion*. Insist with your Sisters so that *union with God* [here is the traditional formula founded and almost immersed in its genuine theological and biblical context!] may be activated *with all these means*, and then *naturally* they will labor for the good.... *To work for God is the fruit of union with God*. With an infinite *charity and goodness*, exactly with that charity and goodness that is born from the Heart of Jesus, *consume your life by inspiring this union and divine action* (July 3, 1923).

It is one of the most profound, most beautiful and effective synthesis of the Salesian spiritual doctrine, inspired by the *Preventive System* of Don Bosco, founded totally on charity, as he expressed himself in the letter to the novice Sister Orsolina Molinari.

You will see how simple the System of Venerable Don Bosco is, *how beautiful, how divine* it is. When you really love the Lord, you will sense the desire to do *much and do it well*, but first (it is necessary) *to clear away*,³² then love Our Lord Jesus Christ much, really love him with all your strength. Not so much with a feeling love, *as of the will*.

³² Earlier in the letter Fr. Rinaldi tells Sr. Molinari to “clear away the obstacles.”

Courage. Take advantage of the *spiritual childhood* [the novitiate] to grow and become *like Our Lord*" (October 14, 1915).

We know that love is by its nature unitive. In the letter to Sister Cecilia Lanzio on the occasion of her Perpetual Profession, we will come across the Pauline term *incorporation* to indicate the highest union, fruit of grace and of human cooperation. "You can now [with perpetual profession] call *incorporation with Our Lord* perfect, if to the other external³³ you unite union of thought, of heart, of soul to *He Who is the True Life, the Light of men, Mercy, Goodness, Infinite Love*" (August 20, 1930).

The wise spiritual master knows very well in fact, that union with Jesus on this earth is never a final conquest, but needs to be continually renewed at the price of hard sacrifices. In the *Little Notebook* of Sister Cecilia Lanzio we find,

In order to establish our *continuous union with Jesus*, a *continuous mortification* is indispensable. We must seek to mortify our *senses*, keeping in check our eyes, ears, tongue, sense of smell, touch and our whole person, allowing ourselves the least satisfactions possible. The situations and persons with whom we live afford us mortification of the *spirit* (CE, p. 496).

He made the same recommendation to her sister, Sister Maria Lanzio, assistant to the Mistress of Novices. "Accustom those dear daughters to continuous union with Our Lord and to sacrificing all in Him," the underlining is his (March 10, 1930).

He always encourages, therefore, the greatest generosity, as also this little letter to the novice Sister Rita Ceron, on the vigil of her religious profession, bears witness.

I am pleased that you are close to your Profession. It will be one more link that will unite you to Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom you are consecrating your entire life. Give him your youth with all your heart, so that you will be able to do much good for many souls in Brazil

³³ "The other external" may refer either to the habit or to the full incorporation into the Institute.

and in the Missions. I will pray to the Lord that you will become holy and do you pray also for he who is yours... (September 24, 1929).

He becomes even more lyrical when writing to the beloved daughter Sister Cecilia Lanzio on the occasion of her Perpetual profession. Even she, though, could not miss the allusion to a sharing in sufferings.

It is proper therefore, that from now on you know how to be always present to Our Lord who is united interiorly with Sister Cecilia; Sister Cecilia then should live united with Our Lord Jesus Christ. Union with God [notice the passage from God to Jesus Christ, so habitual of Fr. Rinaldi!] in work, in recreation, as well as in prayer, as well as before the Eucharist. Union with Jesus Our Lord by day, as well as by night, while awake and while sleeping. Union, always when doing – in sufferings and humiliations – the will of Our Lord, as well as in the exuberance of cheerfulness (August 20, 1930).

Superb this juxtaposition so biblical and Pauline, and so essentially Salesian: suffering and joy!

The exhortation to Sister Teresa Graziano, former directress at Valdocco next to the Servant of God in the Girls Oratory fits very well into this high mystical climate. “*Keep good company with Our Lord Jesus Christ* living and true in your midst as when he was with Mary in Bethlehem and in Nazareth, and is now in heaven” (August 25, 1929).

So let us finish with two short letters to Sister Cecilia Lanzio that summarize very well the two fundamental teachings of the Servant of God. We already quoted the first part of the first letter, which insists on the mystery of the Cross. It concludes thus:

Let us become saints even us (like Don Bosco), seeking to live *the active life* for the salvation of souls, but always *recollected* – as St. Paul wanted – *in Our Lord Jesus*, so much so that in eating, drinking, working, preaching, etc., *his living was Jesus Christ*. May Sister Cecilia find always herself in the heart of Jesus, as yours wants to find himself in Corde Jesu Rev. Philip Rinaldi (April 13, 1929).

In the second, an earlier letter on the occasion of her First Profession, he exhorts her to consume herself like a candle. “Now sacrifice for the Lord begins. *The lit candle begins to consume itself for others with a flame pointing to heaven.* Courage, good dear daughter. I thought many times of this day. How I would like to know that you are *generous, cheerful in fulfilling your mission.* I am hence praying so much for you. Yours in Corde Jesu” (November 14, 1924).

So true, then that the spirituality of Don Bosco, *passing through the heart of Fr. Rinaldi*, becomes more alive, more luminous and more ardent, in the light and warmth of the doctrine transmitted to us by the Gospel and by the entire New Testament. True for all the other sections, but perhaps even more true for the one concerning union with God, a real banner in the hand of he who is considered the surest interpreter of the spirit of Don Bosco for having studied, lived and taught it throughout his entire life.

2.7. Serving Jesus: “*Da mihi animas*”

The title is best understood in this way: *Serving Jesus in one’s neighbours* as synonymous with *Apostolate*. In Fr. Rinaldi’s times that word was not common, with the word *save* more often used in the expressions “salvation of souls” and “good of souls.”

Fr. Rinaldi, then, often adopts the verb *to work*³⁴ or *to do* in the phrases, “to do good”, “to do good for souls”, as we have been able to observe many times. We also encountered the verb *to work*,³⁵ “to work for God” and in one case also “to work at serving Jesus.” All the words that translate the term, apostolate, very common today, became current in a special way with Pius XI with regard to Catholic Action.

In the Salesian context it became widely circulated by Fr. Angelo Amadei with his work *Don Bosco e il suo apostolato*,³⁶ recommended by Fr. Rinaldi to the often-remembered Salesian missionary in China, Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli (February 16, 1930).

With this background, we come to our topic. As already seen, the method adopted for this work, with its rather frequent quotes from the letters, carries many repetitions with it, also because Fr. Rinaldi showed interest in offering to penitents or spiritual children, despite the brevity of

³⁴ *Operare*: to operate, work or act.

