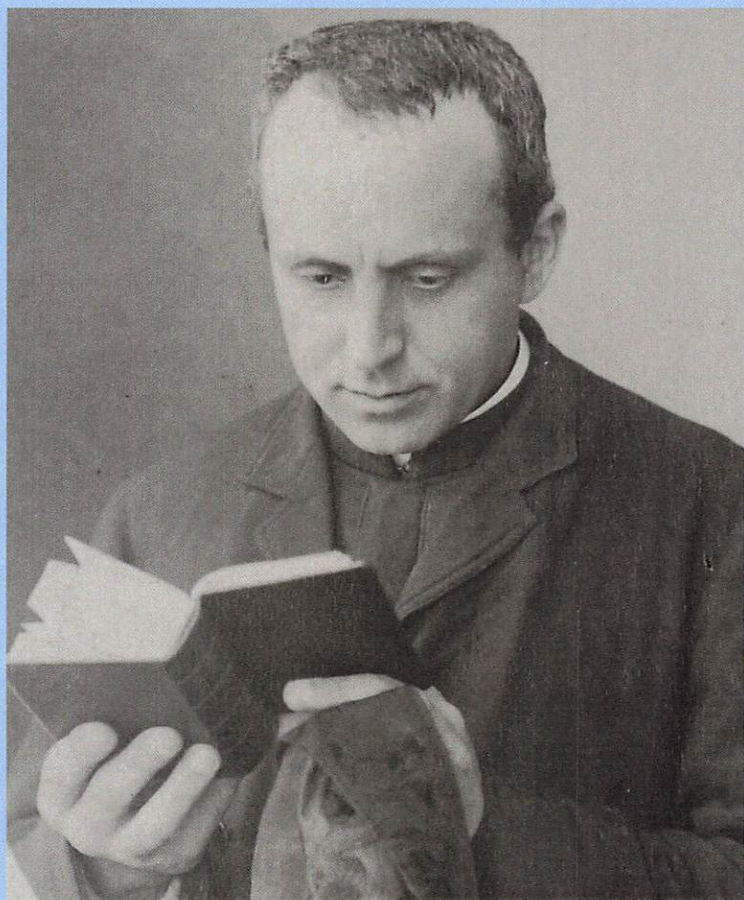


FR. RINALDI

Good Father and Humble Servant of All
A Spiritual Profile



Fr. Pierluigi Cameroni, SDB

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Title of the Italian original:

Don Rinaldi
Padre buono e umile servo di tutti
Profilo spirituale

Don Pierluigi Cameroni SDB

English translation by Agnes B. Paulino

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***“I will do my best to acquire true humility
and show charity to everyone.
To this end, I will not allow a day to pass,
not even a single moment, without meditating on such virtues
and I will examine myself to see if I have sinned against them.”***

(From Fr. Philip Rinaldi's resolutions)

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Presentation

On the occasion of the first centenary of the founding of the Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers, I am happy to present Fr. Pierluigi Cameroni's book *Fr. Rinaldi, Good Father and Humble Servant of All, A Spiritual Profile*. The title already indicates the rich spiritual goal that the experience of this son of Don Bosco offers us in a life filled with God.

The saints are not simply our intercessors; they are, above all, people who accompany us on our journey of holiness through their testimony and are transparent witnesses of that living and faithful God who walks beside us in history and loves us with a Father's tenderness. Fr. Philip Rinaldi, a living image of Don Bosco, was one of these.

Fr. Pierluigi Cameroni's valuable text draws a profile that highlights the great spiritual depth of Blessed Philip Rinaldi, one that makes him a true mountaineer of the Spirit.

– He was a man of God, a man of great faith nurtured with prayer and the Eucharist. Fr. Ceria wrote that, “Fr. Rinaldi presents himself to us with the features of a man of interior life. He practiced it himself and preached it to others. He firmly believed that in order to live in accordance with Don Bosco's spirit, one must not lose sight of one's interior life.” Meditation in particular was something he valued and practiced as an essential means of growth in the interior life. To the young women whom he guided spiritually and with whom he began the experience of consecrated Salesian secularity, he recommended, “Never omit your meditation, even for one day of the year.”¹

– He was a man filled with God's love; it was an embodied love, translated into kindness and fatherly consideration for one's neighbor, from both a material and spiritual point of view. As a good father, he was concerned with meeting the needs of the confreres, but also the needs of many ordinary folk who knocked at his door or whose needs he had already discerned. He was also very much appreciated for his wise, prudent and profound spiritual direction. And it was precisely his experience in guiding

¹ ISTITUTO SECOLARE “VOLONTARIE DI DON BOSCO,” *Documenti e testi*, V, “Quaderno Carpanera.” Le conferenze spirituali di don Rinaldi alle Zelatrici di M.A. (1917-1928), Rome 1980, p. 194.

some of the Oratory girls at the House of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, girls who wanted to make progress in holiness, that gave rise to one of the most beautiful fruits of his creative activity, an all-new experience at the time. Faithful to the urgings of the Holy Spirit, he was the founder of what today is the Secular Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers.

– He was a welcoming man who knew how to give of his time generously to whoever had need of him, treating each as if he or she were the most important person in the world. Ever humble, he considered others to be always better than he was. He was prudent and transparent in his relationships, and both cordial and reserved. He was strong in adversity and at times of misunderstanding. He was austere and simple, faithful to the teachings of the young people’s Saint, so much so that it is said of him, “He only lacked Don Bosco’s voice.” His devotion to the Virgin Mary had a childlike simplicity.

If the saints are like the stars of the night that point out our path in life, certainly Fr. Rinaldi can be considered a star of the greatest magnitude; to be loved, imitated, and from whom there is so much to learn. I am sure that this volume will help us gain a much greater understanding of Salesian spirituality and help increase the thirst for daily holiness in those who read it, in the way Fr. Philip Rinaldi modelled for us.

Olga Krizova
Fifth World Moderator
of the Volunteers of Don Bosco²

² In North America, members of the secular institute founded by Blessed Philip Rinaldi are known as Don Bosco Volunteers (DBV). Elsewhere, they are known as *Volontarie di Don Bosco* (VDB, that is, Volunteers of Don Bosco).

Introduction

“I urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bonds of peace” (Eph 4:1-3).

“Anyone who approached Fr. Rinaldi felt he was approaching a father. Even his physical appearance inspired confidence. He had an attractive face habitually attuned to a sweet but barely perceptible smile. His was a gentle, calm voice; slow and measured his words; a very mild and fatherly gaze which was an invitation to conversation” (Fr. Zerbino).

Fr. Philip Rinaldi’s witness of life was an embodiment of the freedom he experienced in the gift of self; the unconditional trust in the love of God the Father of which he was a tangible sign. The human and spiritual events of his life that we will retrace by giving special attention to the testimonies gathered for the inquiry leading to his beatification³ were marked, ever since he was a boy at the Salesian school at Mirabello, by his meeting Don Bosco. Don Bosco was a father who would accompany his vocational journey and imprint the quite original style of his entire life. Fr. Rinaldi lived in the light of Don Bosco, interpreting the Salesian charism through the category of fatherliness as an expression of authenticity and vocational fruitfulness.

From his youth, he rejected every temptation to entrust himself to unprepared spiritual fathers. Even as a young priest who was given positions of responsibility and until he became the successor of Don Bosco himself, he was, at all times, on guard against this temptation. He

³ SACRA CONGREGATIO PRO CAUSIS SANCTORUM P.N. 749, TAURINENS. CANONIZATIONIS SERVI DEI PHILIPPI RINALDI, SACERDOTIS PROFESSI AC RECTORIS MAIORIS SOCIETATIS SANCTII FRANCISCI SALESII, *POSITIO SUPER VIRTUTIBUS*, Roma Tipografia Guerra, 1985. For the bibliography, see MARTIN DAI LOC NGUYEN, *The Salesian Legacy of Father Philip Rinaldi*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bengaluru, 2015, pp. 142-147.

confirmed and consolidated the educative and pastoral experience that had come from the young people's Saint. Guided by and under the fatherly gaze of Don Bosco who allowed him to heal, he was lifted up and led in a personal and unique way. He gained experience in the spiritual authority that liberates and brings growth and maturation to every good seed. He experienced genuine fatherliness and responded with filial obedience, which, by virtue of the grace of the Holy Spirit, did not weigh upon him, but made him docile and attentive to the whisperings of his inner Teacher. This, in turn, opened up new horizons not only for himself as an individual, but also for all those who related to him or depended on him in some way.

Indeed, intimately shaped by this charismatic experience of a regenerating and liberating fatherliness, Fr. Rinaldi immediately became a point of reference for many individuals and institutions to the point where he extended the fatherly heritage he had received from Don Bosco in a truly prodigious way. The fact that he had been given great responsibility as a young priest, such as the accompaniment and formation of adult vocations, is a sign of how he lived and interpreted authority in spiritual terms at every stage of his life, across a range of duties and roles, from Director to Provincial, from Prefect General to Rector Major. He did this not as an exercise of power or in the style of a manager at central headquarters, but as an expert intermediary of the Spirit's urgings and a faithful follower of his desires, as they touched on the lives of individuals, or communities and institutions.

We see a first side of this spiritual fatherliness in his intention and determination to safeguard and preserve the core of the Salesian charism as it emerged from the cradle of Valdocco and was embodied in new and diverse contexts and settings. It was not only a good to be preserved, but one that needed to flourish in all its expressions. He gave strength and vigor especially to translating the charism into a lay setting, with special attention to Past Pupils and Cooperators, as well as inaugurating a new form of secular consecration by planting the seed which would flourish as the Secular Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers. Fr. Rinaldi was the guarantor of innovation in continuity through a practical exercise of discernment and discrete and efficacious action to spread the vital sap of the charism everywhere. He exploited all the charismatic resources available to him, while avoiding fragmentation or reducing things to ideology.

A second side of Fr. Rinaldi's activity was the ability he had to draw on his personal experience, rooted as it was in the very springs of Salesian experience, drawn directly from the source, the Founder, and the rich

setting of grace that was Valdocco and the first Salesian generation. The events of his maturing and deciding on his vocation, his accompaniment of adult vocations, the years he spent in Spain as the first Director there and then as Provincial, the roles he had at the summit of the Salesian Congregation, were marked by the practical experience he had of either personal or community spiritual direction. Fr. Rinaldi carried out the different responsibilities to which he was called from the perspective that the superior was above all responsible for the *salus animarum* [salvation of souls] of his subjects. The motto *Give me souls* found its first expression and field of activity in the care he showed in protecting the vocations of the confreres. The superior, as Don Bosco wanted him to be, referred to the great monastic tradition of the *Abba*, the *Father*, who reflected God's fatherliness, mercy and pre-eminent and healing grace. What is surprising in Fr. Rinaldi is the fact that, in common with Fr. Michael Rua and Fr. Paul Albera, the first successors of Don Bosco, he lived at a rather delicate time when the Holy See established that Directors/Rectors⁴ in religious houses would no longer be the confessors of their confreres. With great wisdom, and in obedience to Rome, Fr. Rinaldi was able to adapt this provision in such a way that it would not compromise the charism, while at the same time he seized the opportunities that this challenge involved. It's no wonder, therefore, that he exercised his role of authority and encouraged everyone else called to it without making excuses regarding their adequacy for the task. This was one aspect of great relevance for consecrated life. Faced with scarcity of numbers and the hemorrhaging of vocations, he asked superiors and leaders not to back off from the duty of making note of the spiritual progress of the confreres and community.

This way, obedience and mission are not about personal whim or reckless yielding to the urgency of the moment, but a response to the desires of the Spirit nurtured through true personal and community discernment. Due to his lengthy experience of spiritual direction, the ministry of Reconciliation, listening and dealing with his co-workers, Fr. Rinaldi gained the ability to intuit hearts intimately and encourage consciences to be open, thus opening the royal road to recognizing God's will and a readiness to fulfill this will faithfully and creatively. Thus, he presents himself to us as the superior and father who knows people from within and from without, encouraging a real self-awareness in them that offers

⁴ In North American usage, the religious superior of local Salesian presences is called Director. In other English speaking areas the term Rector is more commonly used.

security and strength, avoiding the extremes of a retreat into narcissism or soaring vain ambition. There may certainly be unequal relationships between roles taken on and areas of responsibility, but the common ground is that we are all children of God who need to be obedient to the inspirations and movements of the Holy Spirit.

In this way, he brought back holiness, the apostolic and educative mission, missionary work, fidelity and the prophetic impetus of the charisma to his unique vision and fatherly solicitude. The superior and father, as Fr. Rinaldi lived and experienced it, is not the kind of person who is exclusively caught up in duties or distributing roles and tasks. Fr. Rinaldi did not do this, not even during his twenty years as Prefect General, a role that mainly required him to carry out disciplinary and administrative duties. He knew how to protect and extend the 'leaven' of fatherliness and spiritual direction that precisely during that time would lead him to start up the more original works and enterprises of his lifetime. He assisted individuals and institutions, either those already founded or the ones he started, to become what they were called to be. To do this, he was able to recognize and reject both the temptation to be a kind of policeman superior, suppressing and controlling, or the kind he was possibly more exposed to being, one who just let things go, neither intervening nor correcting. Like a good leader, he managed these two tendencies well and guided people and institutions with profound wisdom and a greatness of soul recognized by everyone. What resulted was a superior who was a father of sturdy mind, experienced, unaffected by human respect or the need to seek approval and not the least interested in strategies aimed at preserving power. Instead, in each authority role, he humbly acknowledged his own inability and unworthiness and saw the need to put forward new names in different sets of circumstances, to invest in new and more capable confreres, people better suited to the required duties.

He was convinced that the grace of God is at work at the school of Don Bosco, and that we need to welcome it and respond to it. The spiritual life consists in accepting that in obedience to his action, the Spirit shapes our life. In this loving relationship we can see the primacy of grace and along with it, the free contribution and awareness of the human being. Human beings cooperate by listening and being available and obedient. Their wish is to encounter the Lord and they pray that this encounter will take place and contribute to the mission they need to fulfill. The spiritual life is a dynamic that develops over time, involving all human dimensions, with its own rhythm and moments of growth and trial.

Aware of his own weakness and inadequacies, Fr. Rinaldi constantly lived with the profound conviction that, “*If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor*” (Ps 127:1) and that, “*Apart from me you can do nothing*” (Jn 15:5). A concrete expression of this primacy of grace was his insistence on living the “union with God” that characterizes life in the spirit of Don Bosco, and that prompted him to ask Fr. Eugenio Ceria to write the famous text *Don Bosco with God*⁵ on the occasion of the beatification of the young people’s Saint.

His primary means for cultivating union with God on a daily bases was his fidelity to daily meditation, an enduring bequest that he received from Don Bosco on his deathbed. Thus, as he wrote in the circular letter of February 24, 1925, “*In the Memoirs [of the Oratory], which Don Bosco himself wrote for our instruction, he tells us that at about 12 years of age, Fr. Calosso taught him to make a little meditation daily. He said that from that time on, he began to appreciate what the spiritual life was. We will certainly do what is pleasing to him and what will attract the blessings of God upon us if we resolve to make our meditation better. By lifting our minds to God, we will learn to work in a way which is more in conformity to the spirit of our Father, our guide and model. We will be more active, more kindly with the boys, more charitable to the confreres, more ready to sacrifice ourselves for the good of souls. And we will move God’s heart to reveal Don Bosco’s holiness to the world even sooner.*”⁶ Meditation, daily examination of conscience, monthly recollection and the annual retreats are privileged moments for listening to the Word of God, purifying the heart, discerning God’s will.

His role as a superior who was a father, led him to show particular care when it was a case of discerning the choice of people called to take on roles of responsibility, seeing to their formation and how that was carried out. It meant working for the life of the community through accompaniment of the confreres, preserving consecrated life and the charisma, purifying every weakness and spiritual sickness, ensuring the right conditions for mission, and safeguarding the good name of the Congregation.

The occasion for this book is the celebration of the centenary of founding of the Secular Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers. The Acts of this process

⁵ E. CERIA, *Don Bosco con Dio*, LDC, Turin, 1946.

⁶ Circular Letter, February 24, 1925, in *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, no. 28, p. 350.

at the time said of them, *“The Zealous Promoters of Mary Help of Christians, today the Don Bosco Volunteers, are Fr. Rinaldi’s most inspired institution for women while he was Prefect General of the Congregation. The Servant of God had the temperament or better, the charism of a founder. He knew how to read the signs of the times, seized upon the needs of the world and relieved the anxiety of souls. Beginning with the spiritual requests of women among whom he was working, Fr. Rinaldi finally achieved and set up a form of consecrated life in the world that is known today as consecrated secularity. The spiritual and juridical doctrines of his time had not matured to the point they have today; in the first instance, there was a lack of official documents of the Church to support innovation with regards to consecration to God. But it is not difficult to demonstrate how Fr. Rinaldi had the charism, not of founding religious life in the world in the guise of a Third Order, but of consecrated secularity as a way of raising up and sanctifying earthly reality. This is how he arrived at the beginnings of a secular institute that, today, recognizes and honors him as Father and Founder.”*⁷

Today, Fr. Rinaldi shines as a special gift for the whole Salesian Family and in a special way for the Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers which venerate him as founder. His testimony helps us and is a reminder to live and promote consecrated life in its diverse forms and genuine expressions, overcoming both a drift into functionalism and interpretations that rely too much on psychology. In particular, he suggests once again the need to look after the confreres and the community or the sense of fellowship. He also proposes an understanding of the superior as a father, who reclaims the spiritual and charismatic care of the confreres through a spiritual fatherliness that finds one of its keenest, most fruitful and relished expressions in “home” and “family spirit” so typical of the Salesian charism.

⁷ L. CASTANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 505, § 1750.



Courtesy of Don Bosco Volunteers Central Archives

Chapter One: Biography

1. His years in Lu Monferrato (1850–1877)

Philip Rinaldi was born in Lu Monferrato, in the diocese of Casale and province of Alessandria, on May 28, 1856, to Cristoforo Rinaldi and Antonia Brezzi, and was baptized on the same day. The parents, well-off citizens, had nine children in whom they would nourish a genuinely Christian spirit and deep piety. The father was an impeccably upright and deeply religious man; Fr. Rinaldi himself described his mother as “a wise woman, a strong woman, a holy woman.” Fr. Rinaldi spoke of his father as a man who preserved his sons “from the corruption of the world... through his piety.” We do not know the precise date of Philip’s First Communion, but he began receiving the Eucharist regularly, a unique case among the boys of the parish. He was confirmed at age six, on May 21, 1862. A year earlier he had fleeting contact with Don Bosco. “The first time Don Bosco was in Lu, Fr. Rinaldi would have been seven or eight years old (in fact, he was five). He was at home playing. When he heard the sound of a band approaching, he went out and joined the crowd that was gathering. He knew nothing about Don Bosco at that stage, and that was the first time he had seen him, his boys around him, and talking to the people who crowded around him as he passed through. The band went on as far as the parish church and eventually Don Bosco also arrived there. He followed the band, as was naturally the case. Caught up in the crowd, Philip got close to Don Bosco, but at most would have kissed his hand.”⁸

From childhood, Philip revealed his good character. He was sociable and placid, respectful of his parents, and they taught him to be an example to the other children. He was devoted to Our Lady. He did not attend the elementary school in the village but received his early education from a private teacher. There was an intense religious atmosphere in the entire village, and at the turn of the century, vocations would grow to truly exceptional numbers. The Rinaldi family, including the extended family,

⁸ Other memories of his brother, Fr. Giovanni Rinaldi, *Positio, Documenta*, no. XVII, pp. 552-553.

would be extraordinarily fruitful with male and female vocations, 25 of them between 1800 and 1900.⁹

In the autumn of 1866, his father sent him to the San Carlo junior seminary that Don Bosco had established in the nearby village of Mirabello. There, he would meet Don Bosco on two occasions in November 1866 and on July 9, 1867. Those two encounters would make a deep impression on him and leave an indelible mark on his soul. In a circular letter in 1931, a few

⁹ This small village would have remained unknown had some mothers not made a decision in 1881 that would have major repercussions. Many of these mothers had the heartfelt desire to see one of their sons become a priest or one of their daughters totally committed to the service of the Lord in consecrated life. They began to gather every Tuesday for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, under the guidance of their parish priest, Monsignor Alessandro Canora, and to pray for vocations. No one could have imagined the extent to which the Lord would answer the prayers of these mothers. Three hundred twenty-three vocations to consecrated life came from this town: 152 priests (including religious) and 171 religious belonging to 41 different congregations. Sometimes there were three or four vocations from one family. The best-known example is that of the Rinaldi family. The Lord called seven sons from this family. Two daughters entered the Salesian Sisters. Sister Maria Luisa Rinaldi was a missionary for 41 years in Santo Domingo and Central America, while Sister Filomena Rinaldi remained in Piedmont as an intrepid and courageous educator. Among the males, five became Salesian priests. In fact, many young people from the village joined the Salesians. It is no coincidence that Don Bosco went to Lu four times during his lifetime. The saint attended the first Mass of Philip Rinaldi, his spiritual son, in his native village. Philip loved to remember the faith of Lu's families. "Our parents had a faith that made them say, 'The Lord has given us children and if He calls them, we can certainly not say no!'" Every 10 years, starting in 1946 when the First Vocation Conference was held, all the priests and religious still alive gathered in their hometown from all over the world. Fr. Mario Meda, parish priest of Lu for many years, told how this meeting was a real feast, a feast of thanksgiving to God for having done great things for Lu. The prayer that the mothers in Lu said was short, simple and profound. *Lord, make one of my children a priest! I myself want to live as a good Christian and I want to lead my children to be good so I may obtain the grace of being able to offer you, Lord, a holy priest. Amen.*

It is worth remembering Mother Angela Vallese (1854-1914), Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, Superior of the first FMA missionary expedition to Patagonia; Archbishop Evasio Colli (1883-1971), Archbishop of Parma, friend of Pope St. John XXIII; Archbishop Mario Cagna (1911-1986), Apostolic Nuncio to Japan, Yugoslavia, Austria.

months before he died, Fr. Rinaldi remembered these encounters, describing them with the typical traits of Salesian spirituality. He mentioned “Father,” “loving kindness,” “word in the ear,” “friendship,” “confession,” all the ingredients of an intense spiritual life, “I remember as if it were yesterday the first time that I had the good fortune to meet him. I was little more than 10 years old at the time. The good Father was in the refectory after his lunch and still seated at table. He very kindly asked me to talk about myself, whispered in my ear and later asked me if I wanted to be his friend, adding immediately, as if testing how I was responding, that I might come to confession in the morning. These are now distant illuminations, but they shine with very keen clarity now that my life is moving to its end. They are part of the dazzling splendors of the immortal halo that surrounds the head of the one to whom I went as a child and whispered the story of my soul into his ear.”¹⁰ He went to confession a second time to the Saint; later, Fr. Rinaldi confided to Fr. Eugenio Ceria that he had seen Don Bosco’s “face suddenly shine with a mysterious light.” The Director of the house at Mirabello was Fr. John Bonetti, and the assistant was the cleric Paul Albera, whom Philip would always remember with gratitude and affection, and who would become the second successor of Don Bosco. The young Salesian accompanied him with advice, comforting words and above all with the example of charity and religious sense. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1867, after Don Bosco’s second visit, Philip left the school with an embittered soul, like someone who had taken the wrong road. He left and returned home to the family. He had headaches and poor eyesight, and he had been struck by an assistant.

