



The Gift of
Don Bosco



TEXT BY PETER CARROLL SDB
ILLUSTRATIONS BY LYNNE MUIR

johngarrattpublishing 

Published in Australia by
John Garratt Publishing
32 Glenvale Crescent
Mulgrave Vic 3170
www.johngarratt.com.au

Text: copyright © 2011 Peter Carroll SDB
Illustrations: copyright © 2011 Lynne Muir
Edited by Maryna Mews

Typeset and designed by Lynne Muir

Print and quality control in China by Tingleman

All rights reserved. Except as provided by Australian copyright law, no part of
this work may be reproduced in any way without permission in writing from
the publisher.

Cataloguing-in-publication data is available from the National Library of
Australia

ISBN:987192946103

Further information about the Salesian priests, brothers and sisters and their
current mission, together with access to the literature mentioned on page 125,
can best be found by contacting either the Salesians or Daughters of Mary Help
of Christians at the central Rome office www.sdb.org.

CONTENTS

Introduction 5

PART ONE 13
The Dream Begins

PART TWO 43
Focusing the Dream

PART THREE 67
Enlarging and Perpetuating the Dream

PART FOUR 101
Dreaming to the Ends of the Earth

Further Reading 125

He had always
promised
three things:
bread,
work and
heaven.

Don Bosco, Biographical Memoirs



INTRODUCTION



John Bosco was not born a saint: he became one through the way he responded to the inspiration of his God and the challenge of his particular time and place in history. He gifted 19th-century Turin and the wider world beyond this with the charismatic insights of an experiment in youth spirituality.

The Italy into which John Bosco was born was politically fragmented and torn apart by political and military conflict between warring factions, in particular, an entrenched clerical and authoritarian church and anti-clerical, secular forces. His great achievement was to be committed to youth who were poor; and educational reform, supporting the core pastoral cause of the church whilst winning respect from some key anti-clerical figures like the Minister of the Interior, Urbano Rattazzi.

His story is one of responding to opportunity: albeit through hardship, setbacks, frustrations, sickness, death of loved ones, misunderstanding; and to the plight of troubled youth migrating from country peasantry to the slums and temptations of city life. His mother handed him a legacy of basic tried and true peasant values and a faith through which he could chat conversationally and continually with his God. Through inspiration and dream he faced the challenges of changing social and economic conditions and change in

religious life and its impact on youth, by establishing an ‘experiment’ in youth spirituality which brought a fresh, palatable and joyous approach to Catholic life for them. He set up oratories, Christian community centres where the young could play, learn, sing, pray and enjoy themselves, in a caring and safe environment. He was also a prolific writer, penning countless daily letters to benefactors and others seeking advice, as well as authoring over 170 books and other publications. His vocational autobiography, *The Memoirs of the Oratory* and short biographies of some of his most exemplary students are noteworthy.

John Bosco ensured the continuity of his work and mission by founding societies of men and women who now work in 130 countries and continue to draw inspiration from the gentle, kindly and adaptive St Francis de Sales – a priest who lived in the late 16th and early 17th century by whose writings and life he was greatly influenced – and the ever-loving and mediating Mother of God. The societies he founded are known as the ‘Salesians of Don Bosco’ and the ‘Daughters of Mary Help of Christians’. He insisted his Salesians perpetuate the key to his educative style, and that this key is relationship – ‘it is not enough that you love the young – they must know you love them’ – lived out through the use of reason, religion and loving-kindness. His gift is that of genuine hope for youth in an ever-changing world.

BOSCO AND THE SALESIANS



John Bosco was profoundly shaped by reverence for the figure of Francis de Sales, author of the still popular *Introduction to the Devout Life* and *Treatise on the Love of God*.

Francis de Sales was born on 21 August 1567 near Annecy in Haute-Savoie, France. The eldest son in a noble family, he was given a privileged education in Annecy, Paris and Padua, graduating as a doctor of both law and theology. While still a teenager in Paris he came under the influence of teachings on predestination and believed he was condemned to hell. At nineteen, insight and relief came to him in prayer when he realised that God is love and must therefore intend good for him. He soon also came to the appreciation that God was calling him to be a priest.