³⁵ *Lavorare*: to work, labour, toil.

³⁶ [*Don Bosco and His Apostolate*], Turin, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1929.

the epistolary style, as complete a thought as possible on the various questions addressed.

This, then, is particularly true for the topic that we want to address in this section on the apostolate, so often called to mind by Fr. Rinaldi a little in all the preceding sections, most especially in the last two on love and union with Jesus. Consequently, we will not have much to add that is really new, and, given the diversity of recipients, there can be no lack of the usual repetitions in what we will say.

We will choose a set from among many selections, preferring the most significant and setting them in the usual logical, albeit rather relative, order.

When writing to the Provincial of Argentina, Fr. Valentino Bonetti, he remembers the entire field of the apostolate, in the formulation so common in Salesian parlance, “*May all be for the glory of God and the good of souls*” (October 27, 1925).

He adds the recommendation, “*Carry on with faith and good humour, correcting imperfections*” (December 14, 1927).

In a note to Sister Teresa Graziano, the horizon of the apostolate widens and is enriched with very interesting theological elements. “*United to Our Lord Jesus Christ, we give honour and glory to the Most Holy Trinity, and we pray that the spirit of piety which is a more intimate and true union with God by means of Our Lord Jesus Christ alive in the Eucharist be better understood by our young people*” (December 18, 1922).

To the very apostolically involved Miss Amalia Bertetti, he makes a general reference to her field of action and underlines the necessary dispositions to perform it. “*Courage. You have before you an immense field for doing good. Confide in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians, and you will always be a good daughter of Don Bosco. Bring his spirit and his action wherever you find yourself*” (October 27, 1920).

More complete is his thought in a short letter to young Maria Lanzio, who by now is maturing and preparing for her Salesian vocation. In it comes a beautiful summary. “*Unite together piety with action. Piety, which keeps you united to God who is charity and infinite love. Action, which always gets united to charity, for it is impossible to love God and not give our whole selves for those creatures whom He created and redeemed with his Most Precious Blood*” (August 3, 1920).

We find another beautiful summary of the Christian and missionary apostolate in the letter to Fr. Antonio Giacone, missionary in Brazil for

over 40 years. “Ensure that you always go there [on apostolic trips] *with the spirit of God*, so that everywhere you pass you can *stir up the grace of God and bring Jesus Christ to life in souls*” (May 4, 1927).

To the beloved son Fr. Bardelli, since his missionary activity was difficult, he recommends faith and patience. “Continue working *with faith. God will do the rest*. Everywhere, everyone finds the conversion of people difficult. *It is enough to remember Our Lord*, who achieved little with all his power and goodness. Courage. *Let us get behind Him*” (October 4, 1926).

To Fr. Pietro Piacenza, a missionary in Japan, he reiterates the great truth that the conversion of souls is the work of God, which, however, demands our collaboration. “Finally you have reached your mission. Do it in a way that you can baptize *ten thousand Japanese*. *Your ten thousand converts* in turn will think about others [apostolate of the laity!]. The conversion of souls is *God’s mystery*. Meanwhile it is clear that *you must save yourself by working for others*” (June 25, 1926).

It is the great thought of St. Augustine made his own by Don Bosco with the famous aphorism proposed to young people. “*Salve, salvando salvati!*”³⁷

With Fr. Bardelli the teaching of the Good Father becomes more explicit and more challenging.

I see that you are beginning (to) orient yourself to your mission, and above all you realize that the good and the salvation of souls *must come by the grace of God, which is obtained by holiness of life*. It is understood that St. Francis Xavier brought about conversions this way wherever he went. You, too, *without changing yourself*, seek to become *holy*, as this is God’s will, and then by working, sooner or later, *China will become Christian* (January 18, 1923).

In another letter also to Fr. Bardelli the discourse widens and becomes more precise, without lacking an allusion to the difficulties and sufferings of the apostolate.

³⁷ Rejoice! In saving others, you save yourself.

It seems to me that your letters reveal an intense desire to *save souls*, and this pleases me very much. It pleases me because you are confiding in the *Heart of Jesus* and are seeking *true piety*. Here rests *the secret for saving China: to turn to God and make them see and feel and love Jesus*. Everything else is necessary, because we must not neglect anything, *but that is not what converts and saves*. I enjoy it so when you speak to me of *faith*, of *piety*, of *Jesus*, of the *Sacred Heart*. Courage; this is certainly the good way. Do not become disheartened if you meet with *oppositions, contradictions, mortifications*, etc. *Jesus Christ went down the same road* (October 13, 1928).

With his other beloved daughter, also a missionary, Sister Cecilia Lanzio, Fr. Rinaldi cannot help but envisage certain dangers of the apostolate. “You know, my good Daughter, that I desire nothing more from You than to *see you holy* and to know that *you are sanctifying souls*. So I am happy for dearest you. Allow me, however, to caution you against *temptations or trials*.”

She was about to make her profession, and she will find herself immersed in the typical American apostolate. The Good Father is referring to the real danger that comes from it.

The work on behalf of souls, indispensable for saving them, easily leads to *dissipation* if you do not *love* Our Lord much more than creatures, and if you do not *see* only Jesus Our Lord in the heart of creatures who are entrusted to you. If you see only Our Lord in them, you will bear all without becoming disheartened and without suffering in spirit. So, do your *meditation* well, *the visit* to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and you will live ever united with God. Courage, Sister Cecilia. *Let us become holy at all cost* (January 19, 1924).

To Fr. Carlo Braga, missionary in China, he points out that the apostolate among his Chinese requires patience, faith, sacrifices and enthusiasm.

The Chinese Salesian plant is spreading its branches. *Growing ever so slowly*, in its time it will bear fruit. Let us hope that *impatience* will not spoil it. *Sacrifices* by you and by us certainly have to be made.

Keep the vein of good humour, of cheerfulness, of enthusiasm, of *confidence in God*. *Woe if the reins fall* or the commander becomes disheartened! The horses, the army do nothing more. Far away be this ugly thought (March 29, 1925).

And with Sister Cecilia Lanzio, the admonition reaches the apex of evangelical need.

Our little existence *must be consumed for the Lord and for souls*. Make use of all the means that are not evil for realizing your purpose: school, entertainments, church, education, the great, the small, Italy (with discretion) and America; but above all of Blessed Don Bosco and Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Courage in difficult moments, *but a courage that means faith, hope, charity*, and that puts into action all diligence *and the complete sacrifice of one's own person*. Here is a *limitless* program, as the zeal for souls *ablaze with love of God* (December 2, 1930).