He returned to Lu and once more took up work in the fields, leading an exemplary life, distinguishing himself for his piety and virtue. At 17 years of age, he had a very brief crisis, but it had little consequence. Along with some other young men he considered not taking part in a procession in which they would wear the cloak of the Confraternity of Saint Blaise, of which he was a member, but he overcame the temptation and peer pressure, did his duty and later wrote, “The memory of that day always did me a lot of good.” His prompt and complete resumption of duty was confirmed by the fact that at 18 years of age he was elected president of the Confraternity and regularly received Holy Communion, something that was unique among the youth of the village, as he would tell us himself.

¹⁰ Circular Letter, April 26, 1931, in *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, n. 56, pp. 940-941.

He thought about marriage, but after going to see Don Bosco at the Saint's invitation, he decided to put the idea of marriage aside.

His religious vocation matured slowly. Considering that he had neither the health nor the capacity for being a priest, he thought he would get himself a job, something more humble in his opinion. "The priestly trade does not seem made for me." So when he turned 20 and considering himself not called to marriage and having to make a decision, Philip thought of making his way to some Religious Order. He would be neither farm worker nor priest. But other than God's grace, many factors would converge to bring his religious vocation to maturity, namely, the concern of the zealous parish priest, Fr. Ganora, "a great supporter of vocations," and Don Bosco's interest (he had had a good impression of the young man) continued to follow him. They never ceased keeping an eye on him and encouraging him to embrace the ideal of consecration to God, inviting him to take up religious life in the Salesian Society, in spite of the resistance and difficulties this young man from Monferrato had presented. Philip Rinaldi himself would tell us much later, "Don Bosco never left me in peace. He wrote to me many times or made me say that I would go with him.... A little later, he wrote to me, inviting me as usual, and I was tired of this insistence, so I replied, 'I frequently have headaches... and more, I have poor eyesight; so it is impossible for me to undertake and continue my studies....' I believed I had won.... On the contrary, Don Bosco still kept writing to me saying, 'Come, the headaches will pass and you will have sufficient eyesight for studying.' I felt won over and after having reflected a little, I decided to obey Don Bosco."¹¹

As we look at it now, despite the occasionally obscured spiritual profile of Rinaldi as a young layman, there were sure elements for claiming that he lived a model spiritual life before and after Mirabello. We can point to the seriousness of his habits, his obedience to his parents, his piety and especially his Marian piety, regular reception of the sacraments, a rather rare case in those times, and for his active involvement in the Confraternity of Saint Blaise, of which he was elected president. This too, is a very significant fact since we are talking about an association of elderly individuals generally jealous of their privileges. Nevertheless, aside from his imposing physical presence that attracted the local village girls, it did not seem that Philip had any romantic interests, even if he had some moments of crisis and restlessness. But he was 21 before he would

¹¹ G. VACCA, *Positio, Informatio*, pp. 10-11, no. 17.

eventually overcome his natural uncertainty, thanks to Don Bosco, and would decide for religious life. He had already laid some solid foundations for becoming an excellent religious and priest, as in fact happened. In this phase of his life, in particular, he showed a religious spirit, commitment to perfection, apostolic zeal among his fellow villagers, humility and prudence, all dimensions that, like seeds, would bear copious fruits of holiness and apostolic fecundity.

The religious vocation of young Rinaldi, therefore, matured slowly, between uncertainties, sufferings and resistances that would last about ten years, more due to his temperament than to indecision, and to a congenital psychological insecurity and deep humility that brought him to distrust himself, especially when faced with the responsibilities of the priest. Finally, with God's grace and Don Bosco's help, Philip would conquer his uncertainty and hesitation. It was a moment of true conversion. On June 22, 1876, Philip had a long chat with Don Bosco about his vocation. An exchange of letters with Fr. Bonetti followed, and on November 22, a final meeting took place with Don Bosco. It is significant that in leaving the world to offer himself to the Lord, he would tell Our Lady in somewhat dogmatic terms, "I would rather die than not cooperate with my vocation."

We refer here to an autobiographical text by Fr. Rinaldi which reveals his human and spiritual character. What stands out first of all is the decisive role Don Bosco played in the lad's discernment and vocational accompaniment, its style marked by patience, purification of motives, and above all, charismatic attraction. What also emerges is the "reserved" trait that characterized him since childhood, either in what he thought about himself, or in his actions. It is a trait that would stay with him throughout his life. Expressions like "being hidden in the Congregation," "doing humble tasks," "without anyone in the world seeing it," "no one at home knew or said anything about it," "I begged him to keep everything a secret," not only point to a psychological trait, but a style of life focused on interiority, on what is not immediately visible. In the final part of the account, we see a strong and decisive will entrusted to the maternal intercession of Mary, wanting to be faithful to the gift received. It is all about a choice of life that marks a point of no return, given the awareness of God's gift and the guarantee offered by Don Bosco's mediation.

In the part entitled *Episode*, Fr. Rinaldi recounts the memory of a day that marks a watershed in his existence. Despite being surrounded by peers who were urging him to free himself from every tie with his past upbringing and the signs of faith that he had learned in his family, he came to a decision to surmount all his psychological conditioning and barriers

in order to testify to his freedom of choice and personal adherence to the faith of his forefathers. His mother's tears and prayers, along with the powerful intercession of St. Joseph, were helps that placed him firmly on the path that led to God's will.

*An original description by Fr. Rinaldi of his youth*¹²

(The "notebook" in the Salesian archives consists of six pages; it lacks the first page.)

... everywhere; he had answered all my objections. He had won me over little by little. Detached from myself, I no longer had any problems to overcome. My relatives had left me free and my choice naturally fell on Don Bosco, who had already won me back again through his appeals, and [descriptions of] his missionary groups sent to America. Whether I studied or not, that seemed to make no difference, and indeed I had always had those earlier humble feelings. So, I wanted to be hidden in the Congregation, just doing humble tasks. In my heart, I decided that without anyone in the world knowing about it, I would personally go and see Fr. Bonetti at Borgo S. Martino.

It was a Sunday in September and I left early in the morning, hoping to go to confession, be in touch with the Salesians and be accepted by Fr. Bonetti, then bid goodbye to the relatives... (*sic*). Arriving at S. Martino, I found nobody at the reception desk, so I went upstairs and entered the chapel.... No one there. So, I went up another flight of stairs, opened a door and found the Brothers just getting out of bed. "Where is Fr. Bonetti?" I asked. "Fr. Bonetti? He is no longer the Director here. He was transferred to Turin!!!" Like a beaten dog, I waited around no longer, turned on my heels and before nine was already reaching Lu. No one at home knew anything about it; and then I thought about reaching Fr. Bonetti by writing to him. It was ten years since I had written to him and I tried to open my heart as best I could. He wrote back to me, encouraging me on behalf of Don Bosco. I had said nothing to the family, but they suspected something, seeing the arrival of a letter with the Oratory address. So on November 12, the Feast of St. Evasius, I opened my heart to my father with a letter. Poor father, he was so moved. I then begged him to keep everything a secret, which he did until after my departure.

¹² Fr. Rinaldi's handwritten notes on his youth, *Positio, Documenta*, no. IX, pp. 535-538.

On the 22nd of that month, I went to Don Bosco at S. Martino where the feast of St. Charles was being celebrated. Don Bosco told me to go to Sampierdarena; and that after two years, I would go to Turin for my clothing day, and that is what happened.

The day before my departure, I went to my confessor to say goodbye. His eyes opened wide at the news, but he looked me in the eye and saw that I was clear about it, so he gave me wise advice and his blessing. I finally said goodbye to the family and turned my back on the world that had stolen the most beautiful years of my life.

May the Lord and his Blessed Mother grant that, having resisted so many graces in the past, I may no longer abuse them in the future.

Yes, O my most blessed Mother, may I die rather than not cooperate with my vocation. Grant that I may make up for the past with the present and the future.

An episode...

We were happy. By now I reached the age of mixing with a bunch of buddies, of taking part in the world of gallantry, of enjoying oneself, even of splurging a little...clowning around! 18 y/o, I was saying.... I was looking at whether I should have to lie down by the side of the fireplace or just hang onto my Mother's apron strings. We are big boys and should not lay around like a marble cat. So many jokes.... To have friends and forget about doing the things that belong to women and children is not so bad. Instead of attending the confraternity meetings, processions, etc., it was better to smoke a good cigar. How enjoyable it was to make smoke rings and designs that played on each other before dissipating...!

Meanwhile, it's Sunday. We go out of the house looking for a good time...; why don't we go for a hike in the country? Everything's ready to go; we're even setting out.... C.G. would readily come along, so we call him, too. There we were, going about here and there, passing the time in idle conversation.

The church bell rings once for vespers, then the second bell rings... before the third bell why not get a taste of some Malvasia wine? So good. No sooner did we enter the courtyard than my mother looked at my friends from head to toe. "Is this the thing for my son?" she says. "Poor boy, on his way to selling his soul!" And we, not imagining what a mother might have thought, drank to her health.

We were celebrating the feast of St. Joseph's patronage with a procession, as was our custom. From when I was little up to that day, I was accustomed to hurry off to be a part of the St. Blaise confraternity and go with them in procession wearing their white hat, despite already beginning to feel ashamed. And giving in to peer pressure, which I needed to overcome by breaking away from those guys, I stopped going there [to the processions].... I am already... mingling with women... with the elderly... However, we started to enter the church. I noted in passing that one of those young men was a troublemaker and I was sure that in church he would have either disturbed me or made me leave. Yet, I was calm; I went up to the door and pushed it open, holding it for my friends to go in; then as if stopped by an invisible hand I feel myself pushed back. I turn around without saying a word and like a madman run at breakneck speed back home.... I enter the house and a groan mixed with my name struck my ears. It was from my poor Mother who was praying on her knees to St. Joseph that he free me from bad companions. Mortified, I grab my uniform and go for the procession, while my good Mother said, "St. Joseph has touched your heart." She was right. Even now I do not know how to explain that turning back, that hand that pushed me away, that wild, thoughtless, aimless running, without saying, "It was the hand of God." The memory of that day has always done me much good and instills in me a great confidence in St. Joseph. And now, in recognition of it, I would like to describe how appropriate was that fact for giving him glory and animating many others to have recourse always to this dear Saint. But as I do not know how and cannot, I pray that I always keep in my heart an unlimited confidence toward him and inspire it in many others.

2. Aspirant and young Salesian (1877 – 1882)

From that moment on, he trustfully abandoned himself into God's hands, and God made him "a daring and secure accomplisher of apostolic enterprises." So, at 21 years of age, in 1877, Philip entered the institute that Don Bosco had opened at Sampierdarena (Genoa) for the formation of adult vocations, where the Director was Fr. Paul Albera, who had already been his assistant at Mirabello. Writing to his relatives, he described him as his "guardian angel," who comforted him with a word and a glance. And he supported him in the journey he needed to undertake, to the point where, when the young Rinaldi confided in him the fear that one day or other he might run away, he was heard to reply, "I would go and bring you back."

What we still have of those early years of religious life are the “Resolutions” that young Rinaldi entrusted to some loose pages. They constitute a precious record for understanding the spiritual energy that animated his religious formation and preparation for priesthood. Given the content of those “Resolutions” it does not seem to be overstating things to say that from then on, he strove for perfection in the Christian life with all his strength. Indeed, it turns out that spiritual motivations dominated, and he sketched them out according to a concrete program involving the struggle with his defects, vigilance in temptation and constant control of his passions along with prayer, mortification, and trustful abandonment to God under the watchful gaze of Our Blessed Lady. The chief points of his daily ascetic commitment were humility, obedience, controlled use of language, and total availability to what the superiors wanted since he thought of them as the representatives of God and mediators of his will. These were practical and not idealistic or illusory guidelines for religious life and revealed the practical approach that would guide Fr. Rinaldi throughout his life, as well as being signs of an uncommon spiritual maturity for a young student aspiring to religious life. One very valuable passage is where he says, “I want to do, think, speak with God alone as the goal,” an expression of a radical choice that would provide a deep structure for his life, a point of no return that would give him guidance in any situation be it happy or sad. Moreover, two virtues would emerge that would stand out in his spiritual profile: charity and humility. He manifested the first in the exercise of good and loveable fatherliness, and the other in the constant attitude of generosity and unselfishness in the service of his neighbor. These resolutions were a constant point of reference whereby, through his fidelity to morning meditation and an examination of conscience in the evening, he could check on his progress and start anew.

Philip Rinaldi’s resolutions between 1877 and 1881¹³

(These original resolutions, written over different years, are contained on three pages in a tiny and unsteady hand).

Your counselor is death.

¹³ Fr. Philip Rinaldi’s resolutions between 1877 and 1881, *Positio, Documenta*, n. VII, pp. 532-534.

In work, the aim and end is eternity.

Always have great distrust of yourself and great confidence in God, in Our Blessed Lady.

I want and promise to observe the rules of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales.

I want to tame my inclination to pride.

On Saturday I will receive Holy Communion to honor Our Blessed Lady.

March 27, 1882 – retreat

I resolve to read often the previous written promises and scrupulously put them into practice until the retreat next autumn.

On September 22, 1878, I made the vow of chastity for one year.

On September 27, 1879, I renewed this vow.

Reminders my confessor has given me to smooth the way in the Salesian Congregation and as a forewarning (*sic*): Humility, Patience, Obedience.

Philip?? (*sic*) Whenever you are tempted, reflect:

1. On the dangers of the world.
2. On the reason why you withdrew from it.
3. That in the world there is no stable pleasure.
4. That everything is dissipation of spirit.
5. That you need to suffer to save yourself.
6. That prayer and trust in God overcomes every difficulty.
7. On how much Our Blessed Lady favors prayers well said.
8. That the world and the body are nothing and the soul and Paradise are everything.

Think about and recall the urgings you have had from Divine Grace, why you withdrew from the world; and that here is where the Lord wants us.

1877 – Sampierdarena

Daily method

1. When waking in the morning, I will kiss the Crucifix and say some brief prayers. I will also kiss the scapular or medal of Our Blessed

Mother and recommend the day to her that the Lord has once again given me.

2. By which I mean that whenever the bell sounds, I will be ready to obey the commands of Our Blessed Lady.
3. I will get out of bed as soon as is indicated, and every morning on my knees I will ask for Our Blessed Lady's blessing.
4. While dressing myself, I will remain recollected with thoughts of God.
5. For the rest of the day, I will do what pleases my superiors.
6. I wish to overcome the distractions that will come to me either in church or study or in school.
7. I will receive Holy Communion every morning if my superiors do not take away permission for this.
8. I will confide all my anxieties in my spiritual director.
9. I will eat only when and as much as my body requires for preserving my health.
10. In recreation I will refrain from talking too much, since this is very harmful to me.
11. On walks and when going out, I will mortify my eyes out of love for Mary most holy.
12. I want and promise to be devoted to Our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph. And I hope to receive from you, dear Mother, my protector, the grace of coming to love Jesus and giving my life for his glory.

March 20, 1881

I want to save my soul. I will put up with negative things by complaining only to Jesus, Mary and St. Joseph.

April 19

Here, that's enough; it has already been too much. I will stop here and with the Lord's grace, I absolutely want to stop complaining. I want to do, think, speak only with God in view. I will submit in a heartfelt way to any superior, seeking only the glory of God. Instead of thinking about how they should command, I will think of how I should obey; and when I must command, I will first try to gain at least as much... [unintelligible] consensus as possible by that Superior who points out the rule to me.

My God, Most Holy Mother, I want it because you want it, but give me the grace.

Remembrance of Fr. Canepa Domenico: C. and O.

Promises made at *Monte della Madonna della Guardia* on October 3, 1879, to always obey my superiors.

If Our Blessed Lady grants me the memory and true wisdom, I promise to spend all the time left to me after obedience with holy books, sermons and other written material that speaks of Mary.

Fr. Rinaldi's resolutions and prayers 1878 – 1879¹⁴

(The page was not dated, but a probable date, 1878, has been penciled in).

I am a stick in the Director's hands. He loves me, wants me in Paradise; therefore, I must let him think about it, help me, bring me to Paradise.

Concern and thoughts about studies I leave to him; I want to be happy when I can say that up until now, I have done what I can, and that's it.

I might have knowledge, intelligence, and memory but I have nothing without the protection of Our Blessed Lady. Well then, if I succeed, good. It is her glory and God's and if not, it is not up to me to worry about it.

Most Holy Mother, remember that I intend to study for the glory of God, so if knowledge will cause me harm, do not give it to me. You have always helped me until now, and I hope that you never abandon me.

LONG LIVE MARY and the One who created you.

(On the reverse of the same page)

Rule of life regarding food.

1st – At breakfast, never a full cup of milk and coffee; no more than a quarter bread roll.

2nd – At dinner [the main meal in early afternoon], just enough, with mortification.

3rd – At supper, one ladle of thick vegetable and pasta soup – half a bread roll, no more.

4th – Outside meals, neither food nor drink.

¹⁴ Fr. Rinaldi's resolutions and prayers between 1878-1879, *Positio, Documenta*, n. VIII, pp. 534-535.

I will do my best to acquire true humility and show charity to everyone. To this end I will not allow a day to pass, not even a single moment, without meditating on such virtues and I will examine myself to see if I have sinned against them.

Resuming his studies was difficult at the beginning but then he made continuous progress. Studying on his own, he gained his teacher's certificate. And having overcome his early difficulties with settling in and with his studies, he was described at the end of the year as being "most studious and excellent." Fully trusting in the help of the Lord and of Our Lady, he made such progress in his spiritual formation that on September 22, 1878, he made the vow of chastity for one year and renewed it the following year.

On September 8, 1879, he entered the novitiate at San Benigno Canavese and immediately won the respect and trust of the novice master, Fr. Giulio Barberis, who appointed him assistant to his fellow novices. This demanding task of assistant to the other novices, which he carried out in obedience to his spiritual director, though not without some inward struggle, would contribute gradually to tempering his character to the point where he acquired the self-assurance, serenity and calm that would later characterize the mature man. On October 29, he received the clerical habit from Don Bosco himself and on August 13, 1880, made his perpetual profession.

He did an accelerated course in philosophy and theology (1880-1883), continuing his efforts at forming his character and overcoming his psychological insecurity. He made remarkable progress in his spiritual life, acquiring an extraordinary spiritual maturity that allowed him to reach rapidly the summit of perfection. In the meantime, Don Bosco himself used all the prestige of his advice and authority to have him advance as far as the priesthood, which he received at Ivrea on December 23, 1882.

It all took place as Don Bosco wished, as Fr. Rinaldi himself would attest some months after Don Bosco's death, as a sign of the decisive role that the Saint played in his Salesian and priestly vocation. "I ought to remember that from when I was ten until I turned twenty, I resisted my vocation both inwardly and outwardly. It was Don Bosco who traced the way for me, who sent me to receive Holy Orders without me hinting at it or asking him or others. When I became a priest, he asked me if I was happy. I replied that if I stayed with Don Bosco, all would be well; but I

would be very uncomfortable if Don Bosco were to send me out of the Congregation.”¹⁵

As we see from this journey in his life, and as Fr. Rinaldi himself often declared and humbly recognized, it is clear that he did not receive an extensive cultural preparation, either in terms of theology or scientific training. The rapid stages of his priestly preparation, following one another in quick succession did not permit this. In Salesian tradition it was known as the “school of fire,” indicating how they needed to quickly pursue the results that would make them suited to the demands of Salesian work among the young. For sure, Philip Rinaldi’s humanistic and theological preparation was reduced to the essentials, both at the beginning of his religious life and later. Don Bosco wanted things to happen quickly for Fr. Rinaldi, so he could have him available immediately, and was satisfied with what was purely necessary. Fr. Rinaldi committed himself to study and above all placed his trust in the decisions Don Bosco took in this regard and carried them out with extreme obedience. So, what distinguished Fr. Rinaldi and what everyone recognized was his practical knowledge which came from common sense, personal reflections and experience, enlightened, of course, by God’s grace. This knowledge did not make a doctor of him, but a sought-after spiritual director, a teacher of life and a holy man of authority.

When we examine his life, from his early years of priesthood to the summit of responsibility in the Congregation, we see concrete evidence of development in his life. He passed from “psychological uncertainty,” due to his delicate health condition, from the challenge of taking up his studies once more and from his low self-esteem to a maturity characterized by a growing interior life. It would make him, through his priestly ministry and the experience he gained, a man fully in control of himself, of clear judgment on people and situations, and a sure guide and leader for anyone who would approach him. He was a calm and serene person, a master of people and events, while remaining humble, reserved, without show of strength, more confident in God than in himself. We can also recognize how the action of the Holy Spirit in his life brought about real transformation. People who might be limited and lacking the esteem of

¹⁵ Fr. Rinaldi’s reflections on an undated and handwritten sheet of paper, *Positio, Documenta*, no. XIV, p. 548.

others, but who let themselves be intimately shaped by the Holy Spirit, become pillars of strength that turn life into an adventure in the Spirit.

