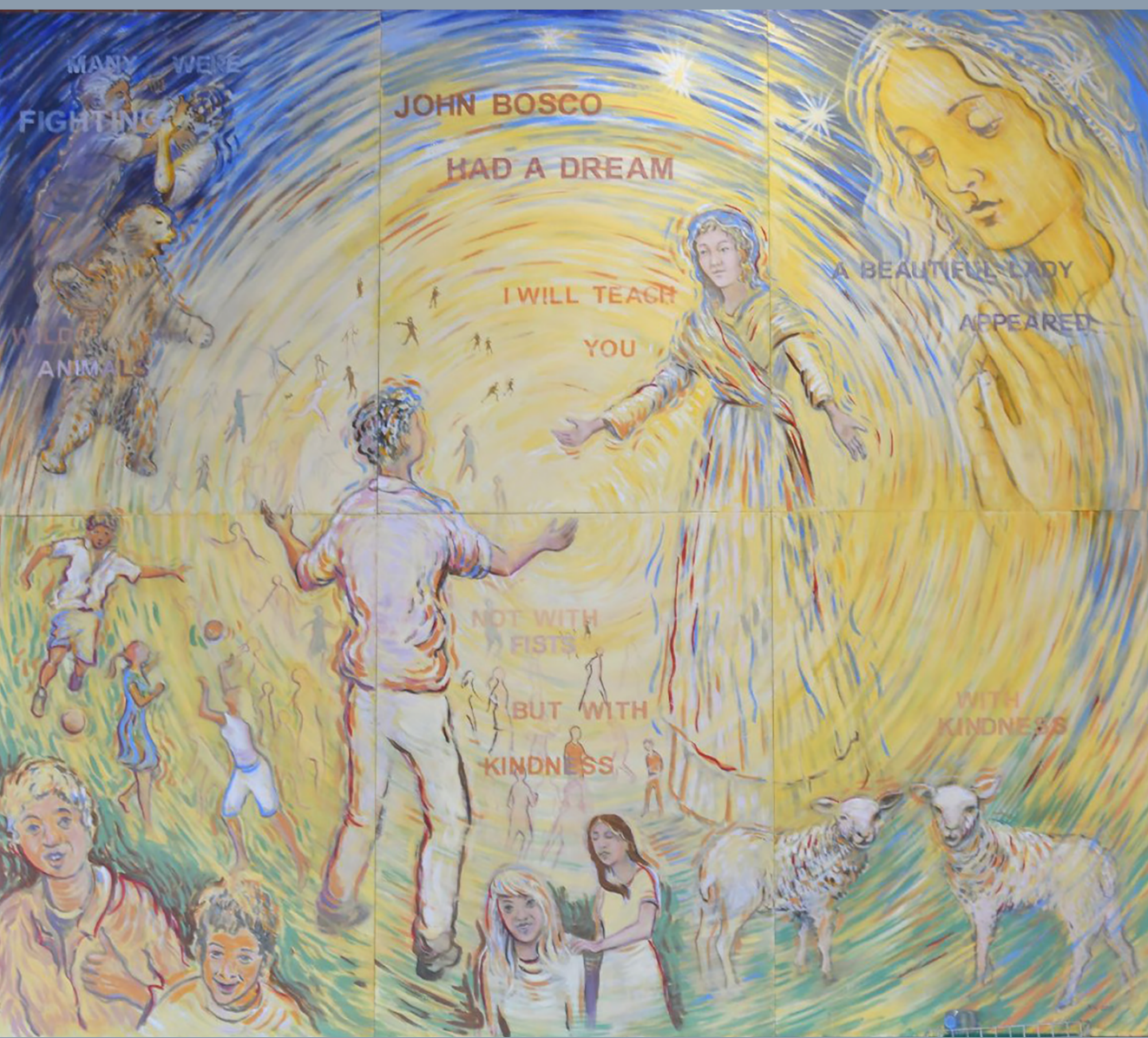
Remembering A Dream
Studies for the Bicentenary of Don Bosco's Dream of 1824



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In Memory of Father Edward Power, SDB
(1910–1982)

Table of Contents

Foreword		ix
1.	Remembering A Dream	1
2.	The Life of Jesus as an Icon of God's Love. Its Meaning for the Salesian Charism	15
3.	Following Jesus into Radical Discipleship. A Reading of Mark 8:14–9:29	35
4.	Education of the Heart	65
5.	'A Secularity that Proclaims the Gospel'. Revisiting the Charter for Salesian Schools	79
6.	The Contemporary Challenge of Consecrated Life	97
7.	Bibliography	117
8.	Index of Names, Places and Subjects	123

Foreword

The Society of Saint Francis de Sales, founded by Saint John Bosco (1815–1888), has celebrated a number of significant anniversaries over recent years: the four hundredth anniversary of the death (1622 in Lyon) and burial (24 January, 1623 in Annecy [remembered in the Universal Calendar of the Catholic Church on that date each year]) of Francis de Sales, the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco (1815–2015), the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Don Bosco's tentative and courageous gathering of marginalised young people in Valdocco (1841–1991), and the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the gathering of the first group of young men prepared to commit themselves to work with Don Bosco and his unique ministry among the young (1859–2009).