This citation, made earlier, bears repeating above all in this context as well as chronologically in the life of the Servant of God, the last months of an existence that signal his maturity of experience and holiness.

We conclude this survey on the apostolate with a letter, some months before, to his dear Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli.

Be truly religious, *an interior man, an interior soul*, and the Lord who *will live with you* will satisfy the emptiness, and will also know how to make you feel the joy *born from suffering and humbled love*. Love, Our Lord said to St. Margaret Mary Alaquoque, *reigns in suffering, triumphs in humility, rejoices in union or unity*.

It is one of the rare times when Fr. Rinaldi cites an author. The same citation recurs a second time in the epistolary, and he feels the need to underline the phrase for meditation. He adds a recommendation that acquires great value for us. "If you have a little bit of time, utilize it by reading the Gospel or the Epistles."

Here is the preferred source, as the rest of these pages prove.

And it concludes with the indication already reported at the beginning of this section. “The life of Blessed Don Bosco and of his apostolate [the volume of Fr. Amadei] will do you good... Courage... *Sursum corda!*”³⁸ (February 16, 1930).

And with this aspiration of liturgical flavour, quite frequently on the pen of the Servant of God to encourage trust and the thought of “things above,” we end the concluding section on the way of Christian holiness, offered to us by Fr. Rinaldi with his characteristic biblical words, so rich in teachings, fruit of his personal experience, nourished by a holiness that today the Church recognizes as heroic.

2.8. *The Spirit of Don Bosco: Scattered Evidence*

We want to add yet another unplanned section to this already long enough chapter and for two reasons. First, we have treated sanctity without explicit concern about further qualifying it as Salesian. The references are not lacking in practice; indeed, they are present with considerable frequency in the long quotations from the letters of the Servant of God. Second, one finds an abundance of material that is of some interest on the spirit of Don Bosco (or Salesian spirit). It will prove very useful as a commentary on the title of the entire volume, *The Spirit of Don Bosco in the Writings [sic] of Father Rinaldi*.

Certainly, still more than the previous sections, the warning is all the more necessary that we cannot expect to find in the letters of Fr. Rinaldi an organic and complete illustration of the spirit of Don Bosco in the manner of a studious work. One will be able to find something more in the documentary part of this work, especially in the circular letters, *strenne*, conferences, etc.

We must limit ourselves, then, also here to reporting a series of citations from the letters that, nevertheless, will make abundantly clear the essential lines of the spirit of Don Bosco. He assimilated them at the school of origins, from the most authoritative masters of his early Salesian life, from Fr. Albera, Fr. Barberis, Fr. Rua and Don Bosco himself as we have seen. He added to them from his reflection, lived experience to the point of sanctity, and even by a study to trace them back especially to the genuine

³⁸ Lift up your heart.

sources of the traditions, of the Gospel and of the entire New Testament, as we will see.

And it is evidently clear that even in this matter the repetitions will not be few.

It comes as a consequence that “the logical order” imposed on the discussion is solely our work and makes no pretense of scientific rigour. We tried to identify it through the quotes themselves, once collected, through an ascending scale of themes and sub-themes, which seems to us to fall into the great theme, above all because they are almost always explicitly traced back to Don Bosco himself by Fr. Rinaldi. In a few other cases he offers us his very own authoritative witness.

Another observation is that the quotes are perhaps too abundant, even though not all the material was collected, and that from all that was gathered up, not everything was used (almost completely missing, for example, is the correspondence with Mrs. E.C.). From the abundance of quotes, nevertheless, and from the relative repetitions, one will see the variety of expressions used by Fr. Rinaldi and a significant identification with the thought of Don Bosco.

A final word on the content. At first it was thought to separate the two series of quotes from Fr. Rinaldi’s epistolary (Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians) as two distinct subsections. In the end it was believed more fitting to unite them in a single treatment, especially since between the two, no significant discrepancies were found, except some particular emphasis, mostly psychological in nature noticeable in the quotes themselves. In fact, by uniting them, there emerged a substantial identity arising from the common Founder of the two Religious Institutes.

Now let us move to the exposition, indicating the progressive passages on the so-called ascending scale of work.

Don Bosco and St. Francis de Sales

For Fr. Rinaldi, Don Bosco’s reference to the Patron of the Salesian Congregation is historically founded. Some quotations, as well as many others not used, attest to this.

“*Happy Feast of St. Francis de Sales, may his spirit with that of Blessed Don Bosco enliven all those dear confreres*” (to Fr. Pietro Tirone, Visitor in Brazil January 26, 1931).

“We are in the centenary [of the death] of St. Francis de Sales and we have to take advantage of it in order to *know Don Bosco better in the example he offers us*” (to Fr. Adolf Tornquist, a Novice at Portici by Naples, January 2, 1922).

“Be faithful to the spirit of *Venerable Don Bosco, of St. Francis de Sales, of the Society*, which is a spirit of charity, which is that of the Heart of Jesus (to Sister Rosalia Dolza, Provincial of Milan, November 24, 1928).

Spirit of Don Bosco, Spirit of God...

A primary source of Don Bosco’s spirit for Fr. Rinaldi is God himself, the Lord, Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

“I wish that you have many new novices, all enlivened by the *spirit of God and of Blessed Don Bosco*. For reading during the days of the Retreat this year you could have *Don Bosco con Dio* by Fr. Ceria read” (to Sister Rosalia Dolza, July 23, 1929).

May they remain strong in their spirit, *in the spirit of the Lord, in the spirit of Blessed Don Bosco*. May they do it also at the cost of the complete sacrifice of all self-love. They will receive in return the *sweetness of the Heart of Jesus*, the fullness of the love of God which surpasses any other joy and consolation (to Sister Teresa Comitini, Provincial of Naples, June 24, 1931).

“Your news made me completely happy; above all because I see that there is a *good spirit* among the confreres. Without the *spirit of God*, China will never be converted to Jesus Christ.... Greet the Confreres for me and in the Retreat, recommend piety, charity, work” (to Fr. Carlo Braga, Missionary in China, July 31, 1924).

“Manage to print the *Gospel*.... This is a work according to Don Bosco. Have the confreres, especially the seminarians, read it, study it and meditate on it. *Let them form themselves on the Gospel, on Our Lord Jesus Christ*” (to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, Missionary in Japan, November 1, 1930).

Therefore you have to know Don Bosco

For Fr. Rinaldi it is a fundamental and prior requirement.