This period of his life already manifests in a particular way several qualities of his spiritual character. Namely, his tender and filial devotion to Our Lady, his serious and practical commitment to his sanctification, his fidelity to the practices of piety, and his trust in the superiors, full of simplicity and eager obedience that reached its summit in the Holy Founder.

3. Director of adult vocations and superior in Spain (1882–1901)

Immediately after his priestly ordination, Don Bosco made the decision to appoint Fr. Rinaldi as Director at the Salesian House in Mathi Torinese (1883–1884), where the young superior immediately made the house a true family through his zeal, charity, and fatherliness. The following year, he was transferred to St. John the Evangelist house in Turin, where adult vocations were formed to religious life and prepared for priesthood. Now that he was in Turin, he had the good fortune and privilege of being able regularly to visit the founder who was a guide and example to him and urged him on in the practice of perfection. It was a particularly fruitful period for him in so far as he could confess every week to Don Bosco and so assimilated his true spirit. He made the most of it to the point that those who knew about it remembered and admired his unostentatious piety, charity, zeal, firmness, always clothed in kindness, and constant serenity; in short, a rich set of virtues that already made him an incomparable master of pedagogical wisdom. “He ran the house for five years. They were five years we can consider the central period of his life, because during that time he brought to completion the transformation initiated when he came to know and then followed his vocation. He entered St. John with something still of his youthful rashness, brashness or impulsiveness in speech and action and sentiments, but he came away from there as a man in control of himself and spiritually superior to the circumstances of daily life. Just looking at him gave one the impression of firmness, kindness, and piety.”¹⁶

¹⁶ E. CERIA, *Vita del Servo di Dio Sac. Filippo Rinaldi*, SEI, Turin, reprint 1951, pp. 55-56.

Fr. Rinaldi's worth also did not escape Don Bosco's successor, Blessed Michael Rua, who in 1889 sent him to Spain as Director of the house at Sarriá in Barcelona. On the eve of his departure, he formulated the resolutions that have come down to us today, and which clearly reveal how, in such a brief period, Fr. Rinaldi had acquired a perfect balance of character and great spiritual fatherliness. He was fully competent in the way he discharged his duties there, despite the situation being so different from many points of view from the previous experiences he had had in Piedmont. It showed, ultimately, the extent of progress he had made in practicing virtue and how deeply rooted was his fidelity to the ideals he had inherited from Don Bosco. Aware of his limitations, to which the "Careful Philip!" he wrote at the beginning of his resolutions pointed, meant that he also spent this phase of his life with great filial trust in Mary, feeling he was always and only her *niño*.

*Fr. Rinaldi's resolutions (1889)*¹⁷

This morning, it is all about humility – even at the start of lunch – therefore confidence and hope in God – certainty of succeeding in great things.

At the end of lunch, due to my stupidity, I plainly did not know how to speak about my poverty, I got confused, or rather embarrassed and said "yes" when I should have said "no" and here I am far, far from those holy thoughts I had earlier been inspired by.

If I act like this during the Retreat, what will I be doing with things amidst difficulties, far from the superiors?... Where will I get that tranquility, that frankness, that spirit of Don Bosco, that spirit of holiness?

Mary Most Holy, here is your *niño*. So, help me to do what God wants so I can arrive at doing the good that the superiors expect from me, that God's glory demands, that souls want, and that I too, poor as I am, in some of my better moments have desired.

I resolve therefore:

1. I to make a sincere confession.
2. 2If I go to Spain:

¹⁷ Fr. Rinaldi's resolutions in 1889, *Positio, Documenta*, no. XII, pp. 543-545.

- I. I will speak little, including with outsiders, of anything that is unrelated to the glory of God and to the good of the society.
- II. Charity and gentleness always with the confreres by patiently putting up with whatever might happen to me, listening to them and questioning them, and regularly asking them to come for their *rendiconto* [personal interview]. However, it will be good to speak informally to everyone and not chatter about vain and stupid things. Careful here, Philip! Insist that they attend to their duties and watch over them.

Be regular with meditation, and especially humility, the exercise for a happy death, conferences, *rendiconto*, and prayer before every action to keep myself recollected in God. In extraordinary cases, I will at least say: Mary Help of Christians, pray for me!

3. With the young, always be happy and good and sincerely so. I will spend time with them, playing with them, chatting; then speak of God, Mary Help of Christians and of Don Bosco.
4. With the Sisters, always patience, reserve and never abandon them, but not waste time either.
5. With benefactors, good manners, never opposition. I will speak especially of our work, that is of Don Bosco, Mary Help of Christians, about doing good, the need for their support, about Fr. Rua, the Oratory. I will not get involved in politics, declaring myself ignorant of it and busy about doing good for the young, therefore quite unable to be concerned about politics.

Humility, confidence in Mary Help of Christians and courage.

M.H.C. help me! St. Joseph, assist me!

Once there:

- 1 – I will take a good look over the House – the workshops, classrooms, recreation, church, refectory, and try to get to know the local customs.
- 2 – I will politely question all the confreres – the clerics, priests, brothers and novices.
- 3 – I will give a conference.

During the twelve years of his activities in the Iberian Peninsula, first as Director of the house at Sarriá for three years, then for another nine years

as Provincial of the new Spanish-Portuguese Province, Fr. Rinaldi founded twenty-one Salesian houses in Spain and Portugal, all solidly grounded in the spirit of Don Bosco. Thus, he can be called “founder of the Salesian Work in Spain.” In this new location, and by his amiable nature, he was able to earn respect and general admiration. “He loves Spain as if he were born here,” said the Archbishop of Valencia, Archbishop Marcellino Olaechea. He gave remarkable help to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, encouraging and supporting the establishment of new presences. He also fostered publishing activities. We can see from testimonies that Fr. Rinaldi was very capable at harmonizing apostolic energy and interior life, to a heroic degree.

First, as a *perfect religious*. So faithful to the Rule and to the Salesian spirit, he tirelessly sought to foster it by word and example among the confreres and the young, focusing especially on family spirit, piety, charity, poverty. And by applying the preventive method in the education of the young, in a brief time he managed to give new impetus to Salesian life, reaping the fruits of this in numerous good vocations for the Salesian Congregation and for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Then as an *ideal superior*. Noted for the enlightened wisdom of his governance, prudent action, and charity together with firmness, he was untiring in fulfilling his responsibilities. Yet he always remained calm and serene, unperturbed in difficult moments because he trustingly abandoned himself into the hands of Our Lady Help of Christians. He promoted the Catholic press, festive oratories, gave many conferences and retreats; he supported and energized people and encouraged them with circular letters vibrating with faith and zeal.

Finally, as a *model priest*. He was able not only to earn respect, trust and reverence from confreres and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, but also from among the laity at whatever level of society. When he left Spain, again at the decision of Blessed Michael Rua, all those who had known him had an indelible recollection of his virtues. They were able to appreciate his good-heartedness, charity and incomparable fatherliness, and they saw his ardent zeal for the good of souls and for seeking out vocations that he was able to discern with a keen eye, and then encourage and guide. Archbishop Marcellino Olaechea testified that he was still a young man when he first came to know him, and that he dealt with Fr. Rinaldi with great familiarity in his different tasks, above all when the latter was Provincial of Spain. “I have the impression that in all of my rather long life, I have never found a priest who gave me such an elevated

notion of God's loving fatherliness."¹⁸ This could only be the result of a life that developed in such an apparently simple and plain way, but that was one of perfect fulfillment of all his religious and priestly duties. His was a constant, spontaneous, ready and joyful life in full fidelity to the spirit of Don Bosco. His was a heroic practice of Christian virtues, and the virtues proper to his religious status.

4. Prefect General (1901–1922)

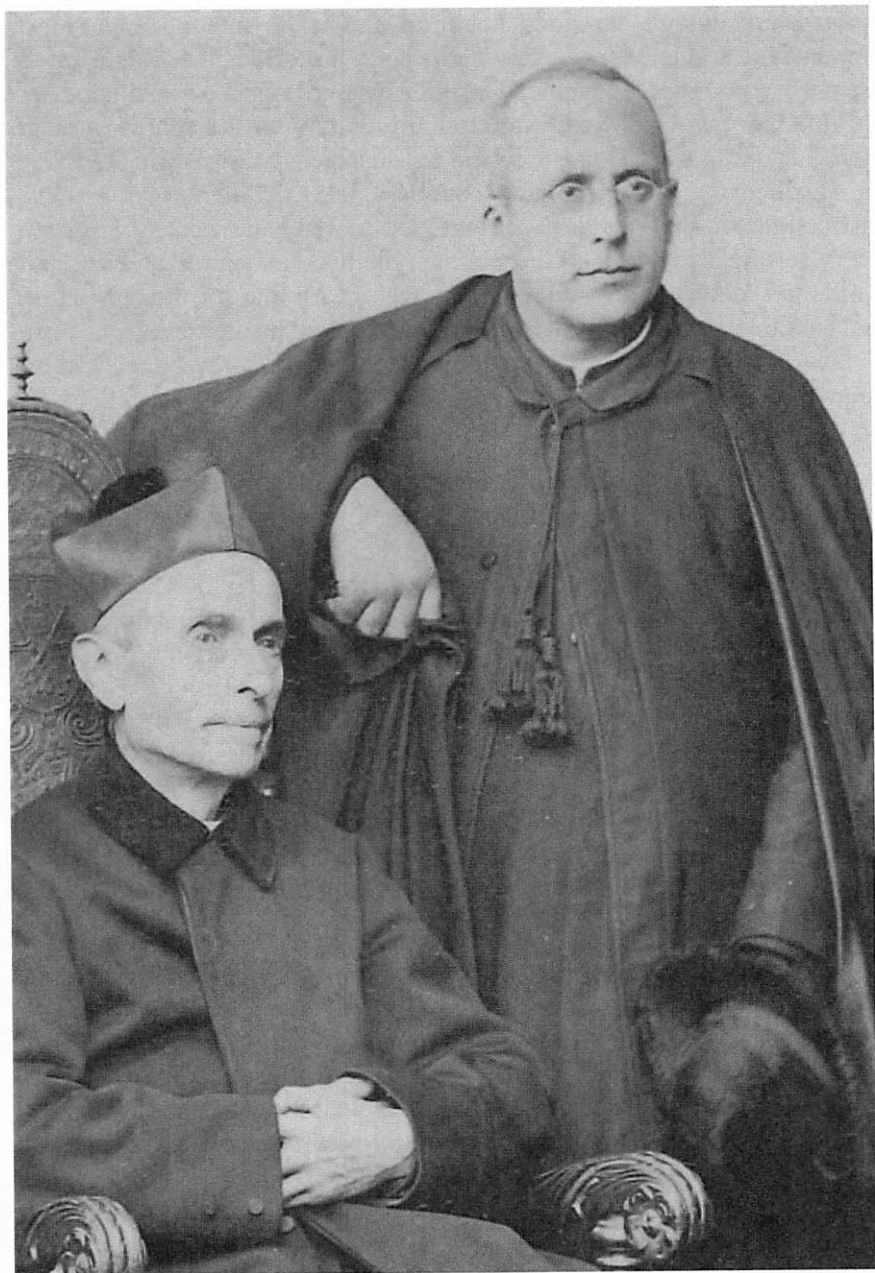
In 1901, he was appointed Prefect General, that is, Vicar General of Blessed Michael Rua, and went from mainly pastoral activities to duties of a rather bureaucratic nature. Now he would have to busy himself with matters of a disciplinary and administrative nature as the first collaborator of the Rector Major. Fr. Rinaldi accepted the change in a spirit of faith, obedience and service. Indeed, he immediately went about things with such commitment, ability and integrity that he soon earned the complete trust of the confreres. This was such that on two occasions, the General Chapters of 1904 and 1910 would reconfirm him, the second of those occasions by absolute majority. He adapted himself to the new duty and new tenor of life to such an extent that it was said, "It seemed that Fr. Rinaldi had always been Prefect General."

In the nineteen years that Fr. Rinaldi was Prefect General, he gave irrefutable proof of being a true Salesian who lived his priesthood in intimate communion with God, yet always strove for the salvation of souls. The authenticity of his religious life and his fidelity to things that would nourish his interior life attest to this. He began his day with a devout preparation for and celebration of Holy Mass at 4:30 a.m. and followed it with a prolonged thanksgiving. He showed his true Salesian colors by his diligence at work, his unconditional readiness to tackle the complex and often thorny problems of his office, his generosity and understanding toward all. He proved himself by the charity and firmness that he demonstrated in fraternal correction, something he needed to do by virtue of his office, by his imperturbable serenity even in the most serious difficulties, as when he had to be involved in the painful "Varazze affair," and his humility in every trial. He manifested prompt obedience to two Superiors General over those years, Fr. Michael Rua and Fr. Paul Albera.

¹⁸ M. OLAECHEA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 363, § 1230.

With regard to the so-called “Varazze affair” that would mark the life of the Congregation during those years, and which had a wider impact at the national level, we need to remember that it all began in 1907 when a Masonic and anticlerical plot led to an unscrupulous campaign accusing the Salesian school at Varazze (Savona) of scandal. The accuser was a boarding student, through a diary later shown to be false, and the boy’s adoptive mother, who inspired the diary. They accused the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the students of obscenities and “black masses.” By striking at these Salesians, the aim had been to defame the entire Congregation and the Church itself. The affair had extraordinary impact throughout Italy, thanks to the extended campaign by the anticlerical press. As Prefect General, Fr. Rinaldi took charge of following the case and here too, in these painful circumstances, so clearly demonstrated his wisdom and prudence. He assured the school’s Director, Fr. Carlo Viglietti, of the closeness of the superiors and of the entire Congregation and gave detailed indications as how to act in the legal arena and in countering public opinion. Prompt and decisive actions by the Salesians took place in the space of a few days. Thanks to their absurdity, the accusations were pulled to pieces; the journalistic outrage ran its course, but legal procedures continued until 1912. Over this time Fr. Rinaldi had to maintain relationships between the Salesian superiors and the defense lawyers, winning the trust of the former and the respect of the latter. Indicative of his attitude are some pages that he placed beneath the statue of Our Lady, in which, with humble self-consideration, he asserted his trust in the Virgin’s assistance. “Dearest Mother, 1907 has presented you with two litigations over the Tambeccari (?) and Turina assets. The 1st was resolved, the 2nd is in abeyance. This year, I do not know how many items of litigation I must place before you. There is the entire Varazze case still unresolved, and I do not know where it begins and where it will end. There are the cases of Silva and Farina, Napoli and Giardini, and who knows whatever else the devil will stir up. I recommend myself to You, our advocate. I have no other hope, I, your ignorant and useless one responsible for these things. We hope you will not abandon us in 1908. P. Rinaldi.”¹⁹ It is a simple note, but it shows the profound and forever keen religious sense that he brought to the pressing issues of his office. We also need to acknowledge that thanks to his ability, prudence and constancy, the case finally had a happy outcome with the decision made on June 5, 1912.

¹⁹ Prayers to Our Lady, *Positio, Documenta*, no. XV, pp. 548-549.



Courtesy of Salesian Central Archives – Photographic and Audiovisual Archive
Fr. Rinaldi as Prefect General to Fr. Michael Rua

As a priest, though, he could not limit himself to merely rendering a bureaucratic service, however valuable and meritorious that was. He felt the need to do more, to communicate his own inner richness to others. So, we find him involved, first of all, in the formation of the young Salesian clerics in the spirit of Don Bosco and Salesian pedagogy, of which he was an excellent teacher. He gave countless talks, conferences, lessons, instructions on these subjects. From 1911 to 1914, he went to Foglizzo every fortnight to speak to the Salesian clerics. His simple and original words left a deep impression on those who heard him for the conviction and passion that flowed from his heart to the extent that these lessons were written down by his listeners, who acknowledged that here they had an “expert in Salesianity.”²⁰

He was also unceasing in the apostolate of hearing confessions, preaching the Word of God and spiritual direction, always managing to be persuasive and effective due to the supernatural spirit and optimism he instilled, as well as his sensitivity and delicateness. For ten years he was also the spiritual leader at the Girls Oratory at Valdocco, ran by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. He had a special gift for understanding and guiding people, spent some hours in the confessional every morning after Holy Mass and was able to direct souls in a kindly and firm way, leading those who showed signs of a vocation toward consecrated life. His presence, already like Don Bosco’s was a continuous reminder of the loving presence of God. No wonder, then, that Fr. Rinaldi’s apostolic activity would see the blossoming of many vocations to consecrated life among the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and that very many young people would leave there well prepared for an authentic Christian family life.

Over these years he increasingly stood out for his leadership and accompaniment of Salesian Family groups. He either consolidated those already started or gave life to new groups, among which was the first nucleus of what in time would become the Secular Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers, who recognize Fr. Rinaldi as their founder. He dedicated himself passionately to new and original forms of apostolate, becoming a genuine and to some extent prophetic man.²¹

²⁰ E. VALENTINI, *Don Rinaldi, Maestro di pedagogia*, Turin, 1965.

²¹ For the presentation of Fr. Rinaldi’s charismatic role regarding the Salesian Family, we include part of the letter written by Fr. Egidio Viganò for Fr. Rinaldi’s beatification, *Fr. Philip Rinaldi authentic witness and*

Field of the Lay Faithful

A. A first field of interest was certainly that of the Christian laity. Here Fr. Rinaldi was a man before his time.

- He reinvigorated and promoted the association of the *Cooperators*. At the time, the custom was for the Rector Major to take a personal interest in the Cooperators through a delegate. Fr. Rinaldi saw that things were not going as well as they should through the lack of suitable organization. So, he insisted with Fr. Rua that a central office be set up, presided over by the Prefect, with three councilors and one or more secretaries as the need required. He chose the personnel, stimulated the activity of Provincials and Directors, set in motion various initiatives for formation and apostolic involvement, drew a clear distinction between Cooperators and Benefactors, encouraged the incorporation of youngsters once they reached the age of 16, and later (in 1917) published a new edition of the Regulations which simplified the enrolment of new members. He also saw to it that local centers were up and running well by forming and completing their animating structures. In this regard he gave special importance to the *Salesian Bulletin*.

Between 1903 and 1930, he was the moving spirit behind nine international Congresses, four in Italy and five in Latin America; and it is worth noting that the Congress of 1920 marked a turning point in the organization and activity of the Salesian Cooperators. His fundamental preoccupation was to always see to it that the true spirit of Don Bosco undergirded their activities.

- With the *Past Pupils*, Fr. Rinaldi's action was of a still more original kind, and rich in results with an international and worldwide perspective....

We have documents in our archives which show that he focused attention on them with the lay people themselves. He convoked the International Congress at Valsalice in 1911, which proclaimed the International Federation of the associations with a ruling body. It was the first international federation of this kind among all Catholic institutions! His, too, was the idea that the Past Pupils should erect a

interpreter of the "Salesian spirit," in Acts of the General Council, no. 332, pp. 24-34.

monument to Don Bosco in the Square of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, an idea that happily was realized in 1920. For its inauguration he had organized three International Congresses, those of the Cooperators, men Past Pupils and women Past Pupils respectively.

Fr. Rinaldi, in fact, was the inspirer and organizer of the *FMA Past Pupils*. "From the first moment he became connected with the Girls Oratory, he had toyed with the great idea of gathering the FMA Past Pupils into a world Union, certainly a daring innovation but at the same time one that caused him no fear."²² As leader of the first association he appointed Felicita Gastini, daughter of the Carlo Gastini who had gathered the first group of former pupils of Don Bosco.

- Another women's group which was the object of his special care was that of the *Zealous Promoters of Mary Help of Christians*, which later developed into the present Secular Institute of *Don Bosco Volunteers*. In 1908, he chose from among the Children of Mary the group he called the Zealous Promoters of the Oratory. In the first congress of the FMA Past Pupils (1911) some of those present proposed the setting up of an association of Children of Mary "in the world." Later, on October 3, 1916, he prepared a draft statute for them with seven points. On May 20, 1917, he called their first general meeting – it was the official beginning! After overcoming more than a few difficulties and misunderstandings, the new association was given the "all clear" with the approval of its first Regulations in 18 articles in July 1918. On October 26, 1919, Fr. Rinaldi was present when the first seven made their profession, and not long afterwards in November 1920, he had them elect from among themselves a Council on January 29, 1921, for the admission of new members (lay autonomy!). When receiving the renewal of the vows of some of them on October 8, 1922, he insisted on their Salesian spirit, considering them the first consecrated women dedicated to the following of Don Bosco in lay society.²³

At first sight it appears a humble start, as are all beginnings, but it contains an ecclesial novelty. "Here," writes his biographer, "Fr. Rinaldi had conceived and realized a new form of consecrated life in the world and had begun an Institute which at the present day

²² CERIA, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

²³ L. CASTANO, *Beato Don Filippo Rinaldi, 1856-1931. Vivente immagine di Don Bosco*, Elledici, Turin, 1990, pp. 123-139; CERIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-223.

recognizes and honors him as its inspiration and father. It could be said that this was the most inspired of all his personal work.”²⁴ No one suggests that he had explicitly thought of a “Secular Institute” as the term is understood at the present day; that would be an anachronism. But what seems certain is that he instinctively perceived and followed a path that led to consecrated secularity, and in so doing “intended to take up an ideal that Don Bosco had not had time to realize, and give it form.”²⁵

- Another lay initiative we should recall is the *Don Bosco Union for Teachers*. A group of teachers, who had Fr. Rinaldi as their spiritual director, had suggested at the beginning of the 1920s, the formation of a non-political association of Christian inspiration for teachers and professors. He saw at once the benefit this would bring both to the members themselves and to their educational activity in the state schools. He took up the suggestion and gave life to a new kind of “Union,” of which he became the first animator with his great prestige.²⁶ The initiative had three aspects that were very dear to him. It was an association of lay people, it aimed at the moral education of the young, and it intended to work according to Don Bosco’s educational system. This association, too, was the first of its kind in Italy in the field of Christian inspiration, not that Fr. Rinaldi sought to be the first with everything, but his apostolic zeal led him willingly to take up avant-garde positions.
- Another field in which positive results followed his creative zeal was that of *Social Communication*. Not many would have expected Fr. Rinaldi to be concerned about founding a big publishing house, and yet that is precisely what happened. He is the founder of the *Società Editrice Internazionale* (International Publishing Group - SEI). Don Bosco had already launched various publishing activities at Valdocco, but decades later they had not yet been organized in a systematic way. Fr. Rinaldi provided such organization in this field and created SEI, having recourse for its financial support to Cooperators and Benefactors of various countries of Europe and America. Like the Holy Founder himself, he too had a flair for enterprise in certain apostolic works.