The year 1824 also needs to be remembered. In that year the young John Bosco experienced an event that determined much of his subsequent life and mission. It is universally recognised as a foundational moment for the Salesian charism and its story. The relevance and authenticity of the Salesian charism depend upon the ongoing recollection and retelling of John Bosco's dream as a nine-year-old. Born in 1815, Don Bosco had a dream at nine years of age, that is, in 1824.

Apart from his sharing the experience of his dream with his family the next morning—to a mixed reception—he kept this deeply personal experience to himself. But it was the driving inspiration for everything that he did. It remains such for all who claim to be followers of Don Bosco in the various manifestations of the Salesian Family. He eventually informed Pius IX of the dream and was asked by the Holy Father to make the experience more widely known. It was not published in Italian until 1946, based upon Don Bosco's own

heavily worked and reworked account in his *Memorie dell'Oratorio*.[1] Along with his Letter from Rome in 1884, a young boy's dream of 1824 has become foundational for our contemporary understanding and implementation of Don Bosco's charism. Much of the dream of 1824 continued to motivate what Don Bosco wrote in 1884.[2]

The central figures in the dream are 'the nobly attired distinguished man' and 'a lady of stately experience'. The man asks John to cease meeting violence with violence, as 'you will have to win these friends of yours not with blows but with gentleness and love'. John is directed to 'a lady of stately appearance', the mother of the distinguished man to whom John's own mother had taught him 'to greet three times a day'. The identity of Jesus and his Mother emerges. Amid confusing and rapidly changing visions, the woman promises John that 'in due time you will understand everything'.

The year 2024 summons us to 'remember' the dream of 1824. Salesians in all parts of the world have been challenged by the charter of that dream. The nobly attired man insisted upon gentleness and love; the lady of stately appearance indicated that success depended upon courage: 'Make yourself humble, brave and persevering', and a preparedness to be open to wherever the future might lead them: 'In due time you will understand everything.'

The six essays that follow have different origins, but they are all inspired by the directions given to John Bosco by Jesus and his Mother in the dream of 1824. The opening essay on the dream itself, and the importance of maintaining the dream, was delivered to all the staff at Salesian College 'Rupertswood', Sunbury, on the Feast of Saint John Bosco (January 31) to open the 2024 academic year. The 'nobly attired man' of the dream, Jesus of Nazareth, insists upon 'gentleness and love'. A contemporary critical approach to trace the life and figure of Jesus of Nazareth as it is reported in

1. See the English translation of Daniel Lyons, *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855. The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco* (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1989). On the history of text of the *Memoirs*, see pp xxi–xxvi (by Michael Mendl). The text of the dream is found on pp 18–21 of the Lyons' edition.
2. Don Bosco's 1884 'Letter from Rome' is so important to the Salesian tradition and educative process (in whatever setting) that the entire text is reproduced as Appendix III to *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales*, 3rd edition (Rome: Edizione SDB, 2015), 258–268.

the Four Gospels lays bare an icon of God's love that provides the christological inspiration for the Salesian charism. This essay was first written in response to a request from Father Ronaldo Zacharias, SDB, and Sister Adair Sberga, FMA. It appears, in Portuguese (*A Vida di Jesus como ícone do amor de Deus: significado para o carisma salesiana*) in their edited volume *O Sacramento da Presença*.[3] Jesus' life and teaching is doubtless an icon of God's love. But it is important to recognise that Jesus looks beyond the revelation of love that took place in his life, teaching, death, and resurrection. His conviction that despite all evidence to the contrary God would have the last word reminds us that such will always be the case for those who choose to be followers of Jesus: 'in due time you will understand everything'. The New Jerusalem described in the Book of Revelation is to be found at the end of much tribulation, but it is found among us: 'the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the apostles of the Lamb. . . . I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb' (Rev 21:14, 22–23).