“I am following your work. Never be dismayed if the results seem slow.... Hearing about the publicity you are making with the leaflets and with the *Life of Don Bosco* pleased me very much” (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, Missionary in Japan, July 28, 1930).

“*Talk much to them [the novices] about Don Bosco. Try to make them know him better by especially presenting the saint, the man of God, the truly beloved son of Our Lady. Farewell. Greetings and blessings from our Venerable Father*” (to Fr. Domenico Canepa, Master of Novices at Portici, April 4, 1929).

The best portrait of Don Bosco is the one that came out after the celebrations [of the Beatification], however, we will not be satisfied until an artist gives us a true picture. From the biographies, the one of *Bishop Salotti* is the best, and I believe *Don Bosco e il suo apostolato* by Fr. Amadei will be read advantageously by the Salesians. Meanwhile, other unabridged volumes are coming out a little at a time (to Fr. Valentino Bonetti, Provincial in Argentina, January 7, 1930).

Following Don Bosco

A necessity for everyone, especially the Superiors.

“Do not want to do everything in a hurry. Rest; think, study and get to feel that we are following Don Bosco. *Age quod agis*”³⁹ (to Fr. Pietro Tirone, Visitor in Brazil, February 7, 1931).

Imitate Don Bosco, but not superficially

Without meditation, the confidential talk⁴⁰ and true piety, we will never have good workers, true sons of Don Bosco. *It is not enough that they imitate Don Bosco in advertising ut videant opera vestra bona*

³⁹ Do what you are doing; concentrate on the task at hand.

⁴⁰ *Rendiconto*, sometimes translated as friendly chat or private encounter.

et glorificent Patrem vestrum,⁴¹ if they do not imitate him in faith, in hope, in charity, in poverty, in chastity, etc. This has to be above all our preoccupation, our work, *to bring our confreres to God* (to Fr. Giuseppe Vespignani, from the Superior Council, Visitor, March 16, 1924).

We must encourage our confreres toward holiness, as well as to what is Salesian; *but you do not get this with light-mindedness* and without serious meditation *on the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, and without love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Most Holy. If you do not make saints, *I have little hope in your mission* (to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, Missionary in Japan, June 26, 1926).

We need to start with a serious formation

“... the young confreres are seedlings that you need to straighten, prune, water, fertilize...; but *with love of God* which is spiritual, confidence in the Help of Christians and in Don Bosco” (to *the same*, December 27, 1928).

Support them [the Novices] more and more with a great piety directed toward the Eucharist, even by means of the Sacred Heart, and toward Mary Most Holy. For it to be true, there must come from this piety the *spirit of mortification* of the senses and of the will. Fortunate...are you who have a hand in so noble and divine work of sanctifying the young (to Fr. Domenico Canepa, Master of Novices, March 18, 1928).

I thank those good novices for their remembrance on the day of their vestition; and tell them that I am not worried about their small number, if each one would really want *to honour Don Bosco*. Let them be ready, as they will remember that Don Bosco wanted it so, *to let themselves change their thinking* without resisting and without becoming sad if that costs them a little effort. To say that they must be *docile is too little*; they have to *think and feel as Don Bosco was thinking and feeling*; and if they study his spirit and love his works, Don Bosco will work this *miracle* (to Fr. Felice Mussa, Director of the same Novitiate, December 12, 1930).

⁴¹ “That they may see your good works and give glory to your Father,” Matthew 5:16.

To know the true spirit of Don Bosco

We are working then so that the Sisters stand *in the true spirit of our Blessed*. They have to live *with piety and united activity*. Be careful of a *faulty asceticism*, which results in doing nothing; be more careful of *an activity of words, of movement*, of blending with the world, without a real search for God. *Don Bosco was working for the Lord and with the Lord*, was praying without ceasing to take care of souls. Let us keep the spirit of Don Bosco (to Mother Luisa Vaschetti, FMA Vicar General, January 16, 1923).

Always be the bearer of *observance* of our *traditions*, of affection for the Congregation, for Mary Help of Christians, for Blessed Don Bosco, for Mary Mazzarello. Be vigilant so that *piety* among the Superiors and the Sisters grow *ever deeper*. *Cheerfulness, work*; our activity should be *saturated with piety*, with devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to Mary Most Holy, with *charity to the point of sacrifice*, keeping present *the life and the death of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of Blessed Don Bosco*. Accustom the Provincials and Directresses to speak of piety even in the confidential talks, without entering into the area of sin. Suggest the way of doing meditation, of staying united with God, sometimes even inquiring if they are making resolutions for the day, etc. *The Superiors who do not know how to speak of God*, of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, *produce little fruit*. This also with the girls. One does not correct lightmindedness, worldliness, etc., other than by bringing them to God (to Mother Teresa Pentore, Visitor in Brazil, July 18, 1930).

I feel that my word may not find them [the Sisters] still gathered [on Retreat]. If you can, tell them to practice *putting a great supernatural spirit in all their works*, even the smallest and most material ones; their living would become *a practical and uninterrupted exercise of faith, of charity, of hope*. *That is what Don Bosco is* in all his manifestations; that is the secret of the interior life. Would that our dear Help of Christians and Don Bosco keep you far from every danger, especially that of losing his holy grace and cheerfulness (Fr. Rinaldi underlined the last phrase) (to Mother Teresa Comitini, Provincial of Naples, August 19, 1930).

... which has its true centre in the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus...

“We have the same Rule, the same Superiors, the same Saints, the same Help of Christians, *the same Heart of Jesus alive in that Eucharist*, which Don Bosco wanted as the centre of our life” (to Mother Rosalia Dolza, Provincial of Milan, November 24, 1928).

...source of charity and peace...

“Live happy and may *the charity of Our Lord* always keep us closely united” (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, Missionary in China, April 3, 1923).

“Courage, dear Fr. Bardelli, *omnia facite in charitate Christi Domini Nostri*.⁴² May charity reign forever in your heart and may it *shine* in all the confreres and the souls entrusted to you” (same place).

“News of the good harmony that reigns among the [Apostolic] Vicariate [of Shin-Chow, Bishop Canazei] and the [Salesian] Province gives me great pleasure. *Deo gratias!* May it please God that it always be thus. *Peace is the kiss of the Lord*” (to Fr. Carlo Braga, Provincial in China, ... 15, 1931).

...which is nourished by the Eucharist...