²⁴ CASTANO, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

²⁶ CERIA, *op. cit.*, p. 331-340.

In addition, he promoted various publications and reviews. In Spain, for instance, there was the newsheet *El Oratorio Festivo*, and then later he gave a good amount of attention to the *Boletín Salesiano*. He founded *Voci Fraterne* and *Unione* for the SDB and FMA Past Pupils respectively, the periodical *Maria Ausiliatrice* for the basilica at Valdocco, and the review *Gioventù Missionaria* for the missions. He equipped libraries for the young; he founded cultural groups; he fostered the *Schola Cantorum*, cooperative associations, free medical services, etc.

He had the idea also of founding a Review for Women, and it is interesting to consider the sense of relevance with which he approached this plan for a women's periodical.

Fatherly dedication to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

- B. But one of his most significant, valid and fruitful commitments was without any doubt his fatherly dedication to the *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*.

It fell to him to act at a particularly delicate moment when the Apostolic See decreed the juridical and administrative autonomy of the Institute, which had until then been aggregated to the Society of St Francis de Sales. Communion of spirit and mission had to be intensified while the autonomy was being organized.

He won general esteem by making a sound and equable division of material goods between the two Congregations, as appears from the Acts of the Processes. Above all, though, he gained the confidence and trust of the members of both when he worked so hard in a continual fatherly and deeply spiritual manner to make sure that the common charismatic heritage of the Founder was preserved. The depositions in the Processes are unanimous and enthusiastic in this respect. The testimonies given by members of the FMA are the most valid as regards both his personal holiness and his work for spiritual and apostolic communion between the now two institutions of Don Bosco. This is a subject which needs exhaustive study to provide a better documented idea of the spiritual unity of our Family. I hope some qualified person will undertake such a work.

One of the works to which Fr. Rinaldi gave particular attention, in collaboration with the FMA, was the Girls Oratory at Valdocco, where he had begun to work as Director (as it was then called) in 1907 when

he succeeded Fr. Francesia in the office. Here, for years he truly lavished the ardor of his priestly zeal and his new educational and apostolic initiatives. It is difficult to understand how he managed to get through so much work in addition to his duties as Prefect General; but the depositions are so detailed, concordant and authoritative that they confirm the objectivity of what we have said. He left to the Sisters whatever was theirs to decide, but he provided animation, suggestions, guidance and encouragement with fatherly optimism and enlightened wisdom. In an atmosphere of shared fervor, hundreds of girls and young women came together. Associations according to age and various spiritual levels sprang up. They had apostolic, social, cultural and recreational aims, as some texts describe and explain with a wealth of details. Manifestations of different kinds kept the Oratory at a sustained festive level. Vocations multiplied (Fr. Rinaldi was one of the regular confessors in the basilica for two hours every morning). [In particular, he insisted that the girls bring themselves to God, talking to them about Jesus in order to correct them from every frivolity and germ of worldliness.] The beneficial effects spread from the girls to the families, the neighborhood, places of work, and Catholic associations of the diocese. The Oratory was not a world closed in on itself but a place with doors open to all. It was a seedbed of good, into which Fr. Rinaldi also inserted elements of the Catholic laity to guide it to true life.

This was a great Salesian lesson, not only for the FMA but for the confreres too. Fr. Rinaldi, in fact, saw the Oratory as an active center of cultural, social and religious initiatives. He wanted to see such oratories in the suburbs of the big cities (as later were those of San Paolo and Monterosa on the periphery of Turin, for which he had a special affection as Rector Major). In the Boys Oratory at Valdocco, for example, it was he who founded the "Auxilium" Circle, which was later to become famous in Piedmont. (In its first year, 1906, the members wanted Fr. Rinaldi as their president; he accepted, but on condition that they prepared lay leaders who would guide the association under their own responsibility).

As well as his oratorian activities he was unstinting in his valuable spiritual direction of the Sisters, and in the pedagogical conferences he used to give at the FMA General Headquarters at Nizza Monferrato, where they had a flourishing educational institute. He spoke to the Sisters, to the students of the higher classes, to the teachers, to mothers. Quite surprising was his ability to understand women's

problems. As well as purely educational matters, he dealt with problems of engagement, marriage and married life, with a truly pastoral outlook. He was able to transfer to the women's world the knowledge and practice of the preventive system, whose application had been interpreted until then largely from the standpoint of work for boys.

But Fr. Rinaldi made his greatest contribution to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians as interpreter and defender of their common spiritual patrimony. Sister Clelia Genghini declared in the Processes, "The period between 1905 and 1913, and especially between 1905 and 1907, was a crucial one. There was the fear of being completely cut off from the direction of the Superiors of the Salesian Society, and then little by little from Don Bosco's spirit.... In this period Fr. Rinaldi, with his fatherly kindness and his wise and enlightened advice, was a source of great help and reassurance to our Institute. Proof of this are the letters he wrote at that time. In the letter of September 5, 1905, he said, 'May the Lord enlighten you. You are passing through the most solemn moment of your life. All you need at present is God's grace and to preserve your equanimity. I have great hopes for the success of the new arrangements, provided you are able to imbue everything with Don Bosco's spirit'."²⁷

His message, therefore, was: welcome a proper autonomy, but in the full communion of the same spirit. "To this end," declared Sister Teresa Graziano, "Fr. Rinaldi visited by preference and with a prudent frequency our Major Superiors who, during his first years as Rector Major, were still resident at the Mother House at Nizza. He was instrumental in getting it transferred to Turin, alongside the sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians, from where the Superiors could participate more intensely and with greater ease in Salesian life and could absorb more spontaneously and efficaciously the spirit of Don Bosco."²⁸

He was concerned to a quite extraordinary extent to ensure the closest possible communion in the identical and precious heritage.

In these delicate circumstances his presence was providential, with his constant and enlightened delicate and fatherly wisdom. He seemed to

²⁷ C. Genghini, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 218-219, n. 758.760.

²⁸ T. Graziano, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 113, n. 338.

have received from the Holy Spirit the special gift of being able to perceive the traits of the female mind. He was able to influence their hearts in a truly wonderful manner but with great tact. His spiritual direction, personal letters, advice given to the superiors, multiple forms of guiding contacts and even corrections, all served to intensify fidelity and union.

It is interesting to note the sincerity and candor with which he spoke or wrote to the Superiors. In a letter of 1915, for example, to the well deserving Superior General, Mother Catherine Daghero, he said with familiar sincerity, "My desire has always been to foster among you ideas which seem to me to be truly those of Don Bosco. I have the impression that to a certain extent we have said too often, 'They are Sisters, they are women, not everything can be adapted to their situation.' And so, things have been allowed to run on, and without being aware of it, you are becoming religious like all the others. In that case there was no need for another religious institute of women; there are so many of them already!"²⁹

These are expressions which refer to a cultural climate of another day, especially on the part of priests and confreres. But what is remarkable, and I would even say prophetic, is the fact that with respect to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (and for that matter to women religious in general), he never tolerated on the part of the confreres any less delicate behavior or attitude stemming from a certain superiority complex. At the same time, he exhorted Mother Daghero to guard jealously the common Salesian identity of which the venerated Co-foundress, Mother Mazzarello, had always been the zealous interpreter and transparent exemplar.

If the two Institutes, in their lawful juridical autonomy, have been able to maintain relationships of intense spiritual communion, mutual understanding, practical solidarity, and fruitful reciprocal collaboration, the merit is due especially to Fr. Rinaldi.

This is a prophetic warning for us at the present day in a Church characterized by communion and involved in the apostolic search for a new evangelization.

When Fr. Rinaldi was elected Rector Major, he considered one of his most serious obligations to be his pontifical appointment as Apostolic

²⁹ Letter to M. Daghero, December 28, 1915, ASC 9.31 Rinaldi.

Delegate for the Institute of the FMA. That office had been obtained for the first time from Pope Benedict XV in 1917, through the good offices of Cardinal Cagliero.

Among the many instances of service and guidance, particular mention must be given to the special New Year *strennas* [gift of a spiritual practice for the year] that he gave to the Sisters in 1922, 1929, 1930, 1931, and 1932. (It was Fr. Rinaldi's custom to give a different *strenna* to each group, and sometimes even different ones for the Salesian Priests and Brothers). He aimed all his contributions at ensuring that the character and form given to them by the Founder were kept in force without ever closing himself off to the needs of the times.

In conclusion, while, on the one hand, Fr. Rinaldi revealed excellent qualities to govern, on the other, without realizing it, he consolidated his own customary spontaneous, joyful practice of all the Christian virtues, especially charity, prudence, justice, fortitude and purity, in a harmonious fusion of contemplation and action that kept him tending toward both God and neighbor. He would never budge from this heroic tenor of life.

5. Rector Major (April 24, 1922 – December 5, 1931)

When he was elected Rector Major on April 24, 1922, the moderator of the Chapter, Fr. Luigi Piscetta, asked him if he would accept. Fr. Rinaldi had hidden his face in his hands and stayed so for a few moments, moments that seemed eternal to everyone. He then replied, full of emotion, "This election is confusing for me and for you. Our Lady wants us to see that she alone is the one who is at work in our midst. Pray that I do not ruin what Don Bosco and his successors did."

The period in which Fr. Rinaldi was Rector Major of the Salesians covers almost ten years and is certainly the richest in terms of testimonies to his virtue, thanks to the testimonies from three Processes, and to bibliographical and archival documentation. In fact, the profound interior life of Don Bosco's third successor and, at the same time, his intense apostolic activity in which his spiritual fatherliness stands out, are very well outlined.

First among his concerns as a father was the religious and professional formation of the confreres. He focused first on the need for a deep interior life, which he would then transfuse into the works, and he sought to foster this in so many ways. He sent out circular letters that are still today a

tangible testimony of his faith and piety. He held frequent meetings or assemblies, especially at the level of educators. He gave an audience to anyone who wanted it, always showing that he was fully available to listen, comfort, and urge people on to good. He visited all the houses that he could, in Italy and abroad, and where he could not personally go, he sent fatherly letters, giving concrete proof of his constant concern for everyone's good, of his spirit of sacrifice and untiring hard work. "Fr. Rinaldi was untiring and lent himself to everyone with extreme goodness. He was forever calm, always the same. In his fatherly heart he knew just how to find the right word that left everyone satisfied and at the same time full of admiration and reverence for him."³⁰

Another aspect that was particularly dear to him as Rector Major was the observance of the rules and the study of Don Bosco's spirituality, of which he was the faithful mirror in his daily life before God, in community and in his social relationships. The Founder's beatification in 1929 with the celebrations that followed in Italy and in the whole world was the most important event during his time as Rector Major. Even though it meant a huge effort on his part, it also offered him a propitious occasion for relaunching the charism as the prototype of the "religious educator," and for rekindling family spirit, community life and the sanctification of work among the confreres. This is what he had in mind when early in his rectorate, he asked Pius XI for the Indulgence attached to sanctified work and was granted it. Writing at the time of the beatification, he said, "I have come to understand just who Don Bosco has become for us.... He is the sure model for our own life as religious educators, the light placed on a lampstand to give light to the whole world, the faithful minister appointed by his and our Lord Jesus Christ to distribute Christ's goods to those in need, our special intercessor with the Virgin, Help of Christians."³¹

In addition, in accordance with the general direction the Church was taking, he gave an impetus to the missions. Through the missionary ideal, re-launched with enthusiasm in the Congregation, he obtained surprising results, namely, the flowering of vocations which made it possible for the Salesians to spread to all continents and bring to them the light of the Gospel. He was convinced that the missionary ideal and enthusiasm nurtured the hearts of young people, increased their faith and aroused vocations. For this reason, he established houses for aspiring missionaries.

³⁰ A. CANDELA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 167, § 578.

³¹ Letter of July 9, 1929, in *Acts of the Superior Chapter*, no. 49, p. 770.

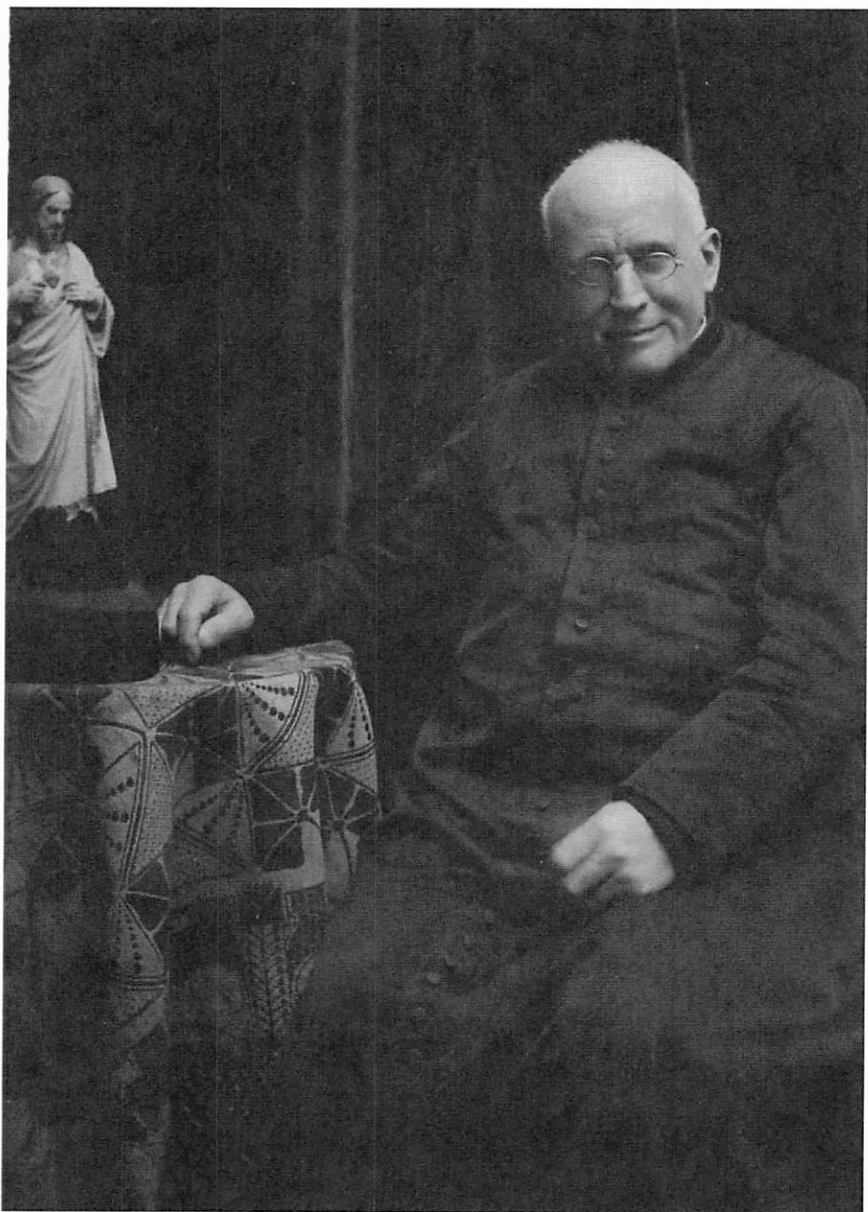
He sent them out to mission countries before their novitiate so that they would know the environment and learn the languages. He founded *Gioventù Missionaria* magazine and promoted congresses and missionary exhibitions. It is not without significance that during his time as Rector Major, the number of members of the Congregation increased from some 4000 to around 8000, and that the number of religious houses and works also increased considerably, with incalculable spiritual benefits especially for the young.

Especially devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to Mary Help of Christians, Fr. Rinaldi promoted their liturgical and devotional expressions with praiseworthy zeal, drawing from these sources serene trust, optimism, hope, strength in difficulties and illness, calm in the face of death. In the last two years of his life, while his physical strength was gradually diminishing and pain increasing above all because of his heart condition, he endured every discomfort with uplifting resignation. He continued as far as he could and as far as his strength allowed him, to take an interest in confreres' problems, personally seeing to his correspondence with them, receiving them in audience in a friendly way, listening to them with great patience and sharing their anxieties and joys.

In 1929, his health being rather precarious, he thought of presenting his resignation as Superior General. He put it forward personally as a case of conscience, but the authority and advice of his close collaborators persuaded him to continue with the task. In this regard, it is worth noting the extraordinary moral benefit that came to the Congregation and to the Salesian Family from his presence at the top. He was a superior who, if not in full strength, nevertheless made the spiritual heritage of Don Bosco felt like no other, at a time of great religious fervor and apostolic enthusiasm for the beatification of Don Bosco on June 2, 1929. It was providential that Fr. Rinaldi was Rector Major. In this matter, too, Fr. Rinaldi was a humble servant who did not seek prestige but gave of himself unreservedly.

Toward the end of his life, his chronic illnesses worsened and he was laid low, exhausted and without strength. There was the imminent threat of a stroke, a family illness. In the early days of December 1931, he suffered from uninterrupted hiccups. At 4:30 a.m. on December 5, he received Communion and participated in the Mass from his room. He seemed to be improving and wanted to receive a venerable French Salesian for a few moments. He was alone in his room and was heard coughing. A few minutes later the barber was allowed in. Fr. Rinaldi was sitting in his tall chair as if asleep, his head reclined; he had left the world on tiptoes. On

his knees rested the first volume of Fr. Rua's life, with some notes on the way in which Don Bosco had cultivated the spiritual life of his successor and his sons.



Courtesy of Salesian Central Archives – Photographic and Audiovisual Archive
Fr. Rinaldi in 1930, ever devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Chapter Two: A Profile of Virtues

1. Close to us and great in virtues

Fr. Tiburzio Lupo knew Fr. Rinaldi as a boy and then as a Salesian, particularly in his role as Secretary General. He testified that before his death, “we loved and respected him as a good father, superior and perfect example of the Salesian in everything, and he was very close to us. But we did not speak of him as a saint.”³² Yet, from the day of his death, both the spontaneous “veneration” shown from all sides and “the graces” that some said they had received through his intercession, “made us realize what, indeed, were his virtues.”³³

In fact, at first sight, throughout his religious and priestly life, Fr. Rinaldi was not extraordinary, contrary to what often happens in the life of the saints who call attention to their rather original work, endowed as they are with preternatural gifts. But over decades, everyone had been able to see and admire the fact that he not only remained constantly faithful to the ideal he had embraced as a young man, but that his steady will meant that he implemented to perfection that program of life that he had professed. It gradually became a matter of habit for him to move within the sphere of life of the Spirit, also bringing others along with him in this. He practiced the theological and cardinal virtues and observed the vows and all the obligations of his state, according to the spirit of Don Bosco. He did all this with such simplicity and humility, giving the impression that this was normal.

Fr. Rinaldi embodied a simple form of holiness. He had implemented a precise program of life; it was rhythmic without heavy penances except those required by total fidelity to the laws of God and the obligations of state, and without humiliating mortifications. It was a holiness that was neither austere nor traditional. It was the result of service rendered to God and neighbor out of love for God and thus with human sensitivity, firmness and warmth. In short, it was a holiness that was attractive, because it clearly and calmly articulated the optimism associated with theological

³² T. LUPO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 387, § 1317.

³³ *Ibid.*, § 1318.

hope experienced outside the rigid settings of earlier times. His is a modern and relevant holiness because it can be imitated today by anyone who is led by a firm willingness to give an adequate response to God, in whatever circumstance of life, and in accordance with the gifts that God has given them and wherever they have been called to cultivate their talents.

It is not a question of a kind of holiness revealed through extraordinary events, but of a heroic life lived in the constant search for good, constant fidelity to duty, perfect self-control in the midst of the difficulties of daily life whether they be great or small. His holiness, “takes on an imprint of naturalness and good-natured and humble spontaneity, a constructive, unobtrusive holiness.”³⁴ It is the example of “an ordinary life lived so perfectly that it could be described as extraordinary.”³⁵

Beginning with a healthy Christian upbringing, Fr. Rinaldi rapidly reached the heights of religious and priestly holiness. His life can be divided into two main periods: his life as a layman, covering some twenty-two years, and his religious and priestly life for another fifty-three years or so. From these emerged his strong commitment to perfection and a continuous ascent in the exercise of virtue to the highest levels. Witnesses do not hesitate to describe this as heroic, explicitly or in some equivalent manner, given the promptness, joy, constancy and toughness of the struggle both to observe God’s law and the precepts of the Church, and his duties as superior and religious.

Fr. Peter Ricaldone,³⁶ who was by his side from 1910 to 1931 and succeeded him as Rector Major, knew him when Fr. Rinaldi was the

³⁴ A. ZANNANTONI, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 438-439, § 1515.

³⁵ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 277, § 968.