Essential to the Salesian charism is an acceptance that it is but one way among many to follow Jesus Christ. Having presented the figure of Jesus as an 'icon' for Salesian life and practice in the first essay, I then turn to a broader study of the radical nature of Christian discipleship, as taught by the Gospel of Mark. It was originally written in preparation for the Twenty Seventh Salesian General Chapter of 2014, dedicated to the radical nature of the Salesian vocation, and the challenge to all who wish to be witnesses to the Gospel.[4] It is inspired by the striking affirmation of *Constitution* 60 of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales: 'Surrendering ourselves totally to God whom we love above all else, we commit ourselves to a form of life based entirely on gospel values.' I rewrote that study and delivered it as part of a

3. Brasilia, DF: EDB, 2024. It is published here for the first time in the original English, with the permission of the editors. I am grateful for their support.
4. Originally published as 'Following Jesus into Radical Discipleship. A Reading of Mark 8:14–9:29', in *Witnesses of Evangelical Radicalism. A Biblical and Salesian Reflection*, Rafael Vicent, Juan José Bartolome, and Shaji Joseph Puykunnel editors, (Bengaluru: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2014), 49–84. I am grateful to the editors for allowing me to publish a rewritten form of this essay.

meeting of the East Asia Oceania Salesian Formation personnel, held in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, from 17–20 November 2023. It appears here in its rewritten form for the first time.

The further three essays appear here in a published form for the first time. Two of them were delivered as part of the Salesian educational project of the Australia-Pacific Province of the Salesians of Don Bosco. In the first place, taking Jesus' life as an icon of God's love and embracing the life of a disciple of Jesus necessarily leads to an educational system that is based upon a heart-to-heart communication, as Don Bosco's model, Saint Francis de Sales, would say. It was first delivered to a meeting of the College Boards of Salesian College, 'Rupertswood', Sunbury, and Salesian College, Chadstone, in 2021. It has been used subsequently for the whole staff at Salesian College 'Rupertswood'. A further unpublished essay faces the most challenging aspect of Catholic education in contemporary Australia and the Pacific—and elsewhere: the vigorous secularity of a society in which students, their families, and even many of the school staff, have little knowledge or interest in the Catholic Tradition and its practices.

Steady attention has been devoted to this problem, especially by Frs Pascual Chavez and the now Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime. The forward planning for the 29th Salesian General Chapter makes it a point of intense focus. Taking seriously the suggestion of Father Ángel Fernández Artime's *Strenna* for 2023 (*As the Yeast in Today's Human Family*) that Salesian educators be 'leaven' in society, I suggest that we recognise the importance of what he calls '*laicità evangelica*' and which I render as 'a secularity that proclaims the Gospel'. As the Rector Major puts it: '"Living for God" means having at attitude of seeking all that is rich in humanity. For only that which is fully human is divine.' The essay was delivered as the opening address at the biennial Salesian Education Conference under the leadership of the Australia Pacific Salesian Principals Association (APSPA) on 11 August 2023. The conference was part of the centenary celebrations of the arrival of the first Salesians in Fremantle, Western Australia, in March 1923.

The final essay was first delivered to the formation personnel and the Rectors of Salesian formation communities of the East Asia Pacific Region of the Salesians of Don Bosco in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, in November 2023. Although only an essay, it is the

culmination of a life-long reflection on the consecrated life.[5] If the Salesian educative system is an 'education of the heart', then a solid understanding of the meaning and role of obedience, poverty and chastity within that system is called for. A long Christian tradition associated these Gospel values with a 'vowed' form of life unique to Religious Orders, somehow marking them off as called to a 'better' form of Christian life. This cannot be the case. They come to us from Jesus and his Gospel. Evangelical obedience, poverty, and chastity form part of the *universal* call to the perfection of love issued by the Second Vatican Council (see *Lumen Gentium* 40). These virtues serve as a 'leaven' that enlivens all who have responded to the invitation to baptism and the Christian life and reaches beyond the Christian world to witness God's unconditional care for all—no matter what their religious affiliation might be.

Seemingly modern, this understanding of the universal call to the perfection of love (*Lumen Gentium* 40) its contemporary roots in the simple but remarkable teaching of Francis de Sales (1567–1622). Don Bosco's favourite Savoyard Saint Francis de Sales insisted upon the possibility of universal holiness by means of the loving exercise of whatever one's state in life might be. Coming so soon after the painful divisions generated by the Protestant Reformation, and the sometimes-severe Roman counterreformation, a recent historian has described Francis' contribution as follows:

> The difference made by this shift in focus should not be underestimated, for just as laity were encouraged to sanctify the world, some clergy were taught to embrace the world too, and to find God in its deepest recesses.[6]

May our 'remembering' John Bosco's foundational dream of 1824 further stimulate the whole Salesian family, in its lay, secular, and ordained ministries to the young to continue that dream in its mission to sanctify the world and to find God in its deepest recesses.

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5. See Francis J Moloney, *Disciples and Prophets. A Biblical Model for the Religious Life* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980); Francis J Moloney, *A Life of Promise. Poverty—Chastity—Obedience*, Consecrated Life Series 1 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1985), Francis J Moloney, *Reflections upon Evangelical Consecration. Celebrating a Bicentenary* (Bolton, UK: Don Bosco Publications, 2015).
6. Carlos MN Eire, *Reformations. The Early Modern World, 1540–1650* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 703.