May all [the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians] spend 1931 under the gaze of Mary Help of Christians in order to learn from Her *the life of the Spirit which Blessed Don Bosco lived*. I remind the Provincial [he sent a gift of panettone] of the *Bread of Life*. May she not only hunger for this Bread, may she also know how to suggest among her dependants to have recourse to the Eucharist in thought, with the heart, with Communion. *We are not dealing only with frequent Communion*, that are sometimes habitual, but a *desire for the Eucharist* while at work, study, recreation, in bed and everywhere. Where and when this matter is suitable, you must *promote it even more, but engage even the most distracted souls* (to Mother Rosalia Dolza, Provincial in Milan, December 24, 1930).

Certainly, to achieve this [creating collaborators in the apostolate among the converted] *you need Communion*. Study the way of giving *daily Communion also to those who do not have a daily Priest*. I am telling you this in confidence. Discuss it with Bishop

⁴² Do everything in the love of Christ Our Lord. See 1 Corinthians 16:14.

[Versiglia, Vicar Apostolic]. *Be careful*; obtain the necessary faculty, but it will be a great means. *The Eucharist within reach of the more fervent faithful*, the so-called catechists, or better Cooperators. *When a young woman makes a vow of chastity and has Holy Communion within reach*, she can do immense good. The same applies for certain young persons, for certain mothers and men.... Pray and then courage, make a plan of action, *in union with Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament*. I, too, will pray for this (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, January 20, 1924).

Marian component

If you want it to be even more meritorious [transferring houses], forget about human things, throw yourself with full trust in the Lord, and think about making yourself only a *true Daughter of Mary*. May her goodness with the just and with sinners render you ever more like the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, whom *She was the first to imitate* (to Sister Pierina Sutto, January 17, 1928).

“Encourage the Aspirants, the Novices, the Confreres with confidence in the *Ecce Mater tua*⁴³ and incline them to preach the praises of this Good Mother. *By means of Mary we had Our Lord Jesus Christ and by means of Her we will bring him to souls*” (to Fr. Valentino Bonetti, Provincial in Argentina, April 20, 1928).

“May Mary Help of Christians smile on you, keep her spirit in you, help you to do good” (to Sister Caterina Gaido, June 18, 1925).

Never lose courage. Always confide in *Mary the Most Holy Help of Christians*, who *will continue to support and console* your whole family. May you remember that *Our Lady can do everything*, and that she is our most tender Mother. May you have recourse to her in all necessities and invoke her with faith and perseverance (to Mrs. Giustina Giacometti, September 2, 1927).

⁴³ “Behold your mother,” John 19:27. This was Fr. Rinaldi’s 1928 *strenna* for young people and past pupils.

“I bid you to grow more and more in love of the *Sacred Heart, of the Help of Christians and of Blessed Don Bosco*. They must be our consolers in life and in death” (to Fr. Giovanni Barile, Missionary in South America, June 24, 1931).

Spirit of piety and of work

Accustom your Sisters to *pray always* when working, studying, assisting, teaching, playing, joking, day and night. Pray and make them pray always. There is no other good than *prayer and work while praying*, that is, keeping the mind, the heart turned to God. Courage, Mother Dolza, let us *use time well*. If you could see how painful it is, *when you are old*, to know you lost time, effort, while there is so much to do for the Lord and for souls (to Sister Rosalia Dolza, September 12, 1929).

The news from Sicily comes most welcome. I knew that there is much good on that island, and your confirmation gave me great pleasure. We endeavour to keep those Sisters *in the spirit of piety and of work*. Do not neglect anything in obtaining this, so that it makes them *true Daughters of Venerable Don Bosco* (to Mother Teresa Pentore, Visitor in Sicily, Macerata April 15, 1925).

Spirit of charity and of faith

“I see among other things that you understand the difficulty of your mission. What pleases me most is your *spirit of charity and faith*” (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, Missionary in Japan, October 31, 1926).

Spirit of true “Salesian” charity

I would like, however that you be vigilant because with piety there would be *true charity*, which knows how to sympathize and help the sister, which leaves that rigidity that is not ever *according to Our Lord Jesus Christ and Don Bosco*. Let us distinguish well between *observance* to be praised, and *rigidity* to be rebuked. You will see it by that *gaiety and simplicity, which is St. Francis de Sales’s own* (to Mother Teresa Pentore, Visitor in America, May 25, 1926).

You will find this seminarian [about whom a letter addressed to him was lost after he had an initial reply by the same Visitor] and take

an interest in him. *Don Bosco will inspire you.* I hope that you can do much good during your visit. *Have a big heart, and gain everyone's heart* (to Fr. Pietro Tirone, Visitor to the Roman Province, April 11, 1930).

Spirit of charity and of justice

It is true, you will find difficulties, as always if you want to do good, because you have to overcome evil; but do not fear. What you must do above all is to make yourself loving by using *great charity and justice* with everyone, without respect to persons, time or circumstance. *Be always good, above all by practicing true justice and equality.* For the rest do not fear. Mary Most Holy will take care of it. *She is master of the house more than you.* May the Lord bless you, keep you *always cheerful*, make you a true dear daughter of Don Bosco (to Sister Teresa Comitini, Provincial in Rome, December 28, 1923).

Salesian fatherliness

“Surely, *fatherliness* is the great means for improving hearts and rendering religious life that much sweeter *even on earth.* We would recommend it especially this year. In fact, we are praying to our Blessed Father that he obtain it for us” (to Fr. Armando De Rosa, April 12, 1929).

I am recommending to you *plenty of fatherliness* above all in the little evening talk⁴⁴ and in the confidential talk. May [the theology seminarians] *never feel anything bitter, irritating or satirical.* Be only *good.* Let the others do the other parts, but *in a Salesian way* (to Fr. Ludovico Costa, Director of International Theological House of Studies in Turin, Crocetta, October 15, 1926).

Salesian Chastity

Keep them [the Novices] working hard and taking good care of the *beautiful virtue*, not speaking of it, but of mortification of the senses and of

⁴⁴ Known in Salesian circles as the Good Night talk.

devotion to Mary Most Holy” (to Fr. Felice Mussa, Director of the Novitiate, March 18, 1928).

“...cherish *modesty* above all, which opens the door to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and prepares souls for true charity, for really Christian action” (to Sister Rosalia Dolza, November 24, 1928).

“*Today it is snowing.* May blessings without end fall on you and on your Province, and above all may sisters and young girls entrusted to your care be as *white as snowflakes*” (to the same, January 1, 1929).

“Jesus, in presenting the Virgin to us, presents her to us with a lighted lamp. The lily does not flower unless it is exposed to the burning rays of the sun. There is no virginity if there is no charity” (Little Notebook of Sister Cecilia Lanzio, CE, p. 497).