³⁶ Fr. Peter Ricaldone is without doubt the most authoritative witness in the Processes for the beatification of Fr. Rinaldi. He was born on July 27, 1870, in Mirabello, where Don Bosco had opened the first Salesian school outside Turin. His father, a man of character and balance, a well-off farmer, became mayor of the town. To complete his studies, he was sent to the Salesian school at Alassio, then to the Borgo San Martino school. Here, one day, Peter was able to chat with Don Bosco alone, and would then see him a second time in Turin. After some hesitation, which led him to the seminary at Casale where he remained until he was about to begin his theology studies, he returned to the Salesians. He made his first religious profession on August 23, 1890. As a young cleric, he was sent to Spain, where he remained for twenty years carrying out intense apostolic and educational activity. In 1901 he became the Provincial of Andalusia, also carrying out the task of Visitor to houses in

Director at San Giovanni in Turin. He remembered the special recognition given to Fr. Rinaldi's work of fostering vocations, and how his goodness and administrative gifts impressed him. He especially recalled the admiration and affection that the confreres and the young people had for their Director. "If I had to express my humble opinion of Fr. Rinaldi's personality, I would say that he was a priest of great interior life, of truly exceptional judgment and practical criteria; of a kindness and fatherliness that shone through all he did. He had a powerful and productive way of working that no one could explain if we were to consider his often-precarious health. Finally, he had a humility so profound that it meant there was nothing extraordinary about him, to the extent that people would not have generally thought we would be introducing his cause of beatification."³⁷ Then, going back to the many conversations he had with him on the need for a solid basis of Christian life in order to live an authentic consecrated life and fruitful priestly ministry, he drew the conclusion that Fr. Rinaldi, "was always a model of observance of the commandments of God, of the Church and of the Salesian Constitutions and traditions. He never practiced or preached a sublime asceticism, but the plain, simple, accessible kind, such as that of St. Francis de Sales and St. John Bosco.... This explains why we have never seen anything extraordinary in him, but an ordinary life lived so perfectly as to be able

Latin America. In 1911 he was called to join the Superior Council as Director General of Professional (Technical) and Agricultural Schools. In 1922 he was elected Prefect General. In those years he distinguished himself in preparing the Salesian Missions pavilion for the Vatican Exhibition, as well as making an extraordinary visit to the missions in the Far East. He played a large part in the organization of events connected with the beatification of Don Bosco (1929). In 1932 he was elected Rector Major, fourth successor of Don Bosco, and governed the Salesian Congregation for about twenty years. A person of considerable intellect and governmental skills, he gave vast impetus to the spiritual and professional formation of the Salesians, and to the development of institutes of higher culture, including the Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum. Twice he travelled around the world, bringing everywhere he went the depth of his administrative experience and an understanding heart, promoting the human advancement of native peoples and showing concern for migrants. He multiplied the number of technical schools, ensuring that everywhere they had specialized personnel. He had the joy of seeing the canonization of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, and the beatification of Dominic Savio. He died on November 25, 1951.

³⁷ *Ivi*, p. 266, §§ 926-927.

to qualify as extraordinary.”³⁸ And he concluded with a truly complete and real picture of Fr. Rinaldi’s virtuous character. “I am convinced that Fr. Rinaldi had practiced virtues to a heroic degree for many reasons. 1) He practiced them throughout his life. 2) He practiced them with an extraordinary strength of will, even during illness, difficulties, and adversities. 3) There was especially an uninterrupted and extraordinary effort on his part to hide the heroic way in which he practiced these virtues. And, 4) I believe that what was truly heroic was his total detachment from earthly things, from people and from himself.”³⁹

Fr. Tranquillo Azzini came to know Fr. Rinaldi in 1901 when Fr. Rinaldi returned from Spain to become Prefect General. He remembered how he met him when he was still a student, gaining a very high opinion of him as completely a man of God. He recounted that Fr. Rinaldi examined the young aspirants’ hands to see if there were calluses, because he said to them, “If you are good at working, you would be good workers in the Lord’s vineyard.” He had the opportunity to meet him often as a young student, and each time Fr. Rinaldi told him, “Remember that you belong to me,” showing the fatherliness that brings people to Salesian life through the kindness and patience that wins hearts. Fr. Azzini testified that Fr. Rinaldi practiced, “virtues in an apparently ordinary way, but in reality, in an extraordinary way. Indeed, because of the spontaneity with which he practiced them and the constancy with which he persevered in them until his death, I believe he practiced them in a way that I do not hesitate to call heroic.”⁴⁰

Other testimonies insist on his heroism in the trials, difficulties, adversities that Fr. Rinaldi had to face and overcome. Very significant in this regard are the words of Fr. Pietro Tirone, member of the Superior Chapter and Spiritual Director General of the Congregation. They indicate the constant effort Fr. Rinaldi made throughout his life in the face of difficulties. “He practiced all these virtues in a way that was very much above the ordinary, and that I am in no doubt about declaring heroic. If we consider the length of time – his entire life – during which he practiced them, if we take into account the effort he had to make to conquer himself, his natural inclinations and if we consider the difficulties coming from the nature of the things and human malice, the prejudices, contrary habits he had to

³⁸ *Ivi*, p. 277, §§ 967-968.

³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 294, §§ 1034-1035.

⁴⁰ T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 24, § 83.

overcome to practice these virtues, we also need to say that it required a resolute will and more than human strength to practice these virtues as he did.”⁴¹ This conviction grew over time, and especially when his duties had him work closely with Fr. Rinaldi, he became even more edified. “Not only did I confirm my view, but I grew ever more in the esteem and admiration that I had for his ardent priestly zeal, for his admirable activity in every sphere, and above all for his superior virtues.”⁴²

For coming to know Fr. Rinaldi’s degree of perfection and deep spirituality, what Fr. Giuseppe Matta, a diocesan priest, has said in offering us the deep motivations of Fr. Rinaldi’s virtuous actions is significant. “He always practiced these virtues with true naturalness and did so every day and in every circumstance, even the most adverse of his life until death, such that he showed himself to be as perfect a human being as is possible for human strength assisted by the grace of God. In his life, the ordinary became extraordinary for the perfection with which he did everything.”⁴³ The testimonies that were part of the Processes present us with a picture of Fr. Rinaldi’s virtues in tones that theologians point to as the signs of their heroic practice. Such indications of heroic virtue are the sheer number of times he practiced them, their continuity over time, promptness, facility, cheerfulness and arduousness. Moreover, they were not improvised but truly inwardly felt and lived as part of a full and free responsibility for spiritual life.

Sr. Rosalia Dolza, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, knew Fr. Rinaldi when she was still a novice at Nizza Monferrato, and was inwardly moved by the preaching of this man of God. It aroused in her a firm purpose for religious life and a passionate apostolic ardor. This first encounter was like a seed that grew over time and strengthened the impression she had received as a young novice. It became more the case when, as Superior and Provincial, she dealt with Fr. Rinaldi on many occasions and over a long period of time. Various testimonies mention an account like this of a first encounter that then led to a history of positive and fruitful relationships. It is expressive of the pedagogical and spiritual tradition testified to by Don Bosco himself in the providential encounter with the young Bartholomew Garelli on December 8, 1841. It was an encounter that sowed the seed for his future work and educative mission and the style

⁴¹ P. TIRONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 245, § 852.

⁴² *Ivi*, p. 227, § 784.

⁴³ G. MATTA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 347, § 1196.

of an effective and lasting educative approach. For Sr. Dolza, the encounter was such that she did not hesitate to claim, "I have not found, nor have I known other priests or superiors who could equal him in virtue and holiness, despite them being most worthy individuals and religious full of virtues. The Servant of God excelled and surpassed them all in an outstanding way."⁴⁴

Fr. Antonio Candela was Director and Provincial in Spain from 1904 until 1916, then Director of the Salesian house in Marseilles in France and later, in 1925, elected a member of the Superior Council. He noted that the memory of Fr. Rinaldi was very vivid not only among the members of the Salesian Family, but also among the numerous groups of benefactors and friends of Salesian work. "In a particular way they all praised his virtues, his great practical criteria, his prudence, his large heart and ardent zeal for the good of souls, someone who could discern with a sure eye, encourage and guide. I never heard a discordant voice in this from anyone."⁴⁵

In conclusion, of particular value are comments by Bishop Evasio Colli who preached at the month's mind⁴⁶ after Fr. Rinaldi's death. "He was a man who had a balance of all virtues rather than one or more of them standing out from the others. He was equally a formidable man of action and an ascetic; audacious and prudent, tenacious and humble; strong and fatherly; a businessman and a man of God; apostle and builder; modern and conservative; he was, in short, the complete spiritual man."⁴⁷

The man of God shone through the transparent exercise of virtues, someone who had assimilated the spirit of the Gospel and of his founder, St. John Bosco, according to a style inspired by *The Treatise on the love of God* and the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales. In particular, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity occupied a central place, and were the dynamic nuclei that conditioned and enlivened the entire structure of a virtuous life. All events, even painful ones, were expressions of the wisdom and goodness of God for Fr. Rinaldi. And appropriate attitudes sprang from this faith, such as, trust in Providence, serenity amid storms, filial abandonment, moderate use of what are considered to be human abilities or supports, his ability to see things *sub*

⁴⁴ R. DOLZA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 163, § 564.

⁴⁵ A. CANDELA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 165, § 572.

⁴⁶ The month's mind is a Requiem Mass celebrated about one month after a person's death, in memory of the deceased.

⁴⁷ L. CASTANO, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

specie aeternitatis (from the viewpoint of eternity), exclusively seeking what would be for the glory of God. This kind of faith blossoms in hope and matures in charity, resulting in reassuring joy.

When seen in the light of the virtues he practiced, Fr. Rinaldi's spiritual character reveals two aspects. On the one hand, his visible and perceptible aspects characterize the face of the disciple of Christ just as Don Bosco wanted it to be in a society that unfortunately no longer seemed to appreciate the classic forms of religious life. On the other hand, less perceptible but equally important aspects, such as the hidden but robust "nerve structure" that characterizes an ascetic way of following Christ are present. More than a particular virtue, what was "specific" to Fr. Rinaldi's holiness was the complex of attitudes, deep convictions and well-tested experiences that came together harmoniously in creating an original and individual style of holiness and apostolate. This makes Fr. Rinaldi one of the more remarkable embodiments and interpretations of the Salesian spirit – a result of meditation, prayer, vocational and charismatic responsibility.

2. Faith: A man of solid, unshakeable faith

The faith that shone through Fr. Rinaldi's life defines him as a believer before being a religious. He was someone with abundant enthusiasm for the mystery of Christ, which, shaped by kindness and with a heart forged by charity, made him energetic yet balanced, hardworking yet temperate, creative yet with common sense. Faith points to a whole view "from above" of the reality of which we are part, a view permeated by optimism and wisdom. It clearly offers the pastoral motivations for action and permeates and sustains that tone of healthy humanism which characterizes the Salesian apostolate. The man of faith tunes into the mystery of God, convinced of the final victory of good over evil, tirelessly committed to building up the Kingdom. Fr. Rinaldi was convinced that any weakening of faith in God would cause serious spiritual decline, with harmful consequences for the Christian and apostolic identity of the Congregation and the Salesian Family.

When those testifying speak of faith in Fr. Rinaldi's life, they use adjectives like "solid," "unshakeable," "lively." They are words that recall the biblical concept of believing, as something with a foundation, based on secure rock, testifying to stability and consistency. "A man of deep, robust faith," is Fr. Carlo Marchisio's description of him. Sr. Ursula Pavese remembers him as "A man of profound and heartfelt faith." Others

who testified spoke in very similar terms, almost producing a litany of such acknowledgements. “A man of the greatest faith,” “a man of very deep and profound faith,” “a man of solid, unshakeable faith.” Some described him as “driven by a very lively faith,” while others spoke of the “lively spirit of faith that animated all his life and apostolate,” and others still who said, “he was always animated by enormous faith.”

From the vigorous and vivid nature of the vocabulary used by witnesses in their testimonies, one grasps the impact of personal conviction based on experience. The claim is not that he had just great faith, but that his faith in some way defined him as a “man of faith.” They describe his faith in terms of its depth and robustness, and as solid and unshakeable, giving Fr. Rinaldi’s faith a virile aspect. Some remember the well-known words of St. Paul when they reflect on the faith of Fr. Rinaldi. “He truly lived by faith,” “He lived solely by faith,” “Throughout his life he was guided solely by reasons of faith.” We note how the vocabulary used by more than a few who gave testimony is one that expresses totality. “Always,” “solely,” “throughout his life,” “all his apostolate.” Those whose spirit is a little far from this, have the impression that they are being presented with judgments that are too universal. However, the feeling is that these judgments, other than their conceptual content, have a true and proper value and subjective significance. Words like “always,” “solely,” “all,” show the strong impact that Fr. Philip Rinaldi’s faith had on these witnesses, as a value that gave unity to his life.

There is no doubt about this. A very keen and solid faith was Fr. Rinaldi’s driving force. It is true. Faith appears prominently in all men and women of God, since it is the first fruit of God’s pleasing action and the fundamental response of the human being to the life-giving presence and word of God. It is also true that among the various witnesses of the Spirit, the fundamental aspects of Christian living end up taking on particular aspects and hence, in addition to being common elements, they become characteristics of the religious experience of some of them. It seems to us that this is the case with regards to faith in Fr. Rinaldi’s spirituality. It was this spirit of true faith that gave him the courage to face so many difficult commitments inherent in his mission and office. “When we saw Fr. Rinaldi, we saw him continually immersed in God, forever meditating, despite his many tasks. His entire activity was one of faith, and governance for him was inspired by and based on his spirit of profound faith.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸ E. VALENTINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 518, § 1794.

There are many signs through which this profound and living faith manifested itself. “Only the most ardent spirit of faith can explain his entire life and marvelous activities.” Faith “shone through his whole being and action,” especially when he prayed, celebrated, and gave conferences. Many recall “the way he was before the Blessed Sacrament;” his deep faith and “great devotion” shone through when celebrating the Eucharist. “His faith was most transparent in his piety and devotions.” Sermons and conferences too were circumstances in which he expressed his faith and strengthened the faith of his listeners. “He also sought to infuse faith in us.”

The Oratory girl, Anna Frassati, who then became a leader of associations and Catholic Action recalled, as a woman of discernment and apostolic commitment, the influence Fr. Rinaldi had on her. “He passed on his faith through his simple but profound word, direct, rich with substance. It was not just a voice you heard and then forgot it. It struck root in the heart.”⁴⁹ Fr. Peter Rinaldi, a grandnephew, had known him since his boyhood. When he became a Salesian, his relationship with his granduncle was always one of trust, and they wrote to one another. He wrote a biographical and spiritual profile with the eloquent title *By Love Compelled (Sospinto dall'amore* in the Italian edition). In his testimony for the cause of canonization he states, “The imperturbable calm of the Servant of God, his constant serenity and his ever reassuring and comforting words had their origin in his deep spirit of faith. It was the spirit of faith that had led him to write as one of his novitiate resolutions, ‘I want to think, speak, act only with God in mind.’”⁵⁰

A man entirely of God

Fr. Rinaldi was a “man entirely of God;” “his person pointed to the things of God.” It was the outward reflection of the theological direction of faith, hope and charity that oriented his person and life. Faith animated his profound communion with God, nourished by continuous and fervent prayer. One could clearly see that he was united with God, and to those who observed him he gave the impression of a man in continuous union with God. Those who spent several years with him describe him as a person “in continuous union with God,” “continually immersed in God,” “endowed with the most ardent spirit of prayer,” “a priest in whose

⁴⁹ A. FRASSATI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 479, § 1655.

⁵⁰ P. RINALDI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 399, § 1363.

presence you felt the presence of God.” “He was adorned with the true spirit of prayer. One could say that he always prayed.” His recollected demeanor aroused admiration and edification.

This sincere and profound faith had its foundation in union with God. “He was always calm and serene, recollected and devout, even in the midst of the most varied occupations. We could see that the thought of God occupied his soul, and one would describe him as the man of interior life in the midst of the noise of daily life.”⁵¹ Fr. Azzini states, “I can attest that the Servant of God was a man of the highest faith, and that indeed he truly lived by faith. He showed this by the perfection of his works and by his words which were always inspired by the highest and purest principles of faith. What stood out most in him was the continuous and absolute trust he placed in the Lord. He in no way relied on his own strength and human help, but everything was committed to the supernatural guidance of faith.”⁵² The same witness says that Fr. Rinaldi was burning with zeal for the propagation of the faith, teaching catechism to children, carefully seeing to decorum in the House of God and in liturgical rites. He was very much devoted to the Eucharist, the Blessed Virgin, St. Francis de Sales and St. Valerius, his village Patron Saint. Faith guided and sustained him in his life.

Guido Ferreri, who as a young boy was part of one of Fr. Rinaldi’s more original activities, the San Paolo Parish and Oratory in Turin, put it this way: “Fr. Rinaldi was a man of conviction and exemplary in faith. This faith shone through in an exceptional way in everything he did. I often had the opportunity to serve his Mass and his devotion edified all of us. His preaching was all about the spirit of faith and abhorrence of sin. After one of his exhortations, we felt devout and very good. He had a deep devotion to Our Blessed Lady and his Marian preaching made us more enthusiastic.... He inspired young people to love the Pope through his preaching, following the example of Don Bosco. He demonstrated his zeal for the propagation of the faith by taking interest in each of us in the Oratory and by inviting us young people to carry out the apostolate with our companions. From the Oratory, therefore, a good few dozen vocations emerged, a good number of them going off to the missions.”⁵³ His conferences were so interesting and practical that the Sisters preserved

⁵¹ P. TIRONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 242, § 840.

⁵² T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 7, § 20.

⁵³ G. FERRERI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 496, §§ 1720-1722.

many notebooks filled with them. One in particular, is the *Quaderno Carpanera* (*Carpanera Notebook*), a collection of the conferences he gave to the young women, the core group of the future Secular Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers.

At the Valdocco Oratory Fr. Rinaldi had founded a very flourishing “Auxilium” group, with the intention of spiritual formation and social action for young people so they could take up a fruitful lay apostolate. Nicola Angeleri, a member of Auxilium, attested to his faith, devotion to the Eucharist, the Sacred Heart and Our Lady. “A living and active faith was evident in Fr. Rinaldi. Faith and love for the Lord were the motive for his activities. One sensed his keen faith and the Lord’s presence in the way he celebrated and preached. He insisted in a special way on the Eucharist, devotion to the Sacred Heart and to Our Lady.”⁵⁴

Fr. Rinaldi was spiritual director of the Oratory of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco and animator for various associations that distinguished themselves for their spirit of piety, purity of life, union and mutual charity of their members, and their readiness to do every kind of good work. He created an uplifting spiritual and moral atmosphere, which became fertile soil for strong vocations to consecrated life and marriage. Sister Ida Diana, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, met Fr. Rinaldi when she was 12 years old and attended the Oratory. This is how she described the faith of the man of God. “His deep sense of faith shone through in the way he spent time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and the way he celebrated Holy Mass or presided over other religious services. His fervent and thoughtful preaching on the eternal truths testified to his very lively faith. Especially when he encouraged devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and to Mary Help of Christians, his words were a living and profound echo of a lived and communicative faith. It was clear that the truths he preached radiated naturally from his inner life, his living in the presence of God, from which it transpired that his was no theoretical teaching but lived experience.”⁵⁵ Bishop Marcellino Olaechea sums it up well. “He had a deep theological faith and appeared as the ‘*iustus ex fide vivit* [the righteous one who lives by faith].”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ N. ANGELERI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 490, § 1691.

⁵⁵ I. DIANA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 454, § 1570.

⁵⁶ M. OLAECHEA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 368, § 1249.

Man of prayer

Fr. Rinaldi experienced and nourished this faith in his life and in the practice of prayer, as those who were close to him would testify. Fr. Tomás Bordas, who came to know Fr. Rinaldi at the Salesian House in Sarriá, Barcelona (Spain) as a nine-year-old, has spoken of the strong impression he received when he first met him on the occasion of a retreat. This was later reinforced when, as a young student of theology, he listened to the Prefect General's conferences on pedagogy in the house at Foglizzo, and then saw him while engaged in the various tasks he undertook at the General House in Turin. He described Fr. Rinaldi's daily life as that of a man "undoubtedly endowed with a great spirit of prayer, both vocal and mental. It was edifying for us to see him always at his place in the choir stall in Mary Help of Christians Basilica from the early hours of the morning, taking part in the first of the community meditation times. His was an attitude of devout recollection that instilled devotion in everyone who was there. We would never see him sitting during meditation.... He nurtured in others the same spirit of prayer that so strongly motivated him as the principal means for achieving Christian perfection and for overcoming difficulties of a spiritual and material nature."⁵⁷ Every evening he would come down from his room, cross the courtyard in Valdocco and go to the small choir area behind the altar, "where he remained praying at length and in devout adoration, his demeanor revealing the vibrant faith that was his very heartbeat."⁵⁸ He was seen to embody the ideal of unceasing prayer that was proposed by the desert Fathers in obedience to the recommendation of Christ the Lord and of the Apostle, "Pray always," and many people saw his "profound recollection." To appreciate his spirit of piety, it is worth reporting what he himself thought about the relationship between meditation and Eucharist. "He used to say that meditation well done is to some extent more effective than Holy Communion itself, because for someone who has meditated in depth and seriously, it is more difficult to fall into sin than someone who has gone to Communion, even with the very best of preparation."⁵⁹

He made frequent and fervent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament; he was also very fond of brief prayers that revived the sense of God's presence throughout the day, along with entrusting himself to Mary and

⁵⁷ T. BORDAS, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 79, § 278.

⁵⁸ A. CANDELA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 178, § 615.

⁵⁹ T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 16, § 51.

the intercession of the saints. It was no rare thing to find him with his rosary beads in his hands; and it was moving to see him praying beneath the picture of Mary Help of Christians. He would often go there during the day, praying in her sanctuary.

He practiced and encouraged the eminently Salesian devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In a letter to Fr. Pietro Berruti, Provincial in Chile, he wrote, "From now, before every doubt and fear, just say, 'Heart of Jesus, I trust in you,' then push ahead both as regards yourself and others."⁶⁰ He fostered devotion to the Sacred Heart in so many different ways, recommending that we "mold our heart on the very Heart of Jesus, and he himself was a faithful copy of that."⁶¹ This devotion of his had nothing mawkish or sentimental about it, but it was the burning furnace which unleashed the apostolic zeal that led people he directed to courageously and unashamedly witness to their faith in their family, or at work. "He was convinced that only through an intense love for the Heart of Jesus could he firm up true piety in the heart of his spiritual daughters."⁶² In his final years he gave great importance to the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, organizing a procession within the Oratory in which parents and children would take part and during which he preached, focusing entirely on the family and promoting the consecration of families to the Sacred Heart.

Among his preferred saints was "his" Don Bosco, for whom he had a devotion that was impossible to describe and he saw it as his strict personal duty to foster this devotion. He dedicated all his energy to preserving the true spirit of the Founder in the Congregation, and he was himself described as the "living image" of Don Bosco. Added to that was his love for the Pope and the personal devotions he constantly nurtured.