Much against the plans of his father, who had arranged a 'suitable' marriage for him and envisaged him as advancing in the military or politics, Francis secured the patronage of the bishop of Geneva who ordained him and soothed his father by appointing him provost of the cathedral chapter. Francis became a tireless and enthusiastic evangeliser, winning over Protestants from the Calvinist Reformation which had begun seventy years previously. Affable, talented, intelligent and educated, he readily related to anyone – prince, pauper or in-between. The God of love he had lost for a time and then rediscov-

ered, shone on others through Francis's ease of conversation and his obvious concern, compassion and catechesis.

At the death of his patron bishop, Francis was himself consecrated bishop of Geneva in 1602 and he was a much sought preacher and retreat-giver, extending his congregations from his own people to the royal court of Paris. Helper of poor, confidant of encouraged, re-con-many know that he God did too. He left through his books and earth examples enable abstract knowledge all too young, on a in 1622. Such was his was beatified in 1661 and canonised a saint just three years later.



St Francis de Sales

strugglers, friend of the royalty and the pope, he ciled, educated and let loved them and that an enduring influence letters. His down-to-a relational rather than of God. Francis died, journey through Lyon fame and reputation, he

The pastoral care of Francis de Sales extended in the beginning of the seventeenth century into Piedmont and churches in Turin and Chieri where the youthful John Bosco would refreshingly feel his influence two hundred or so years later. The practical and adaptive aim of 'being all things to all people' and the 'loving-kindness' of Francis de Sales would become key components of the peer-based youth ministry style of John Bosco as he initiated his particular Salesian mission.

...the Love and
gentleness of
(St) Francis de Sales
be my guide in
everything.

Don Bosco, Spiritual Testament



A SALESIAN TIMELINE



1567 Birth of Francis de Sales in Haute-Savoie, France.

1602 Francis is consecrated bishop of Geneva.

1622 Death of Francis in Lyon.

1664 Canonisation of Saint Francis de Sales.

* * * * *

1815 Birth of John Melchior Bosco at Becchi in Northern Italy on 16 August.

1817 John's father dies suddenly.

1825 The first big dream revealing his future mission to the young.

1835 John begins study for the priesthood in the seminary in Chieri.

1837 Maria Domenica Mazzarello is born in Mornese.

1841 Don Bosco is ordained a priest in Turin and begins his youth apostolate with 'a simple catechism lesson' on 8 December.