May *this good Mother* [Mary Help of Christians] bless all of them [Daughters of Mary Help of Christians], wherever they may find themselves, and may she adorn them with *those virtues* which Blessed Don Bosco saw in them when he founded them, that is, with the *purity of the Angels* so that they would be worthy of the youth which he saw entrusted to them, and *of the charity* that Our Lord Jesus Christ came to bring for the salvation of souls (to Mother Luisa Vaschetti, 3rd Superior General, May 23, 1930).

“May Mary Help of Christians bless the Postulant *Stefania Martinotti* and make her *white* as a lily and *ardent* with charity and religious action, as *Venerable Don Bosco wanted the Daughters of the Help of Christians*” (July 25, 1926).

Salesian cheerfulness

Fr. Rinaldi’s references to Christian joy, understood in a Salesian way as cheerfulness, are innumerable. We shall quote only some of the most characteristic of his style.

“May cheerfulness and *trust in the Lord* accompany you during this new scholastic year” (to Sister Rosalia Dolza, September 12, 1929).

“For the rest, *remain as cheerful as you can*; may the Lord bless you” (to the same, April 20, 1930).

“Take a few walks and they will do you good, and *keep cheerful*” (to Miss Celestina Dominici, September 10, 1912, DBV Archives).

“Let us be *happy, cheerful and good*” (to Mrs. E.C., July 29, 1913).

“Here is what you need to do, but do it *with cheerfulness, do it with Don Bosco’s spirit of joviality*, do it without looking at the sacrifices. Forward in Domino” (to Sister Giulia Berra, Missionary in Assam, December 31, 1923).

“Live cheerfully” (to the same, April 9, 1924).

“The proof of good will is the cheerfulness that you must *always keep*, whatever oppositions may come” (to Sister Carolina Cerrato, November 28, 1916).

“Let us pray much. Let us press ourselves and others on toward a *cheerful and active holiness*” (to Mother Luisa Vaschetti, January 16, 1930).

“Go forward calmly *with simplicity and cheerfulness*, willing to do the will of God to the point of sacrifice” (to Sister Marta Gastaldo, August 30, 1926).

Discouragement: causes and remedies

Well, then, if you want to prevent discouragement, it is necessary that *you clothe everything* – that which is within you and that which others do and say – *with a great supernatural spirit*, all aiming at the light of faith, of hope and of charity, that is, *according to God’s estimation*, not according to the estimations you had up to now. You will get that by cultivating the interior life, whose nourishment is Jesus in the Eucharist (to the FMA Novices at Pessione, August 19, 1930).

“On difficult days *look to Paradise*. Up there you will receive the recompense for all that you have suffered on this earth” (to Sister Giulia Berra, December 31, 1923).

Let nothing disturb you St. Teresa said and Blessed Don Bosco repeats to us, in particular to the Directors. *Let nothing disturb you*; in

its time you will be happy.... *Non turbetur cor vestrum.*⁴⁵ We respect you and we love you; if you have need, come here to talk with us. I am praying for you; *the devil must not win the game* (to Fr. Josip Tkalec, August 1, 1931).

“*Let nothing disturb you above all in spirit. With serenity and trust in God let us save the Young*” (to Sister Linda Lucotti, new Provincial in Sicily, October 8, 1922).

Apostolic component

“Blessed Don Bosco and Mary Help of Christians will bless you, *if you seek the glory of God*” (to Fr. Carlo Braga, Provincial in China, August 7, 1931).

Courage, dear Fr. Barile; what I ask you is that by your word and your example you may do good for the Confreres of Peru. *How I would need to be understood by everyone.* Let us pray that *the spirit of the Blessed be our spirit*; let us pray that *the love of souls and of the Lord triumph* above self-love (to Fr. Giovanni Barile, July 30, 1929).

I see that you are beginning (to) orient yourself to your mission, and above all you realize that the good and the salvation of souls *must come from the grace of God* which is obtained by *holiness of life*. It is understood that St. Francis Xavier brought about conversions this way wherever he went (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, January 18, 1923).

“Keep watch so that *God may reign in your hearts*. If you are not holy, *you will be doing something useless.*⁴⁶ *Beans do not produce rice, nor nuts figs*; so the missionary will not bring Jesus Christ, if he is not totally the Lord’s” (to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, August 26, 1926).

I share in the pain of *your oratorian disaster.... Let nothing disturb you*. I console myself by remembering the history of the first

⁴⁵ “Let not your hearts be troubled,” John 14:1

⁴⁶ Fr. Rinaldi uses the idiomatic expression, “*farete un buco nell’acqua*” – you will be making a hole in the water.

Christians in Rome. *The triumph of the Cross will come also for you; for the time being you are experiencing only its humiliations and vicissitudes. Be persevering in prayer and in fractione panis.*⁴⁷ Now you are uniting *two great means*, devotion to the Sacred Heart and that of the Help of Christians, and you, too, will see miracles. *Start again* with renewed energy and above all with faith and charity (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, Missionary in Japan, October 12, 1928).

Missionary component

I am very happy to know that you will hold the *little assembly for the Missions* in your boarding school on the 28th, vigil of the feast of St. Francis de Sales.⁴⁸ I rejoice that those students will know how to understand the *high civil and Christian significance* that encompasses the missionary concept, and I rejoice that they would take an immediate interest in these *truly big questions* of religion and homeland. Only men of heart and faith know how to penetrate them and offer their energies to resolve them (to Fr. Giuseppe Mossetto, Director at Cuorgné, January 22, 1926).

It seems to me that V.S.⁴⁹ *has not yet understood well* the scope of our missionary feasts and our expeditions. Look, we propose to create enthusiasm for *the salvation of unbelievers*. Yet we are convinced that *the missionary idea* among the boys: 1st cultivates the heart; 2nd increases faith; 3rd awakens vocations. These *three goods* are for the *benefit of the Christian education of the young* and for an increase of Salesian vocations. For the rest it is good to consider that a Catholic country such as Argentina *should not ignore the Hindus and the Chinese* from the East. Pardon my insistence on this, that the interest I have in increasing the personnel for Argentina, for its houses and the progress of their studies, does not lessen in the least. *Sow these ideas* in the boarding schools and among the Confreres that they must then be obedient to the Superiors.... In February I will go to France and Spain. In this last country we want to start a *Missionary House* (to Fr. Giuseppe Vespignani, Visitor in Latin America, December 9, 1925).

⁴⁷ “In the breaking of the bread,” Luke 24:35.

⁴⁸ January 28. Before the Vatican II reform of the liturgy, the feast of St. Francis de Sales fell on January 29.

⁴⁹ The initials of a person’s name.