The pillar of the Eucharist

Fr. Rinaldi's love for Jesus in the Eucharist was the focus of the Christological dimension of his spiritual life. One witness saw in this "something extraordinary which led one to immediately understand, even simply in his act of prayer, how immensely convinced he was of the real

⁶⁰ P. ZERBINO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 419, § 1444.

⁶¹ M. LAZZARI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 306, § 1074.

⁶² T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 106-107, § 370.

presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the most holy Eucharist.”⁶³ “His devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was a vibrant one;” “he encouraged and fostered Eucharistic devotion,” considered to be the basis and soul of Don Bosco’s preventive system.

Without wanting to draw attention to himself, his outward demeanor, so devout and respectful, encouraged reverence and love for the Eucharist. A number of those testifying said how they had been impressed by the way he celebrated the Holy Mass. Fr. Tomás Bordas, who had been present on various occasions at Masses celebrated by Fr. Rinaldi, testified, “Without seeming odd, his demeanor pointed to how intimate was his understanding of the great mystery that he was celebrating and how deeply convinced he was of the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament... He never omitted fervent preparation and a becoming thanksgiving.”⁶⁴ One expression of such faith and Eucharistic love was adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. “On the occasion of the Forty Hours Devotion celebrated at the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, the Servant of God was seen to kneel for a long time in fervent adoration, wholly recollected and absorbed, such that he was unaware of what was happening around him.”⁶⁵ He wanted the place where the Eucharistic Lord lived always to be clean and dignified. During the night, if he could not sleep, in spirit he visited the five tabernacles, those in the house and the others in the house of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, adoring the Lord in a way that recalls the Eucharistic love of Blessed Alexandrina Maria da Costa, Salesian Cooperator and mystic of the Eucharist.

The pillar of Mary

Many of those who testified spoke of his devotion to Mary. “He nurtured a very special devotion to Our Lady; he encouraged people to love her.” Devotion to Mary is “very special,” “profound,” “vibrant,” “tender,” “very tender.” The testimony of Fr. Giuseppe Matta sums up Fr. Rinaldi’s Marian devotion very well. “It is well known that the Servant of God was devoted to the Blessed Virgin, venerated especially under the titles of the Immaculate Conception and Help of Christians. Following a praiseworthy tradition in the Salesian Society, he wanted the feast of the Immaculate to be celebrated with solemnity and the usual academy to be held. He then

⁶³ G. MATTA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 326, § 1132.

⁶⁴ T. BORDAS, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 72, § 252.

⁶⁵ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 125, § 426.

took particular care to ensure that everything that referred to devotion to the Blessed Virgin, venerated especially under the title of Help of Christians, was accomplished with the greatest solemnity and with works of piety.... The feast of Mary Help of Christians was a real event for him. Everything had to converge to glorify the blessed Virgin, to exalt her with prayers and hymns and above all to make sure that there were many confessions and communions.... In every letter, exhortation and everything he wrote and preached, he never failed to encourage people to love Our Lady, pray intensely, be devoted to her with special love and have the greatest trust in Her.”⁶⁶ The brief prayer *Maria Auxilium Christianorum* was continually on his lips. He ardently fostered devotion to her in his writings and with exhortations that drew his listeners in, igniting their love and devotion for the Mother of God.

Devotion to Our Lady, with which he was brought up from childhood and which had very tender aspects to it, was one of his special characteristics. “His love and devotion for her had something profoundly unsophisticated about it, and could almost be said to be childlike, but it revealed the trust and abandonment he placed in her. When he had a particular difficulty, he went back to his Patroness with full confidence.”⁶⁷ To document his filial recourse to Our Blessed Lady, it is worth reading the slips of paper he used to place under a statuette of Our Lady on his writing desk. We are talking about prayers written on separate small pieces of paper and which reflect the difficult situations and problems he had to face and resolve day by day. At the beginning of the messages we find such expressions as, “Dearest Mother... I recommend myself to You, our advocate. I have no other hope, I, your ignorant and useless one responsible for these things who hopes that you will not abandon us,” “My most Holy Mother, the interests of the Pious Society are entrusted to my prudence and activity. You know how very clumsy I am, and how I would not know what to do. So, You do it. You know what I should do and how. You are our help. You are our Mother. If I must serve you, command and guide me. It is enough that I am an instrument in your hands and ever your most devoted son and servant.” “My sweetest Mother...” They are expressions that on the one hand show his unlimited and filial confidence in entrusting himself to Mary’s motherly intercession, while on the other they show his sense of

⁶⁶ G. MATTA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 329-330, § 1138-1139.

⁶⁷ T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 10, § 33.

inadequacy and inability faced with situations that were difficult and rarely simple.

Prayers to Our Lady⁶⁸

These are handwritten prayers on small separate pieces of paper that Fr. Rinaldi placed under a statuette of Our Lady on his writing desk. He wrote them in different years and they reflect the problems that he had to resolve day by day.

Dearest Mother, 1907 has presented you with two litigations over the Tambeccari (?) and Turina assets. The 1st was resolved, the 2nd is in abeyance. This year, I do not know how many items of litigation I must place before you. There is the entire Varazze case still unresolved, and I do not know where it begins and where it will end. There are the cases of Silva and Farina, Napoli and Giardini, and who knows whatever else the devil will stir up.

I recommend myself to You, our advocate. I have no other hope, I, your ignorant and useless one responsible for these things who hopes that you will not abandon us in 1908.

P. Rinaldi.

Virgin, Mother, after Varazze comes Marsala. You have perfectly resolved the Tambeccari, Turina, Silva, Varazze cases, etc. To You, therefore, our advocate, I also entrust Marsala. In our ignorance and blunders guide us well as to what we will do. You know how many doubts, how much uncertainty accompanies what I do; guide them to a good end, for the good of souls and for the glory of God.

You know that without you I cannot guess what to do with even one of them, yours in C.J. [the Heart of Jesus], F.R. [Philip Rinaldi]. Keep an eye on Bari, Loreto, and Alvito.

My most Holy Mother, the interests of the Pious Society are entrusted to my prudence and activity. You know how very clumsy I am, and how I would not know what to do. So, You do it. You know what I should do and how. You are our help. You are our Mother. If I must serve you, command and guide me. It is enough that I am an instrument in your hands and ever your most devoted son and servant. 18-12-09.

⁶⁸ Prayers to Our Lady, *Positio, Documenta*, no. XV, pp. 548-550.

Dearest Mother. I am placing under your direction the matter of our properties because I really do not know what to do. As for the Bookshop and the Oratory House, I do not know how to fix them. You know what is appropriate and what I can do to benefit your works. Tell me what to do therefore, or you yourself directly arrange matters, but may I always carry out God's will and not my own.

Bless me, yours in C.J. 31-10-09.

13-3-'14. My Sweetest Mother. You know the torment and the danger that trouble me. I appeal to you to free me. Remember that I am yours and I want to be so exclusively and forever. But you know that I can do nothing on my own, since I know and understand nothing. Enlighten me. Strengthen me, save me, free me. O clement, O Pious, O sweet Virgin Mary – *dignare me laudare te; da mihi virtutem contra hostes tuos* [make me worthy to praise you; give me strength against your enemies].

25-7-17. Dear Mother, I recommend to you the cause of Loggia (?), and Caviglione, Gaido, Quaranta, Moron. You know that I cannot do other than lose my head and theirs. Protect me from any sort of danger and them from any sort of evil. I want only what (is) for the glory of God and the good of souls. Your Phil.

Dearest Mother. For some time, I have been drawing the attention of others to things that I have been doing well and to predictions that have come to pass, either to satisfy myself or to gain the admiration of those who listen to me. Now this is pride, vanity and self-love. I need to correct myself and seek God alone. Help me to practice *ama nesciri et pro nihilo reputari* [love to be ignored and regarded as worthless]. You know that this poor man can do nothing on his own.... (perhaps "Philip" – torn off).

Dear Most Blessed Mother. I am leaving for Spain. I recommend the trip to you and the reason I am going there. Without you, we will achieve nothing or only make blunders. I recommend my brother to you; see that everything is for the good of our souls. Bless me. Your poor Philip Rinaldi.

12-2-1911

Dearest Mother, let me know if I should leave the Girls Oratory or how much and how I should be involved. Do not allow it to be a pretext for gossip, suspicion or even slander. Enlighten me, but also free me from dishonest malice. You loved the beautiful virtue so much and you did not suffer the least insult during your life. Free me and us from such troubles.

30-12-09

Your son P.R.

The apostle

He demonstrated deep faith not only in personal devotions, but also in external activities, in his initiatives and in his exhortations to the confreres. “He drew inspiration from his faith for all his initiatives and works and sought to instill it in us and whoever came to him.”⁶⁹ Fr. Giuseppe Matta states, “He was a man of solid and unshakeable faith, and lived solely by faith, which was the guiding principle for all his activities.”⁷⁰ His talks and conversations were imbued with a spirit of faith to the great spiritual benefit of those who engaged with him. He warned members of the Society to be on their guard lest their apostolic energy might lead to unrestrained activity, harmful to the life of the Spirit. He instilled a spirit of faith in his sermons. “It was enough to listen to one of his conferences to recognize that he was a man for whom faith was the principal strength behind his activities, such that it became second nature to him and animated all his intentions and works.”⁷¹

Fr. Rinaldi’s life and activities cannot be explained without the maximum degree of faith that shone through his words, relationships with others, in spiritual direction, even in the matters in which he was mostly involved during the years when he was Prefect General. His life demonstrates that it was by faith that he decided to give himself to God and accept the difficult moments of obedience that marked all his roles, given his belief that due to his health and knowledge, he should only be used in the most humble offices.

What shone through was the character of a man of constant and convinced prayer, who drew the strength for action and daily service from his union with God. As soon as he was elected Rector Major, he went to Pope Pius XI in Rome to renew the devotion and filial obedience, his and that of the entire Salesian Family, to the Vicar of Christ, and it was then that he asked for the indulgence for sanctified work. His ceaseless activity was no superficial activism, but an expression of his belief that rightly characterizes the Salesian spirit as “untiring hard work sanctified by prayer and union with God.”

Fr. Angelo Zannantoni, a past pupil of Valdocco and then a Salesian, highlights well the contagious and radiant force of Fr. Rinaldi’s faith that

⁶⁹ F. GASTINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 40, § 143.

⁷⁰ G. MATTA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 324, § 1124.

⁷¹ C. MARCHISIO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 409, § 1400.

irreversibly marked the story of his vocation, an expression of vocational ministry as a result of attraction. “Everyone recognized him as a man of a heroic faith that shone through his personality and sustained all his activities. His was a supernatural faith based on interiority and foreign to outward show or noise. We noted nothing about him outwardly. He did not have a faith based on sentiment, but whoever came to him felt it bursting from within and he won them over by it, as happened to myself. In fact, when I was professing my vows in his presence, I left with a profound feeling of joy that I could not explain. Contact with him had given me deep calm and serenity and this intimate joy lasted for many days. Those who approached him had the distinct impression that he was a man whose abandonment to God’s will was total, a man, who always seemed to be in communion with the Lord.”⁷²



Courtesy of Salesian Central Archives – Photographic and Audiovisual Archive

The fatherly gaze of Blessed Philip Rinaldi

⁷² A. ZANNANTONI, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 440-441, §§ 1522-1523.

Sr. Teresa Graziano, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, Provincial of Sicily, concurs. “He was animated by a very vibrant spirit of faith which enlivened his whole life and apostolate. This spirit of faith emerged in all manifestations of his thinking and his heart.”⁷³ This faith soothed her and enlightened her in the difficulties of life, making her feel internally strengthened and ready for every sacrifice.

She met him for the first time when she went to the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians for Confession. Although there were several people waiting and she was tempted several times to go to another confessor, she felt as though there was a hand holding her at that confessional, as if a special grace was linked to that confessional. Indeed, she experienced indescribable consolation and above all met the one who would resolve her life problem, to such a point that the date Fr. Rinaldi told her she would enter the Institute coincided exactly with the date she had decided a year earlier to be a religious.

The light of faith never weakened in Fr. Rinaldi amidst difficulties and adversities, but shone through it all, guiding his journey toward God. Especially in the years in which he was Prefect General, he found he had to deal with a mountain of issues and the huge responsibility weighing on his shoulders. His great faith, that gave him calm and serenity of spirit and absolute self-mastery without bewilderment or agitation, sustained his care of administration and religious discipline.

Also testifying to Rinaldi’s faith is his docility and supernatural vision with which he accepted directives from his superiors. He manifested his faith in the unique way he remained united with Don Bosco and permeated with his spirit during his life and after his death. At every moment of his life, and especially during the period in which he held the office of Rector Major of the Salesian Society, he was well aware that his main mission was to preserve the spirit of the Holy Founder in its entirety, and faithfully carry out what he had indicated or planned down to the smallest details. With this firmly rooted conviction, Fr. Rinaldi was a tireless diffuser of faith, constantly promoting apostolic activities and giving a great impulse to the missions.

This spirit of faith also inspired the advice with which he guided souls that brought precious light and fervor into the depths of hearts. In some of the letters Fr. Rinaldi wrote to his grandnephews, he said, “You ask me what

⁷³ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 119, §§ 406-407.

you must do to be a Salesian according to Don Bosco's heart. You will be such if you seek God alone in everything you do; if you are not afraid of work; if you are gentle, cheerful, tolerant toward others and patient with everyone.... Only if you have learned to suffer and humble yourself for Jesus Christ will your progress in the spiritual life be assured.... In our search for holiness, we must turn to ordinary things, our duties, the hidden sacrifices in our day-to-day existence. Let us face them with faith that is both serene and joyful, in union with Jesus Christ.... See that you give life to all your actions by living for Christ, with Christ and in Christ."⁷⁴

A concrete expression of his faith was his study and action in promoting the missionary activity of the Salesians and the great development that the Salesian missions experienced while he was Rector Major. His desire to propagate and increase the faith stimulated his impressive commitment to the missions. Faith was, in fact, the light of all his religious life and apostolate.

During his time as Rector Major, he aimed to guide Salesians toward the spirit of prayer and union with God, since this had also been the secret of Don Bosco's holiness. On the occasion of the 1922 General Chapter he said, "Let us never forget that the spirit is superior to rules and regulations, and that the wheelers and dealers battle it out plenty but end up with little. Miracles are worked through steady piety."

He had expressed to Don Bosco his desire to go to the missions to spread the faith, but the answer he got was that he would be sending others. And, in fact, as Rector Major he gave great impetus to the missionary activity of the Salesians, founding institutes to prepare young people for the missions based on the simple strategy, "If you are holy, you will save souls," and he preferred to accept the poorest and most difficult missions.

3. Hope: Every day you need to bring a brick for the building of our home in Paradise

At Don Bosco's school, hope for Fr. Rinaldi signals the certainty of help from above, in an entirely creative life, that is, one committed to planning daily practical activities above all for the salvation of young people so they may attain the ultimate goal of Paradise. This is the virtue that highlights the energy and activities of the Salesian in building up the Kingdom. The

⁷⁴ P. RINALDI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 399, §§ 1364-1365.

certainty of help from Jesus and Mary forms the basis of the constancy of his efforts and the enthusiasm of his commitment. Fr. Rinaldi was convinced that God alone can strengthen us. He alone will keep us firm to the end because He has placed us on the solid foundation of Christ. By His very nature He is faithful and will protect us from evil.

“The Servant of God was animated by a very vibrant hope. His thoughts were fully oriented toward eternal goods, which he hoped to achieve through the infinite merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁷⁵ Witnesses in fact agree that Fr. Rinaldi was a man of great hope. They saw his life projected “beyond the things of this world,” “based on the things up there,” “oriented toward heaven.” This supernatural spirit gave him unshakable confidence in Divine Providence. With the help of divine grace, he who in his adolescence was uncertain and undecided, became a model of intrepid donation to God. “Throughout his life he showed that he never depended on his own strength or his own initiatives, but that he trusted only in the help of the Lord, whom he constantly invoked, and in the help of Mary Help of Christians, to whom he entrusted his causes.”⁷⁶ He possessed a serenity and optimism that he also passed on to others, especially when there were painful events or situations, such as when he wrote to Sister Teresa Graziano, struck by a family misfortune. “Be brave and trust very much in God and in Our Lady.... If following Our Lord sometimes makes us suffer, let us remember that in Paradise we will be well rewarded.”⁷⁷ Fr. Candela also testifies to this hope, referring to the following response of Fr. Rinaldi when he manifested to him the inadequacy and discomfort he felt at being appointed a member of the Superior Chapter. “You see, there are confreres in the Congregation who are more capable than we and who would do better than we. But the Lord has chosen us. We do what we can. He will do the rest.”⁷⁸ Constant serenity in the midst of great trials was also a sign of hope. His weapon at that time was trusting prayer based on Christ’s promises.

Besides, such trust, which was flowing from his faith, conferred a characteristic note to his spirituality, that is, serenity and self-control in all circumstances. Unanimously, all speak of his constant, incomparable, supernatural, and unshakable calm and serenity, even in the midst of big trials. Fr. Guido Favini, who knew Fr. Rinaldi as an alumnus of the

⁷⁵ T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p.12, § 40.

⁷⁶ T. BORDAS, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 78, § 272.

⁷⁷ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 132-133, § 451.

⁷⁸ A. CANDELA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 196, § 686.

Valdocco Oratory and then later as a Salesian, had confidential dealings with him, receiving tasks of responsibility, among which that of running the San Paolo Oratory. He testifies, "All the major administrative, financial and disciplinary problems from the various Provinces and every house of the Salesian Congregation, with their moral, legal, and financial worries ended up in his office. He dealt with everything right down to the details, never getting upset, showing unshakeable calm, prudence and care, for which the superiors and confreres were immensely grateful to him even when he had to take serious measures. He never raised his voice, lose patience or get upset. His spirit of recollection allowed him to accept everything as from God's hands, see the ways of God's Providence, enjoy habitual union with God, and overcome all difficulties with trust in God and total abandonment to God."⁷⁹ His characteristic optimism was completely supernatural and even in the most arduous circumstances based on the certainty of divine assistance. "Both by word and example, he sought to instill in the hearts of those he approached this unlimited confidence in the Lord's help, this very vivid hope which inspired him and which he conveyed through persuasive words filled with fatherly goodness."⁸⁰

Fr. Pietro Zerbino, who had known him since his childhood and as a young Salesian at Valdocco, testifies, "Hope in Fr. Rinaldi gave an incomparable serenity to his outward demeanor that succeeded in calming the most agitated souls... and giving everyone a sense of tranquility and trust.... His was a supernatural optimism, nourished by an unshakable trust in God. Difficult situations, unexpected difficulties, the magnitude of the initiatives did not upset him, because he was convinced that if God desired a work, he would bring it to completion, as had always happened while Don Bosco was alive. We, who knew him and were near him for years, do not even once recall seeing Fr. Rinaldi frowning or disturbed.... Fr. Rinaldi's heroic hope shone out above all in the founding of new and difficult missions, such as the one in Japan, and in the founding of various missionary institutes to feed them with personnel, so that in just nine years he was able to increase the number of Salesian missionaries by more than 2000. To meet these enormous expenses, he trusted in Providence, decisively refusing to resort to human means that were not in line with the means that Divine Providence usually makes use of."⁸¹ In particular,

⁷⁹ G. FAVINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 463, § 1598.

⁸⁰ A. CANDELA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 182, § 633.

⁸¹ P. ZERBINO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 421, §§ 1447-1451.

convinced that God's works are not like those of human beings, he wanted his confreres to think and act not according to the logic of the world. This aspect is also of great relevance for the Church of our time, when we often get involved and overwhelmed by worldly logic that results in resounding failures and deeply hurts the life and credibility of the ecclesial community, sometimes even causing serious scandals. What Fr. Bonvicino said about the Salesian presence in Borgo San Paolo in Turin is of interest. "With regard to hope I must point to his great trust in Providence in all apostolic initiatives and his optimism based on the hope of the Divine in everything. For the Oratory of Borgo San Paolo, I must say that *contra spem in spem credidit* [in hope he believed against hope, Romans 4:18]."⁸²

Here are the clues to a virtue tested even to the point of heroism. Heroic faith was the basis of his hope. "He was animated by a very ardent supernatural hope that he demonstrated in every one of his undertakings. He did not trust in himself, or in the help of human beings, but placed all his trust in God. He used to say, 'If I personally have to suffer some failure in my work, it doesn't matter; if God willed the work, He will see to making it triumph.'"⁸³ Fully detached from earthly goods, he placed all his trust in God, abandoning himself to Him. "The mainstay of Fr. Rinaldi's entire life was his heroic hope. He waited to receive everything from Jesus and Mary Help of Christians, to whom he entrusted the solution of every difficulty with full and filial abandonment to the divine will and the search for heavenly goods without any attachment to earthly goods."⁸⁴ With this hope he started two oratories in an outlying and difficult area of Turin, and he undertook the opening of numerous houses for aspiring vocations, especially for missionary vocations.

Witnesses trace his absolute detachment from worldly goods and honors back to this orientation of life, the fact that he entrusted his life to Providence, and it was a form of life he also inculcated in his confreres. On one occasion he refused the offer of a share in the profits of a national lottery because he wanted to live off Providence and not off lotteries. Naturally, we are also referring to the detachment from present goods and

⁸² Testimony of Fr. Ignazio Bonvicino, SDB, *Positio, Documenta*, n. XVIII, p. 555.

⁸³ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 131, § 447.

⁸⁴ C. MARCHISIO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 409, § 1404.

honors of those who wanted to embody in their religious life the eschatological orientation of the Christian.