1846 The Salesian Oratory finds a permanent home in Valdocco, Turin.

1853 Beginning of his first technical stream and his first brass band.

1854 Twelve year old Dominic Savio meets Don Bosco.

1855 Seminarian, Michael Rua makes private vows before Don Bosco.

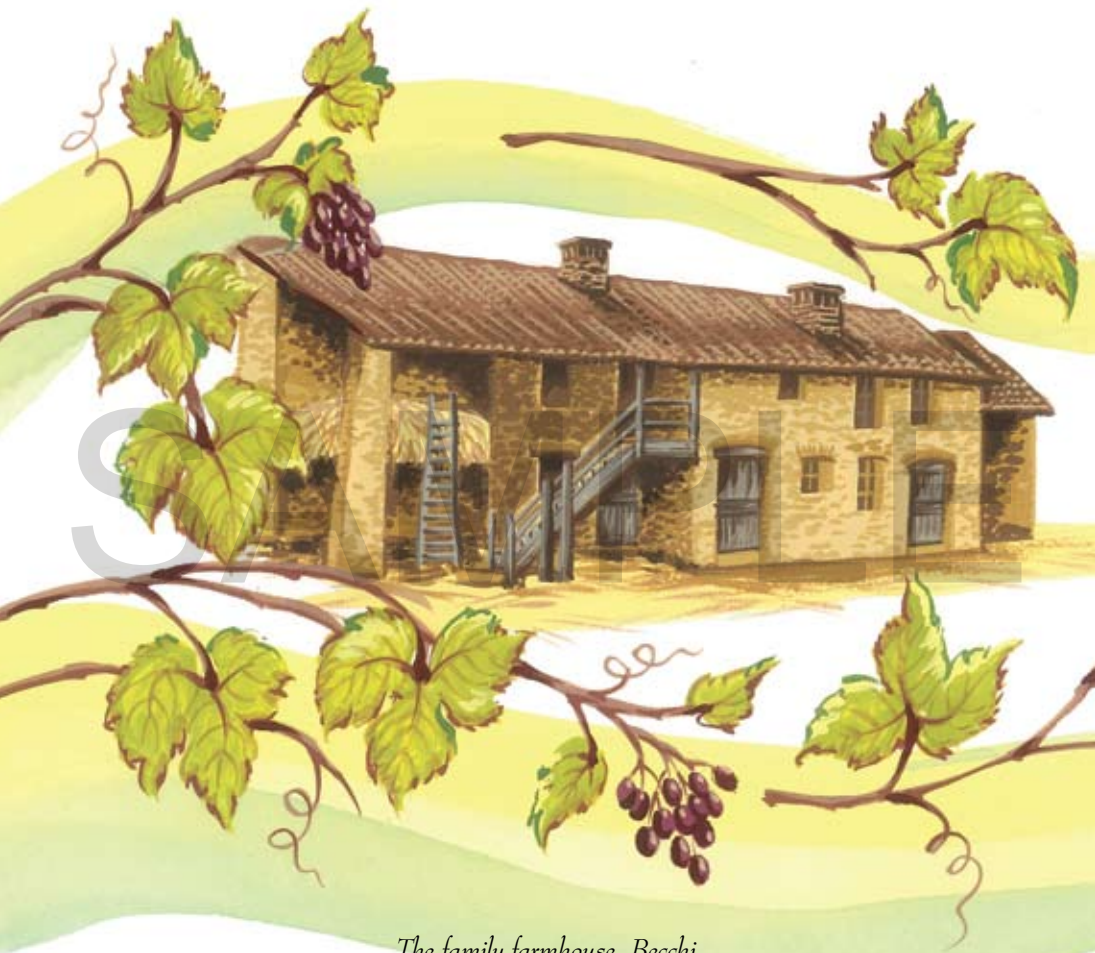
1856 Death of Don Bosco's mother, Mamma Margaret.

1857 Death of Dominic Savio.

1858 Don Bosco's first interview with Pope Pius IX.

1859 Birth of the Salesian Society on 18 December.

- 1860 Joseph Rossi accepted as the first Salesian lay brother.
- 1862 The first twenty-two Salesians take their vows before Don Bosco.
- 1863 The first Salesian foundation outside Turin.
- 1864 Don Bosco meets Mary Mazzarello at Mornese.
- 1869 Papal decree approving the Society of St Francis de Sales.
- 1872 First foundation of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters) in Mornese.
- 1874 Definitive approval of the Salesian Constitutions by the Holy See.
- 1875 Opening of the first Salesian house outside Italy (in Nice, France).
The first missionary expedition leaves for South America.
- 1881 Mother Maria Mazzarello dies on 14 May.
- 1884 John Cagliero becomes the first Salesian bishop.
- 1888 Don Bosco dies on 31 January.
Michael Rua is unanimously elected as first successor.
- 1890 The process for canonisation of Don Bosco begins.
- 1911 The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians formally approved by the Holy See.
- 1922 Beginning of the Salesian work in Australia in the Kimberley.
- 1929 Don Bosco proclaimed 'Blessed'.
- 1934 Canonisation of St John Bosco.
- 1951 Canonisation of St Maria Mazzarello.
- 1954 Canonisation of St Dominic Savio.
- 1972 Michael Rua proclaimed 'Blessed'.
- 1981 The Australian province extends to Samoa and the Pacific.



The family farmhouse, Becchi