Increasingly encourage the houses of formation.... Then I wish that you seriously consider founding soon a *Mission House* also in Argentina. *The evangelical spirit is not complete without a zeal for converting pagans* and for accomplishing the *Ite docete omnes gentes*,⁵⁰ not just the Argentinians. Instill *this idea of being true Salesians* (to the same, November 27, 1925).

Apostolic method: the Salesian...

“Our method is *Salesian*. Let us do as Don Bosco did at Turin” (to Fr. Carlo Braga, Missionary in China, July 31, 1924).

“I am happy that you brought the *Salesian method*. His Holiness Pius XI advised me to use it also in the Missions” (to Fr. John B. Gasbarri, missionary in Peru, April 20, 1923).

The Holy Father *counts a great deal on our ways, that is, of the Salesians*. Approach the boys, interact with them, instruct them *through our methods* that he knows so well. He spoke to me of singing, music, professional schools, outings, even about the past pupils, *as the means of which we have the patent*. So I wish that you make known these ideas of the Holy Father [even those on the necessity that the Missionary know and appreciate the culture of the peoples to evangelize, to be spoken of shortly] to your companions and turn your attention to putting it into practice. The Holy Father has great trust *in Venerable Don Bosco’s methods*. He would want even the popular press, print shop and paper mills there (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, April 3, 1923).

... his principal characteristics:

Approach persons

“It is Don Bosco’s tactic, that of *approaching people* in imitation of Our Lord” (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, in Japan, July 28, 1930).

“How are your relationships with the Chinese going? *Are you trying to approach* the Chinese in whatever way, as far as you can? *You need to go to them* and draw them to you. Here stands *Don Bosco’s school*,

⁵⁰ Go teach all peoples. See Matthew 28:19.

practiced also by all the zealous missionaries everywhere” (to Fr. Carlo Braga, in China, March 29, 1925).

Do not alienate anyone

“Do not alienate yourself *from anyone* while you work with the poor, even look for the poorest” (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, in Japan, July 28, 1930).

Attract the young people

“Above all attract young people; *talium est enim regnum coelorum*.⁵¹ And this is our portion” (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, January 18, 1923).

“Remember that Don Bosco *founded his hopes on young people*. Pius XI does not think very differently about it. I spoke with the Pope about your school according to the norms and he was very happy about it. This is his plan that *we penetrate into the public schools*” (to Fr. Carlo Braga, May 8, 1924).

It gave me great pleasure that you are working with the mountaineer friends [of the Lanzo valley, during vacation] to do good for the *young people*. *Young people*, as Don Bosco said, *need to play, to be cheerful*, etc., and if we do not bring them toward good activity, they go toward bad activity. *Poor young people encounter wolves who make them wild*. They become rough in their tastes, dealings, words, while they scurry about, shout, amuse themselves. You accomplish the work of refining by *bringing them toward pure ideals, healthy cheerfulness, true life*.... Work with the new companions encourage them to do good (to Miss Cecilia Lanzio, July 25, 1921).

“The work done for girls generates multiple fruits” (*Little Notebook* of the same person, CE, p. 497).

“After all, young people must be *our favoured part*. Don Bosco saw the salvation of China in the young people” (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, October 13, 1928).

Prefer *poor and working* young people

⁵¹ “For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven,” Matthew 19:14.

*It seems to me that it is not the case to become preoccupied with the inheritance of that lady of Viscone. Rather I believe it better to let her have an understanding with others. You can cite as a reason, which it is also true, that we lack the personnel to open that new house. For the rest, take courage. See if you can restore life to that house. Rather, it would be better to attend to *the young or to the working classes* in as much as you have the means to do so. For that make known *your popular ideas*, so that the gentlemen may come to your aid (to Fr. Deodato Giacometti, Trent, June 26, 1919).*

Evangelize with faith and charity

“Courage; *gather as many boys as you can*, make them good, devoted to Mary Help of Christians and to the Most Blessed Sacrament, *though they are still pagans*; the rest will come” (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, July 20, 1927).

As you see, you have only to comfort yourself by thinking that you are imitating the Saints living in the Christians’ desert of China. Onward, dear son, onward in Domino *Sow the good seed; bring the good news to everyone*. The Apostles were in no better condition than you; *have their charity* and press on (to the same, February 11, 1925).

I am sharing in your progress and in thanking the Lord for it. Also, the Holy Father in days past demonstrated his trust in the Salesian work in Japan.... Continue, with faith, your work *among your youthful pagans*. Use all the attractions, dealings, and modern methods, as Don Bosco did, sanctifying all that is indifferent but that young people like. Use everything as a ladder to reach their heart and bring them to Our Lord Jesus Christ (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, May 15, 1930).

Become one of them and of their culture

Make use of the Daughters of Mary for spreading good; *if only you could become Chinese with almond eyes and the old-fashioned ponytail*, how much more good you could do! Now, go ahead in Domino. Remember that Don Bosco saw that his sons were triumphing under the banner of Mary Help of Christians (to Fr. Bardelli, January 29, 1927).

I was with the Holy Father, who, you could say, spoke to me only of the Missions. *He follows you almost as I follow you*; he reads

the Salesian Bulletin and takes an interest in everything and blesses you. He dwells above all on *two ideas*. *First*, he believes that *it is necessary to study much about the lands where missionaries go*. He would like the Missionary to know the language, habits, history, geography, ethnography, etc., of the land. He has great trust in these means for entering into families, in society and among learned persons. He would like to see you *in the school and everywhere*. *In the second place*, he counts a great deal *on our ways*, that is, of the Salesians (to the same, April 3, 1923).

Rouse up collaborators:

“Go among the boys. This has to be foundational to our mission. *By means of the boys you must win the men*. Don Bosco dreamed of this and this has to be our mission” (to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, June 26, 1926).

“Your method of *using others to do good*, and even the same physician, is precisely Don Bosco’s, that, as soon as he learned something as a boy or seminarian, it drove him to teach it to others” (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, March 21, 1928).

The proposal to *have pious and converted souls help you* is the Salesian system. Don Bosco used boys to help with the boys and used lay people in all his works. *This then is the Christian spirit. Charity is diffusive*. It is impossible to be warm and remain cold. Make use of all, boys and girls, the young and old. Don Bosco wanted us in paradise with a crown of souls saved by our zeal. At another time tell me how many men and women Cooperators you have created (to Fr. Galdino Bardelli, January 20, 1924).

“Your letter affirms me in the dream that I have for China; besides, Don Bosco assured us of it. Christians, *when they have the true Christian spirit, cultivated in a Salesian way*, will give you the necessary offerings for running the works” (to the same, July 20, 1927).