“His whole being led to the things of God. When we spoke with Fr. Rinaldi, we realized that he focused his whole life on the ‘things above’.... He used to say to us, ‘Every day you need to bring a brick to the building of our home in Paradise.’”⁸⁵ The Christian faith necessarily translates into hope, because it deals with faith in the God of promise. Christian existence is a life on a journey, a decisive orienting of oneself toward the future in God, or toward God, our future, allowing him to guide us. Statements by witnesses present Fr. Rinaldi as tending toward his divine future. “He was animated by a most lively hope. His thinking was fully directed to eternal goods.” Another recalls that “he constantly had thoughts of Paradise and used to say, ‘Paradise never costs too much.’” Fr. Tomás Bordas attested, “Equivalent to his ardent faith, the theological virtue of hope was alive in the Servant of God. In him we saw the sense of reaching eternal life with the grace of God and the certainty of having divine help necessary both to achieve that end and to carry out good and zealous works for the glory of God.”⁸⁶ Such was how he encouraged Salesians to constancy – “With the hope of Paradise.” In fact, Fr. Rinaldi did not allow any occasion to pass without keenly encouraging in everyone this Christian virtue that animated him. In conferences, sermons, in private conversations, he sought to pass on this spirit of unbounded trust in God which he had and which filled his heart.

The salvation of his soul was Fr. Rinaldi’s fundamental concern and he committed himself to this with a serious and decisive will throughout his life, entrusting himself confidently to the Lord and working untiringly in view of Paradise. His life was the surest proof of this heroic habit of hope, and concrete facts demonstrate it. He left his family and at the age of 20 made a generous effort to become a priest. He almost immediately accepted in obedience the responsibility of becoming a Director. He suddenly detached himself from Italy to go and work in Spain. He spent twenty years as Vicar of the Rector Major dealing with complex and often deeply distressing matters, and finally, ten years of governing the Congregation with an extraordinary program of initiatives promoted solely for the Kingdom of God. These are facts that presume the immense strength he drew from hope. He counted confidently on God’s promises,

⁸⁵ A. FRASSATI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 480, § 1657.

⁸⁶ T. BORDAS, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 76, §§ 266-267.

and, looking beyond human events, he was able to face the difficulties and the risks with trust, constancy, and an unswervingly serene soul. Fr. Rinaldi did all this and therefore carried out not just isolated acts of abandonment to God, but his entire life was a heroic gesture of hope. His final years were an accelerated preparation for Paradise, which he felt was imminent to the point that he used to say goodbye with a resolute “*Arrivederci in Paradiso*” (See you in Paradise)!

4. Love of God: Everything in Fr. Rinaldi was about love of God

Those who spent time with him noticed that it was “a deep love of God that impelled him and it was the reason for his dedication to souls. He loved God and wanted him to be loved by us.”⁸⁷ He translated this love into living in God’s grace and growing in virtue and exhorting us to love the Lord. “Seek the Lord alone in everything and let the rest go.”⁸⁸ This inner movement of love transpired in his words and sermons, which were simple but sincere, and with which he managed to touch souls. He never brought himself to the fore. On the contrary, he made “a special effort to hide himself, so that God would always appear in everything.”⁸⁹

His love for God prompted him to put His holy will into practice with great precision, to have a particular revulsion for every form of sin and to desire reparation. Fr. Tranquillo Azzini, who had known him since 1901 and worked for many years as administrative secretary of the Salesian Society, declared, “The Servant of God, animated by that ardent charity that bound him to the Lord, suffered immensely for the offences that ungrateful humanity commits against God. And he endeavored to make reparation for them in the best way he could. From the fact that after his death, according to what I heard, penitential objects were found on him, I believe that he also tried by these means to make reparation for the world’s offences against the infinite Majesty of God.”⁹⁰ His charity manifested itself through zeal for the conversion of sinners, praying for them and doing everything possible to get them back on the right track. He showed zeal in organizing hours and days of reparation to Jesus in the Blessed

⁸⁷ A. FRASSATI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 480, § 1659.

⁸⁸ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 135, § 461.

⁸⁹ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 285, § 995.

⁹⁰ T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 17, § 56.

Sacrament and diligent dedication to the ministry of Confession with a generosity we can describe as truly heroic.

Witnesses agree in giving prominence to the heights to which Fr. Rinaldi's love for God reached, a love that shone with extraordinary intensity in his life and marked his holiness. Fr. Tirone, who was appointed Spiritual Director General of the Salesian Society attests, "Everything about Fr. Rinaldi was love of God. His mind and heart were full of God; he often spoke of God, and always with the deepest respect and a most tender love. His whole life, even when he had to deal with the most varied matters, was a continuous act, an incessant hymn of God's love, and an impetus of zeal for His glory and the salvation of souls. The numerous works to which he put his hand and happily brought to completion with perseverance and sacrifice were but an effect of his great love of God. God was the one and only purpose of his life, from his entry into the Congregation until his death."⁹¹

Sister Ursula Pavese began to know Fr. Rinaldi when she was six years old attending the Girls Oratory at Valdocco. Those early encounters with him so impressed her that she compared the image of Don Bosco's monument in the Square in front of Mary Help of Christians with the fatherliness she experienced in Fr. Rinaldi. Retaining a vivid memory of the impressions, moods, and atmosphere one breathed in the Oratory and the spiritual fruits that matured while she was there, she testified as follows. "Through his peaceful, warm and soothing words we felt that God was in relationship with us and we with God. We came away from him with our spirits energized, convinced that to love the Lord we had to think and act as he, Fr. Rinaldi, had taught us, and joyfully, we tried to act and truly live like that.... His great love for God radiated in a way we could not describe and convinced us that he was a saint. His love for God powerfully communicated itself to us just by encountering him. It was more of an interior experience than one we could explain. His words awakened in us young girls between the ages of 14 and 18 the need to love the Lord, stay united with him and, I say, even enjoy him.... That enormous love of God and neighbor that we all recognized in Fr. Rinaldi was the secret and the measure of the spiritual input that we experienced in some sectors of the Oratory. His love of neighbor and his ability to attend to all material and

⁹¹ P. TIRONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 241, §§ 836-837.

moral needs with such understanding was not only acting for the salvation of souls, but a real desiring to lead them to greater intimacy with God.”⁹²

He translated love of God into a constant effort to live in his presence and to do his will. He practiced what he taught. “True piety is not words, beautiful phrases, outward attitude, frequent visits to the church. No, true piety is nourished by sacrifice and by the fulfillment of God’s will.”⁹³ For Fr. Ricaldone, “His love for God manifested itself in a profound spirit of piety and uplifting recollection. It then showed up and moved hearts in his conversations, sermons and lectures. Those who dealt closely with him were convinced that he made a special effort to hide himself, so that God would always appear in everything. He was very delicate even in the smallest things, especially when it came to preventing offence against God.”⁹⁴ And that without ever stopping or considering that he had achieved his goal. In an address to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians he said, “Now, tell me, yes, me, to do what I have recommended that you do. Do me this favor at the foot of the altar. Say it, say it to Jesus, so that I too may love my neighbor, celebrate Holy Mass well, and pray well. You will tell me, ‘But you already do this!’ It can be done better; it can always be done better. Onward then, always onward, till we reach Heaven.”⁹⁵ The resolutions he wrote down when he was a student at Sampierdarena in Genoa also testify to this commitment.

Fr. Tomás Bordas, who met Fr. Rinaldi in Spain when he was nine years old, and then as an assistant to the Salesian Superior Chapter was close to him until his death, attested, “We can say that the whole life of the Servant of God was a continuous act of his love for the Lord. He demonstrated this by the exemplary life he had already led since he was a young man before entering the Salesian Congregation; by the detail with which he attended all his obligations; by the precision with which he conducted his religious life; and by the great delicacy of conscience which was evident in him.... His submission to the will of God in every case was complete, a submission which he did not fail to inculcate in his confreres, especially in his penitents, as the basis and foundation of their Christian life.”⁹⁶

⁹² U. PAVESE, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 445-447, §§ 1540-1542.1547.

⁹³ P. TIRONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 242, § 842.

⁹⁴ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 285, §§ 995-996.

⁹⁵ P. TIRONE, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 242-243, § 843.

⁹⁶ T. BORDAS, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 79, §§ 276-277.

The love that Fr. Philip Rinaldi had for God who revealed himself to us in Jesus as Love, is expressed in the vocabulary of totality. “Everything about Fr. Rinaldi was love of God.” “He had a heart filled with true love for the Lord.” “He was animated by a very keen love for the Lord.” “He was animated by a very ardent love for the Lord.” One can find a flourishing of adjectives with which witnesses describe Fr. Rinaldi’s love for God. It was very ardent, very keen, most tender and strong. All these descriptions, on the one hand, manifest the fire of charity that springs from the Heart of Christ and, on the other, the typical traits of the Good Shepherd who, through the gift of himself, loves with a meek and humble Heart.

These are not abstract statements; they come from experience and concrete facts. “By his very presence, by his behavior, he demonstrated his great union with God and his immense love.... It is difficult to judge a person, but one can intuit many things, and in Fr. Rinaldi one intuited and felt the profound love of God that was his driving force and the reason for his dedication to souls.”⁹⁷ The lover, as we know, often speaks of his love. Fr. Rinaldi could not hide his love for the source of love. The tenderness and ardor of which witnesses speak clearly refer to the emotional aspect of love. He demonstrated his keen love for God by submitting fully to his will, manifested and expressed through the invitations and commands of his superiors. God’s love, transformed with generous commitment to charity, filled his soul. It manifested itself outwardly by his loving fatherliness and it shined and continues to shine through the many spiritual works which he began and worked at ceaselessly, steadily and zealously, to the point of consuming his physical strength without him ever saying, “Enough.”

Fr. Tiburzio Lupo, who knew the spirituality of the man of God well, attested, “His love for God is proven by his life of piety, the edifying celebration of Holy Mass, his regularity in the practices of piety in common, especially meditation, his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Following the example of Blessed Fr. Rua, he always promoted this devotion in Salesian houses. There was also his abandonment to the will of God in the infirmities that afflicted him, especially his eyes, and heart condition, which only increased his desire to be united with God.”⁹⁸ Fr. Antonio Candela, who knew Blessed Philip Rinaldi well and observed him carefully, spoke no differently. “We can

⁹⁷ A. FRASSATI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 480, § 1659.

⁹⁸ T. LUPO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 383, § 1295.

say that the love of God was the motive behind Fr. Rinaldi's intense activity. This was clear from what he said, wrote and did. Everything about him aimed at glorifying God. Undoubtedly, the Servant of God had great delicacy of conscience and was constantly endeavoring to maintain union with God, while refraining from doing anything wrong. He often spoke of this union with God in his conferences."⁹⁹

Sr. Teresa Graziano said, "The love that the Servant of God had for the Lord was certainly tender and very much alive, and he demonstrated it through full adherence of his will to God's will. It meant accepting responsibilities for which he did not feel naturally prepared, and he fulfilled them with much peace, serenity and perfection.... The Servant of God manifested his love for the Lord in a special way in his spirit of piety, in calm and profoundly recollected prayerfulness."¹⁰⁰ Finally, Arturo Poesio, a pupil of the Oratory when Don Bosco was still alive and subsequently President of the International Association of the Salesian Past Pupils, gave this testimony. "To the best of my knowledge and as far as I know from what I saw externally, I can attest that the Servant of God had a heart filled with true love for the Lord, for whose glory he spent all his energy and all his activities. When in contact with him, I always had the impression that he was an exemplary priest, foreign to all fault and imperfection, and completely dedicated to multiplying good works for the glory of God and the good of souls."¹⁰¹

5. Love of neighbor: If I were not in contact with souls, I would no longer be real

Love of God became love of neighbor. The supernatural and theological outlook that enlivened Fr. Rinaldi and drove him to heroic generosity is evident. Fr. Rinaldi's extraordinary love of neighbor sprang from his heroic love of God – a sincere, active, constant and universal supernatural love. We could say that he fully embodied what he said during a retreat for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. "Our interior life prompts, urges us to charity, work, and sacrifice for our neighbor." First of all, Fr. Rinaldi fulfilled his duties as superior in an exact manner, with total self-giving for the good of his confreres. This he did, not only when it involved intense external activity, with frequent travel (for example,

⁹⁹ A. CANDELA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 182, § 634.

¹⁰⁰ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 133, §§ 452-453.455.

¹⁰¹ A. POESIO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 31, §§ 112-113.

during the period he spent in Spain), but also during the long office hours while carrying out the duties of Prefect General and Rector Major of the Salesian Society.

Nevertheless, God's love led him to find time for magnificent priestly activity in the ministry of Confession, spiritual direction, and preaching, as well as for the direct promotion of apostolic works. Fr. Tirone reported that Fr. Rinaldi, called in 1901 to hold the office of Prefect General, "celebrated Holy Mass at 4:30 a.m. each day, and then for a couple of hours sat at the confessional, and it was always well-frequented. He was also called on during the day and left his work and went immediately to the confessional. To anyone who wondered at this he said, 'This is how we remember that we are priests!' His spiritual direction was much appreciated and many took advantage of it."¹⁰² Fr. Zerbino also reports the following words Fr. Rinaldi said to Fr. Rodolfo Fierro when he told him that some were complaining about the amount of time the Prefect General was dedicating to the ministry of Confession. "Look, all day I am dealing with money and business. If I do not put myself in contact with souls and not try to lead them and us to God, I would no longer be real."¹⁰³

Fr. Rinaldi's inner life was a life of love for God and dedication to neighbor. His love for others, however, was clothed in goodness, attentive and caring gentleness, benevolence, kindly forbearance. In a word, a spiritual fatherliness that sustained him and helped him to walk in God's ways. Here, Fr. Rinaldi showed the distinctive character of his uncommon personality and the unmistakable features of his priestly life, by exercising the highest and most perfect theological virtue. Love of neighbor is naturally the projection and practical realization of love of God. One can say that all his life, and his wide-ranging activities developed in oratories, conferences, sermons, catechism, had only one purpose, to prevent and fight sin and to promote the glory of God and the spiritual good of souls. Just as his entire life was an act of love for God, so was it an act of love for neighbor within the Congregation, or in other words, with the priests and other confreres, and beyond it, through the continuous exercise of spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

¹⁰² P. TIRONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 231, § 799.

¹⁰³ P. ZERBINO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 429, § 1482.

They spoke of Fr. Rinaldi as they would of a father

“In carrying out his office as Rector Major, he revealed more and more each year the kind of person he was. He showed prudence, wisdom and above all, fatherliness, resulting in the growing affection of all his sons. They spoke of Fr. Rinaldi as they would of a father. Just as piety was the characteristic of Fr. Albera and the Rule, observance and fidelity was the characteristic of Fr. Rua, so fatherliness was the characteristic of Fr. Rinaldi.”¹⁰⁴

As a superior, he was a good father to all. Witnesses speak of his “uncommon fatherly kindness.” He did his best to give himself to others, literally until the last moment of his life. In fact, after a final act of charity to an elderly confrere who had asked him for an audience, he sat exhausted in a chair where he died a few minutes later. The confreres emphasized his fatherly kindness in governing, exhorting, and correcting. Fatherliness was Fr. Rinaldi’s special, unmistakable and identifying characteristic. “He was convinced that people are won over more by the heart than by intelligence. Therefore, he did not tire of recommending kindness with everyone and encouraged people to see Jesus Christ even in the most humble, and especially in those who seemed far from God.”¹⁰⁵

He also instilled this in those entrusted with responsibility for governing and managing. A letter to his niece, Sr. Maria Rinaldi, who asked for advice upon her appointment as superior, is quite revealing, “Your first task is to safeguard the family spirit in the community.... Your role as superior is to radiate calm, serenity, joy.... Look at yourself often and see if your face spreads sunlight around you.... A superior must govern with the heart, not with the Rule. It is the heart that makes people love the rule. This is what Don Bosco thought, taught and practiced. If as superior you are unable to be loved by the Sisters, then you are out of place, and you would do well to ask to be removed.”¹⁰⁶ And to a recently appointed Provincial, he wrote, “Yes, father, with fatherliness, you will perform miracles.”

There is one photo worth a thousand words, showing Fr. Rinaldi as the loving and beloved father. It pictures him being borne aloft in a chair around the paths of the Salesian house in Ivrea by the young missionary

¹⁰⁴ *Ivi*, p. 416, § 1429.

¹⁰⁵ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 287, § 1005.

¹⁰⁶ G. RINALDI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 472, § 1631.

aspirants. He was amused and happy about it, especially for the joy of seeing how happy the boys were, a happiness he also spread about him. The photo recalls the episode when the boys at Valdocco carried Don Bosco around on an armchair, celebrating as they expressed their joy after he was cured through Our Lady's intercession. Here, as then, are the young people who in some way canonize the Salesian holiness that has in fatherliness the more sublime expression of that pastoral charity that loves and gives rise to love in return. His life was a constant application of the words he had written in his first circular letter to members of the Congregation. "On this past April 24, when... I went to the Shrine of Our Lady Help of Christians, I was deeply moved as I prostrated before her smiling image. At that moment I felt in my heart that all of you were given to me by her as dearest children in Jesus Christ, and that since then, all I had to live for was you. Doesn't fatherhood call for a complete immolation for the good of the children?"¹⁰⁷

His was a welcoming, sincere, tender, understanding and helpful fatherhood, which he exercised throughout his life and which was admired by everyone, confreres, sisters and laity, over the previous thirty years and in particular during his time as Rector Major. "His time as Rector Major was characterized by a great fatherliness and heightened spirituality. By common affirmation of all confreres, Fr. Rinaldi was a kindly and fatherly man, and that was how I knew him."¹⁰⁸

It is interesting to note that the outside world recognized and appreciated this fatherliness toward his confreres. Sister Teresa Graziano extols Fr. Rinaldi's love for his Salesian confreres, saying, "The dominant note of his charity shone out in a very evident way toward his confreres. Not only did he treat them all with fatherly kindness, but he also emphasized their best qualities, covered over their faults, did not want his children to be picked on, and defended them as a good father zealous for the good name of all his family."¹⁰⁹

After mentioning several episodes regarding Fr. Rinaldi's love for neighbor, Fr. Pietro Zerbino concludes by saying, "These last episodes remind me of a very Salesian form of charity in which Fr. Rinaldi distinguished himself, perhaps like no other Major Superior after

¹⁰⁷ Rector Major's Letter, May 24, 1922, in *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, n. 14, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ C. MARCHISIO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 408, § 1395.

¹⁰⁹ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 136, § 468.

Don Bosco, which is fatherliness, the most beautiful and dearest characteristic of Don Bosco. Anyone who approached Fr. Rinaldi felt he was approaching a father. Even his physical appearance inspired confidence. He had a handsome face habitually wearing a barely perceptible smile and a gentle, calm voice. His words were slow and measured and his gaze very mild and fatherly, which was an invitation to conversation.”¹¹⁰

He loved everyone and wanted to reach out to everyone

He gave himself to everyone with heroic generosity, without preference, loving everyone with the same affection as a father and trying to solve all situations correctly. If he had any preference, it was for those who suffered and were sick. He lavished extraordinary charity on them. He showed special attention for his sick confreres who were returning from the front at the end of the First World War. He also gave attention to sick past pupils, visiting them, comforting them and helping them. This memory of a girl from the Oratory is very realistic: “He manifested his heroic charity especially in visits to the sick. I often saw him go to relieve the angelic souls of young women who were going through times of material and moral misery, living in hovels, attics, long dark and dangerous corridors as they were in some houses in old Turin around Valdocco, not far from my house. Overflowing with goodness he softened even the hardest and most hostile faces in those homes where the priest was not wanted.... He seemed so burdened by the weight of so much material and moral misery that even going up and down those stairs was burdensome for him. He made a heartfelt plea to religious and pious lay persons to intensify their assistance to these poor people; but as much as he could he went himself, due to the risk of contracting tuberculosis that prevailed in those stagnant and unhygienic places. He loved everyone and would have liked to reach out to them all.”¹¹¹

His word often had a reassuring and calming effect on others, as told by Fr. Pietro Zerbino who, as a young confrere, found himself experiencing a change of community that cost him a great deal because of a confrere with a very difficult character. When he met Fr. Rinaldi in the courtyard at Valdocco, Fr. Rinaldi firmly held his hand, looked him in the eye and with a few words changed him inwardly so that the young confrere felt

¹¹⁰ P. ZERBINO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 425, § 1463.

¹¹¹ R. GABASIO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 488, § 1686.

transformed. A peace that gave rise to the sunshine of serenity replaced the nightmare. Fr. Zerbino testified, "For me, Fr. Rinaldi revealed his heroic charity above all in the form of goodness that had become habitual for him. He was in fact good to everyone, even to those at fault. It is true that 'God alone is good,' but God communicates his goodness to his friends. Fr. Rinaldi's was a supernatural goodness, the fruit of a continuous union with God and of his extraordinary love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus."¹¹² The grace of fatherliness enlightened his great spirit of charity toward his neighbor in the last stages of his life, as a priest for many years and superior of the Salesians. His special love was for the sick and the parents of Salesians. As a manifestation of this charity, one could mention the love he showed in correcting his confreres, the impetus he gave to the Salesian missions, his dedication to the confessional and to the various works of the apostolate, such as catechesis, oratories and lay associations.

In everything, he showed sincere respect for the individual. He gave his time generously to the individual, whoever he was, whoever came to him with a question, difficulty, or problem. "He was never in a hurry," is a common claim found among many witnesses and is an indication of his self-control and truly heroic charity. "When we spoke with him we always went away comforted, with the satisfaction of having been able to express every pain, every situation. He was never in a hurry. He received everyone, even a young person, and received him as if he were a very important person."¹¹³ Giving himself to everyone without reservation was his heart's profound need. He embodied the goodness of Don Bosco; and like Don Bosco he shared the same understanding of human misery, compassion for all material and spiritual needs, concern for receiving, consoling, instilling courage and hope. These were the concrete expressions of compassion of his fatherly heart. Felicita Gastini, mother of a family, praised Fr. Rinaldi's charity and fatherly goodness. "Even in the exercise of charity toward his neighbor, as an expression of the ardent charity that made his heart burn for the Lord, the Servant of God was a true model. He loved his neighbor as someone to do good for, first to do good for the soul, and then the body. He saw every effort of his as an exercise of the works of spiritual and temporal mercy."¹¹⁴

¹¹² P. ZERBINO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 422, § 1456.

¹¹³ C. MARCHISIO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 408, § 1395.

¹¹⁴ F. GASTINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 47, § 170.