Principle work: *The Oratory*

I am very happy that you are thinking of the Oratory; but also here, that it be a Salesian Oratory in the spirit of Don Bosco. This work

gives results in every land, even among the pagans, when it is carried out with the authentic imprint of our Venerable Father (to Fr. Giovanni B. Gasbarri, Chachapoyas, Peru, April 18, 1928).

I am rejoicing in the good news that you give me and I hope that with the Apostolate of the Oratory the good will multiply. *Don Bosco assures us that this is the salvation of society....* Keep well, dear Fr. Bardelli; *implant in China our principal work*, that of the Oratory *doing as Don Bosco did* (to the same, April 28, 1931).

The last among the substantial collection of Fr. Rinaldi's letters to this zealous missionary who spent around sixty years in China and died in Hong Kong on November 10, 1982, at 99 years of age, is still aimed at the *Oratory*. The Good Father penned it a few days before his passing, a witness to his ardent missionary zeal. It merits being quoted in its entirety.

Turin, November 18, 1931,

Dear Fr. Bardelli,

The Oratory will be also an advancement of the Mission when it is done with perseverance and the spirit of Don Bosco.

I say with perseverance because the results of converting the whole of China will not be achieved easily, but it will be with a work of greater penetration than all the others.

As to the spirit, then, I recommend myself to Our Lord. The spirit comes from above and only the one who knows how to live the life of Jesus Christ as Don Bosco did bears that life with him and communicates it to others.

Accordingly, I will pray much for you and for your collaborators. Courage. I will also remember you to yours.

In Corde Jesu

Rev. Philip Rinaldi

2.9. Conclusion

Preserved is a splendid synthesis of the spirit of Don Bosco which Fr. Rinaldi sent to the Mistress of the Novices of Arignano, when Maria Lanzio was preparing to enter as a postulant.

I greatly appreciate your greetings, because they come united with promises to make yourselves *worthy daughters of our Venerable Don Bosco*. This is everything, good Daughters. Make yourselves like Him pious, like Him *devoted* to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christians, like Him *zealous for the good* and the salvation of souls. But remember that to be properly *pious, devout, zealous like Don Bosco requires that you be like Him, humble of heart* and like Him, *imitating Saint Francis de Sales* in courteous and refined ways and like Saint Francis de Sales *always in the presence of God* (January 28, 1922).

When writing to Fr. Pietro Tirone, Visitor to Brazil, he showed him the way to build a good Salesian. “Be encouraging everywhere, bring good humor, piety, Don Bosco” (July 25, 1931).

Instead, he outlined for Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti a kind of *silhouette* of the model Salesian. “...as good Salesians to be *cordial and simple; never familiarity, rather endless goodness*” (October 29, 1928).

Those who knew and visited him attest that the three last brushstrokes reproduce for us a Fr. Rinaldi who journeyed through his long life observing, studying, remembering and imitating his Father and Teacher Don Bosco.

Suffice it to say that this last chapter was the most difficult of them all, precisely because it is more rich, varied and complex than the previous ones. It was born only as a simple sketch for a conference to the Don Bosco Volunteers, and initial encouragement came from the current Ecclesiastical Assistants, including the Central Assistant, to rework it, enrich it, for a volume in the Institute’s series *Documenti e Testi*.

I had a similar invitation at a later time from three instructors at Università Pontificia Salesiana for a wider research. The late *Fr. Domenico Bertetto*, also, returned the material to me, accompanied by this sparse note, from which moreover the idea for the title to this little volume was suggested.

May 11, 1987

“Dear Fr. Stefano,

It seems to me that it would be very useful for everyone if you would draw up a version directed to all in a way that was easily accessible for developing the topic, *holiness according to Fr. Rinaldi*. Do it right away. D. B.”

As I reread the Epistolary from the beginning with this new lead in mind and meanwhile becoming ever more attentive to details, the bulk of notecards increased as well as the references to various interesting subthemes of the general topic of holiness. The idea of the work developed more clearly and increased in substance.

In a brief presentation of the entire work on the writings of Fr. Rinaldi to the Rector Major, mention was made of this special chapter on holiness in the Epistolary of the Servant of God. And from him came the exhortation, almost a command, to bring it to fruition with a presentation, even only an outline of the gathered material, without excessive preoccupation with a scientific quality, thus leaving to the experts the task of resuming the discussion and eventually perfecting it and giving it a definitive form in our days.

So, the writing of the draft began in the last days of June, and was completed a little after the middle of July. Then, as it developed, surprises, veritable discoveries increased. Not only did the series of six words intensify with quotations from Fr. Rinaldi’s letters, but the same original intuition became clearer and clearer and received new confirmations. The *Christocentrism* of Fr. Rinaldi became palpably evident, and was indeed carried to its ultimate applications, while the *biblical theological* foundation of his entire spiritual doctrine proved always more extensive, more solid and richer than expected. Especially the Gospel and the letters of St. Paul, that he knew almost from memory, even if he did not explicitly quote them except on rare occasions, were breathing there from top to bottom. It would have been easy, given the time, to integrate the various notecards on Fr. Rinaldi with the respective New Testament biblical references. From one final reading of the entire chapter all impressions were transformed into ever greater certainties.

Therefore, the principal and foundational thesis from which we began can be considered completely confirmed. In addition we have the

awareness that Fr. Rinaldi's teaching refers constantly to Don Bosco and to his genuine spirituality, reinforced moreover by the richness of the biblical foundations which he brings to it, fruit of his constant meditation on the sacred text, according to the explicit testimony of Fr. Zerbino. So, we have affirmed the legitimacy of this ninth and last chapter and, in it, this final paragraph on *The Spirit of Don Bosco*, which is presented not as an almost forced external addition but as a necessity that spontaneously wells up from within the entire little work.

Finally, given the character of this work, to be considered only as a first attempt – imperfect, not matured, nor refined – the tempting task of carrying it to a greater maturation is left to the experts; with the desire and the hope that a more extensive reworking of the entire documentation (extending also to the other writings of the Servant of God) may soon be achieved, with the deepening and enriching that they would bring with it.

It seems however we may deduce that Fr. Rinaldi's merits for his biblical reworking of the spiritual teaching of his Father and Teacher could be said to have been acquired. We may then affirm that also in this delicate area he was able to achieve the task so well discharged by others: *to preserve, with innovations and enrichments, the sacred deposit received as a precious inheritance, in order to adjust it to the times and transmit it to new generations of Don Bosco's Family.*

Therefore, also in this case he would remain *a precursor of new times!*