Whether he was Prefect General or Rector Major, the poor crowded his antechamber and he always combined material with spiritual charity. At his insistence Salesian houses welcomed countless orphaned and abandoned young people. Sometimes he heard the remark that perhaps too many were accepted. But he replied good-naturedly, "It goes beyond that; the Lord has room for everyone." He loved to visit the sick and despite his workload, he always promoted the Conferences of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Witnesses, including those who benefited from them, cite numerous episodes as proof of his heroic exercise of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Perfect charity while seeing to formation of all the Salesians, young people at Boys and Girls Oratories, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians for whom he showed particular zeal, and Salesian past pupils whom he aided in material ways as well. "A characteristic of the Servant of God was his fatherly charity, which he showed for Past Pupils in a particular way.... He was always happy to be among the Past Pupils.... Nothing could be more consoling for a father than to see his own children around him."¹¹⁵ He showed no resentment toward those who offended him or made him suffer, and he was open-mindedly generous and unconditional in forgiveness. His charity also extended to the deceased, for whom he prayed and saw that others prayed for them.

Fr. Azzini attested, "The Servant of God certainly did not fail to carry out with zeal spiritual and corporal works of mercy whenever the occasion presented itself. His constant concern was the Christian education of youth, which is the particular aim of Salesian work. He therefore wanted to give a lively increase to Religion classes in all Salesian Institutes, and to catechism classes in all oratories dependent on the Salesian Society. His love for his confreres was even more than that of a father. One can say that he reached out everywhere there was a need or some difficulty. He did not even wait for others to point out needs, but seemed to get there beforehand. He was immensely charitable to his sick confreres. He often visited them, comforted them with spiritual help, and wanted them to be properly assisted in everything, both as regards medicine and food. He did not deny charity even to confreres who failed in their duties. Even in admonishing and correcting he was always fatherly. I recall one day when a confrere was in his office shouting in a fit of anger. The Servant of God remained ever calm and serene, so much so that the confrere was forced to recognize

¹¹⁵ A. POESIO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 32, §§ 115-116.

his injustice and apologized to him.”¹¹⁶ He also demonstrated the same affection and respect for confreres who had left the Congregation.

One work of charity in which he shone was his consolation for the afflicted, especially for boys when he saw them down or discouraged. He would immediately approach them to make them happy again, almost mindful of his experience as a boy in the school at Mirabello. This was the case for young Jorge Ferro, in Spain, who approached Fr. Rinaldi to tell him that he wanted to leave the school. Fr. Rinaldi brought the boy’s head to his breast and said, “No, my son, you will be a Salesian and you will do very well.” And so it happened.

6. Prudence: Fr. Rinaldi’s most outstanding virtue

Several testimonies agree in recognizing prudence as a characteristic virtue of Fr. Rinaldi, especially as superior and teacher of spiritual life, a virtue which reflected his interiority and holiness. There is talk of his “consummate prudence,” “personified prudence,” exercised with the exquisite trait of gentleness and delicacy. Evasio Colli, Archbishop of Parma, a close friend of Fr. Rinaldi, said, “For me, he impersonated prudence so much so that I confided in him to the end, even on matters relating to my Episcopal ministry, certain that his precise and calm word solved even the most difficult problems.”¹¹⁷ Fr. Ricaldone, who was close to him for 20 years in the government of the Congregation, was able to state, “If I had to say what was the virtue that most stood out in Fr. Rinaldi, I would not hesitate in saying that it was prudence.... He had a deep knowledge of himself, and therefore a great humility, convinced of his insufficiency. He manifested it every time that it was a question of accepting some position.... In the difficulties and in the works undertaken his word was always light and sure direction for all. He possessed the utmost discretion and used it to illuminate, order, guide and moderate in all circumstances. He knew how to keep secrets and confidences. He measured his words and even more so what he wrote. His discretion was combined with truth, gentleness and firmness.”¹¹⁸ Fr. Bordas continues in the same tone. “One of the great gifts that made Fr. Rinaldi so highly respected as a Superior was undoubtedly his consummate prudence, the natural and clear result of his focus on and union with God. He was never

¹¹⁶ T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p.18, § 60.

¹¹⁷ E. COLLI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 401, § 1371.

¹¹⁸ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 289-290, §§ 1013-1015.

rushed, but always calm and a master of himself. He allowed all opinions to be spoken and presented, and then, very carefully gave his judgment, which was generally welcomed by all, even by opponents, with true satisfaction.”¹¹⁹ Sister Graziano remarked, “Prudence was not only a natural quality of his, but a true supernatural virtue, because we saw him always focused; and we noticed that before acting or giving any advice, he recollected himself and prayed. It seems that he drew the decisions he had to take and the advice he had to give from some inner light.”¹²⁰

It is enough to make a quick overview of the different stages of Fr. Rinaldi’s life to realize that he always acted with the utmost prudence. When he decided to follow God’s call to religious life, he asked his superiors for advice and was a model of sincerity and docility. Then, as a superior, he appeared subject to legitimate authority and exercised his functions in a fully satisfactory manner, and with abundant good results. “You can describe the Servant of God as the prudent individual par excellence, in that he was never agitated, hasty with his decisions, but calm and thoughtful. If he needed to, he took as much time as was necessary to examine and reflect on things.... He prayed for the necessary enlightenment and in the more difficult circumstances and more important affairs, he made triduums and novenas and saw that others made them, to ensure protection and enlightenment from heaven.... How much prudence he showed when he had to decide on his vocation! He studied it for a long time on his own, but did not decide to follow it until he had the clear and repeated invitation from Saint John Bosco to enter the Congregation. Even when it was a question of receiving sacred orders or positions in the Congregation, he did not do so unless he was called by Don Bosco and assured that it was the will of God in his regard.”¹²¹

In governing at different levels, he knew how to respect the competence of other superiors without ever invading their territory. He listened to and considered the opinion of the councilors, showing himself nevertheless unshakable when it came to defending some of Don Bosco’s principles or traditions; and, after having prayed and studied the individual questions with the help of those who were in charge, he took the decisions and put them into practice without delay. Fr. Candela reported, “In Chapter meetings he left the greatest freedom of speech; he listened to everyone’s

¹¹⁹ T. BORDAS, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 85, § 299.

¹²⁰ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 144 § 495.

¹²¹ P. TIRONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 243, §§ 844-846.



Courtesy of Salesian Central Archives – Photographic and Audiovisual Archive

Fr. Rinaldi hailed by the missionary aspirants of
the Cardinal Cagliero Institute in Ivrea

advice and did not take decisions until after everything had been well thought out and especially after having asked for light from heaven.”¹²² Fr. Ricaldone, speaking in light of his personal experience declared, “He thought things through thoroughly before acting and did this, I would say, by nature. More than once, this seemed excessive to me and I allowed myself to tell him. He smiled, but the facts proved that he was right. He was not only a *cunctator* [one who holds back], but a skilled sailor through the reefs; he was also very skilled at finding unforeseen solutions even in material affairs.”¹²³ We often find expressions like “keep thinking,” “think about it more,” “reflect then we will decide,” “let us pray, then we will decide” in the Minutes of the Superior Chapter.

He showed prudence in the ordinary performance of his duties, in spiritual direction, and it stood out with particular intensity in certain especially difficult circumstances that he had to face and resolve. In these cases he employed truly heroic prudence and simplicity, guided as he was by gifts of nature, but above all by the light that came to him from supernatural grace, the fruit of prayer and contemplation. It will suffice to recall his way of acting during slanderous campaigns against the Salesians, as for example in the case of the Varazze affair, unleashed by Freemasonry. Fr. Rua gave the supreme directives, but the one who had to deal with lawyers, journalists and other people was Fr. Rinaldi. He was able to conduct matters in such a way that the din of the newspapers ceased and it all came to an end. The guilty were condemned, but how much trouble it caused for him, how much thinking and work it took! It is also worth remembering his attitude toward the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, especially on the occasion of the Holy See’s decision that established the autonomy of female religious institutes from male institutes.

His penitents also praised his prudence in spiritual direction and personal relationships; a prudence exercised simply and firmly. “Personally frank... clarity personified.” He was always prudent, whether dealing with things concerning his office, or dealing with confreres, or in spiritual direction. An obvious sign of his consummate prudence was the number of people who went to his confessional in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. This came from the fact that the penitents discovered a spiritual director of enlightened spirit in Fr. Rinaldi. He was practical and his direction was

¹²² A. CANDELA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 187, § 653.

¹²³ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 283-284, § 991.

in accordance with God's heart. Fr. Eugenio Valentini attested, "It is well known that Fr. Rinaldi was considered a person of great prudence and enlightened counsel. Before his election as Rector Major, he went to the basilica each day to hear confessions, and his confessional was very popular. When he became Rector Major and could no longer be in the confessional, audiences with him became very popular with every class of people who turned to him for advice and moral help."¹²⁴ Sister Graziano, who had him as guide for her vocation and religious life, spoke of his prudence. "His spiritual direction had nothing long and complicated about it. The Servant of God helped with his enlightened and fatherly word. And, if necessary, he knew how to ask for real sacrifices, but then he supported souls in their struggles, always urging them to do good and inspiring them with the greatest confidence in the infinite goodness of God."¹²⁵ A former Oratory girl recalled her youth under Fr. Rinaldi's guidance. "Because of his reputation as a virtuous and prudent man, Fr. Rinaldi was highly sought after for problems of conscience and was considered enlightened in vocational choices. He was an enlightened guide, for many years, to many generations, young and old alike. Gifted with fine intuition, divine light, he directed people to discover the will of God. I think it is difficult to number all the beautiful, holy vocations that have adorned the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians during those years due to the Servant of God.... At that time, in the atmosphere of the 'living' Oratory, the idea of becoming a postulant went through the mind of all of us young people. Fr. Rinaldi had us pray, he advised us, and calmed us. The clarity of his intuitions was impressive."¹²⁶

An example of such wisdom is the advice given to Fr. Ignazio Bonvicino when he sent him to Penango to open a missionary aspirantate. On that occasion Fr. Rinaldi told him, "The aspirantate is not yet the novitiate; it is a boarding school where the spirit of Don Bosco is best practiced. If you must remove an aspirant, make sure that he goes away very impressed by the treatment he received; as a friend, not as an enemy."¹²⁷ Perhaps this remark was related to his personal experience when he left Mirabello as a result of being badly treated and remembering how difficult it was to reconstruct wounded relationships and erase negative memories. To

¹²⁴ E. VALENTINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 523, § 1807.

¹²⁵ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 145, § 499.

¹²⁶ A. FRASSATI, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 482-483, §§ 1667-1668.

¹²⁷ Testimony of Fr. Ignazio Bonvicino, SDB, *Positio, Documenta*, n. XVIII, p. 555.

Fr. Ignazio himself, when he was later sent to direct the new agricultural school in Cumiana, he said, “In controversial matters, do not listen to a single bell; listen to them all.”¹²⁸ The suffering and the pained events of his vocational story had enabled him to be ardent and sure when it came to carrying out apostolic enterprises and above all in the art of helping individuals discern and choose their calling. What a wise example of prudence he showed in advising on recruitment of vocations, opening new houses, assigning specific and potential tasks to individuals! What prudence he showed in preventing abuses or in dealing with them, in avoiding misunderstandings, making plans and carrying them out according to time and circumstances! Fr. Ricaldone said, “I recognize that I have not found another individual who possessed the gift of counsel as eminently as Fr. Rinaldi did. Priests, religious, industrialists and government people turned to him with their doubts and they all came out enlightened and comforted.”¹²⁹

7. Justice: charity without justice becomes weakness

Fr. Rinaldi’s love for his confreres was a love that always kept in mind the demands of justice. He was a “just” man in the full sense of the word. “As for justice, I am convinced that Fr. Rinaldi was the *Vir Iustus* in the biblical sense of a person endowed with every virtue. He used to say, ‘Charity without justice becomes weakness. We must be good, but just, the one who prefers charity to justice is at fault.’ I always found the Servant of God most exact in the fulfillment of his duties toward God and very careful in seeking and carrying out his holy will. He was extremely delicate in dealing with his neighbor in everything that was due to him.”¹³⁰ He practiced the virtue of justice toward God and neighbor in a perfect way. He gave himself completely to God and did not spare himself in his various roles of responsibility. Fr. Guido Favini attested, “It perfectly corresponds to the truth that Fr. Rinaldi exercised justice to the highest degree. *Toward God*, all his life was a continuous search for God’s will to carry it out; and he found it in the desires and suggestions of Don Bosco and the other superiors, in events around him, and he always conformed to this will to pay God the tribute of respect and obedience due to Him. As a Salesian religious, he never deflected from the Rule, so much so that we considered

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 288, § 1008.

¹³⁰ P. ZERBINO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 427, §§ 1473-1474.

him the most Salesian of Don Bosco's sons. *Toward human beings*, especially in his relationships as superior, he took great care not to favor anyone to the detriment of others, to distribute positions equally, to love everyone with the same affection as a father, to resolve all situations in the right way."¹³¹

He manifested the practice of justice in the exactness with which he administered the goods of the Congregation as Prefect General and worked to ensure that debts were settled as soon as possible. Here is what his administrative secretary had to say. "I had the opportunity to admire his precision from the administrative perspective. In fact, being with him for many decades in the administrator's office when he was Prefect General, I could see how detailed and minute he was in recording things; how he wanted to satisfy creditors and suppliers punctually. I can state that I never heard anyone complain about his method of accounting or complain that they had not received what was due to them."¹³² It is worth noting that in the 21 years that he was Prefect General and considering the extraordinary development of the works, there were no bankruptcies or economic risks. He also manifested this sense of responsibility by wanting to be informed of all situations of an administrative nature, while having full confidence in his collaborators. His sense of gratitude toward benefactors is also worth noting. His concern to carry out their will with precision was a great merit; something truly uncommon given certain freedoms that some take with sad consequences. In this regard, he organized a special office to express his gratitude to benefactors.

We find an eloquent example of the exercise of justice without favoritism in the relationship with his four Salesian grandnephews. One of these attested, "I note his gratitude to benefactors and his relationship with his family. The Servant of God was always foreign to the idea of meddling in the affairs of kinship. Yet his influence on his relatives was great and beneficial.... Neither superiors nor confreres saw even the shadow of nepotism in him. He followed us with more than paternal interest, but never wanted us to be privileged in any way."¹³³

Regarding justice to others he quoted the example of his father Christopher to the family, writing on the occasion of his father's death. "And you especially, who have to guide the family, imitate his justice in contracts,

¹³¹ G. FAVINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 465, §§ 1606-1607.

¹³² T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 20-21, §§ 69-70.

¹³³ P. RINALDI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 401, § 1373.

his commitment to religion, his disinterest in managing goods and things of the Church, his perseverance and determination in raising his children.”¹³⁴ As priest and religious, this example is enriched with supernatural motivations. He was not making distinction of age, merit and tasks.

Another example of justice occurred at the time of the division of intangible assets between the Salesian Society and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians when, by the will of the Holy See, the two Congregations were legally and administratively separated. Fr. Rinaldi’s positive and balanced influence on this delicate issue showed his profound sense of justice and prudence. This was particularly delicate and very complex because there had been a complete communion of real estate assets; but with his sense of justice and fairness, he led things in such a way that at the end of the separation there was mutual satisfaction and complete harmony.

Another episode to remember was when he worked in Fr. Rua’s name for the settlement of the dispute between the owners of the Poma Company and their workers during a strike. He was the mediator who brought the two parties together and led them to resolve the dispute to the satisfaction of both parties.

And in some cases, what justice he practiced! Especially with his confreres, in whose regard his goodness and fortitude converged in a magnificent synthesis of fatherliness. He knew how to chide an intemperate superior and advocate for injured material and spiritual rights; he paid personally or through the Congregation for the errors of some members, without taking refuge in anonymity or invoking the support of the powerful for his own protection. He manifested this exercise of justice in a truly heroic way even in cases where it was necessary to go ahead and defend the good reputation of the Congregation in the face of serious slander that severely compromised its very survival. Fr. Antonio Candela attested, “At the time of the so-called Varazze affair, I was in Spain. But I heard that the Servant of God, while feeling all the pain of the serious accusations that had accumulated against the Salesian Society, nevertheless did not lose heart. He took charge, full of confidence in the inevitable help of the Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary Help of Christians and with a spirit of great courage, in order to dispel the obscene calumnies;

¹³⁴ *Positio, Documenta*, n. XI, p. 543.

and through the powerful efforts of lawyers, he managed to obtain full justification of the Salesian Society.”¹³⁵

8. Fortitude: *omnia possum in eo qui me confortat* (All things are possible in him who comforts me)

His complete self-mastery and control over all the spontaneous reactions of nature, a mastery that manifested itself in calm amidst daily difficulties, revealed a fortitude of mind in Fr. Rinaldi that, for its perfection and perseverance was heroic. There is proof of this in his efforts to strive for religious and priestly perfection, and holiness, an effort sustained constantly throughout his life. Through long practice he achieved complete self-mastery, perfect balance in all circumstances and control of external events, including the unforeseen and regrettable. Fr. Tomás Bordas attested, “Supernatural fortitude radiated in the Servant of God in a special way, highlighted particularly by his deep humility. Although he felt very humble in his own regard, he did not hesitate to undertake major enterprises, and to continue them energetically, if he understood that they were required for the greater glory of God and the good of souls. One could see that he was animated by the sentiment of the apostle who said, ‘*Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat*’ [I can do all things in him who strengthens me, Philippians 4:13].”¹³⁶ We recall what he did to tackle numerous material and moral difficulties, the wounds resulting from the First World War, financial disasters, the expenses required for supporting the missions and the persecutions suffered by the Congregation in different parts of the world.

Fr. Rinaldi endured all this without ever losing his usual joviality and paternal loving kindness. In fact, he acquired serenity at a high price, the result of a struggle with himself. His character would have led him to be indulgent, but fortitude gave him perfect control over himself, so that his proverbial goodness and unalterable serenity was not a sign of weakness, but of proven virtue. All the witnesses speak of this unchangeable serenity, of his “perfect equilibrium in the face of the most disconcerting and unforeseen events.” Even in periods of fatigue and of his final illness “he was imperturbable,” “he never spoke of it, acting... serenely.” At the same time, they admit that he was “almost inflexible when it came to preserving

¹³⁵ A. CANDELA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 182, §§ 631-632.

¹³⁶ T. BORDAS, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 89, § 313.

unchanged the religious traditions left to us by Don Bosco.” “He was austere and inflexible with himself.... He knew how to correct charitably but firmly those who lacked religious discipline and the spirit of Don Bosco.” He was firm and intransigent in governing when it came to defending the truth.

He gave proof of heroic fortitude in illness, especially in his final years, as witnessed by Fr. Vacca, who acted as his personal secretary in the last period of his life and to whom Fr. Rinaldi showed fatherly, even motherly affection and attention. “Even though he understood how things were with his risky heart condition, he submitted himself even in his last two years to tiring journeys, to bring the comfort of his smile to distant places.... He was always there for everyone, whether to give audience, receive festive demonstrations, celebrate functions, without giving up; and the smile on his face would never alter, nor would he allow tiredness or intolerance to show.... And he never spoke of it, acting with a spirit of adaptation to his illness so serenely that having recourse to help from others seemed more like an act of fatherly confidence on his part than an imperative need. Never a complaint at the many sleepless nights, nor were they grounds for him to dispense himself from the daily concerns of duty and charity.”¹³⁷ His constancy and perseverance in the practice of virtue and the commitment with which he was faithful to the practices of piety are noteworthy. Fr. Ricaldone declared, “During periods of exhaustion, he spent his sleepless nights sitting most of the time in a large chair. And he was always there at 4:30 a.m. to celebrate Holy Mass, and then attend meditation.”¹³⁸

However, the aspect that deserves to be studied with greater attention is that which concerns Fr. Rinaldi’s fortitude in the performance of his duties as superior, bearing in mind also that for almost fifty years he held uninterrupted positions of government in the Salesian Society. The documents present his kindness as the most characteristic trait of Fr. Rinaldi, to which one can add with even greater intensity his fatherliness. Despite this, there is no lack of testimonies that document how he combined this kindness with firmness, directed to the glory of God and the good of souls. The deposition from Fr. Ricaldone is significant in this regard. “It is natural that a major superior of a Congregation finds many difficulties along the way; I am not referring to what we might call

¹³⁷ G. VACCA, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 255-256, §§ 888-890.

¹³⁸ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 275, § 959.

the ordinary ones; and I speak of just one.”¹³⁹ Here the reference is to 1931 when *Il Duce*, Benito Mussolini, dissolved all Catholic associations as well as the festive oratories. Fr. Rinaldi left Turin in protest, and by speaking with authorities in a very frank manner he succeeded in having the oratories reopened through the personal intervention of *Il Duce*. His words, “always gentle and kind, took on a strength of phrase and incisive tone when it came to affirming the truth or defending unarguable principles of healthy spirituality; and he was intransigent in matters that he understood clearly or that were clearly defined, while proceeding in a most affable manner.”¹⁴⁰ Fr. Ricaldone testifies how Fr. Rinaldi was “inflexible” when it came to preserving unchanged the religious traditions left by Don Bosco, and tells of a time he saw him really angry when one poor individual had made a very bad impression among young people; after scolding him severely, he sent him away. Fr. Tirone reports how in the face of modernism, Fr. Rinaldi severely reprimanded someone who even appeared to be in sympathy with this position. He “was convinced of the obligation and importance of correction; he did it and wanted it to be done, but always gently, and he preferred to encourage rather than correct.”¹⁴¹ He was able to correct charitably but firmly at the right time those who lacked religious discipline and the spirit of Don Bosco.

The works Fr. Rinaldi undertook and the constancy with which he pursued them also speak of his fortitude. Considering the uncertainty that characterized the origins of his vocation and the firmness with which, since the novitiate, he had formulated and maintained his resolutions, introduced by an energetic “I will,” this is significant. Despite the fragility of his physique, he never retreated in the face of fatigue endured by his duties, even at those times when his health forced him to take to his bed. Fortitude for Fr. Rinaldi was a kind of harmony of gentleness and firmness. He could “arm wrestle with a velvet glove.” His authority was devoid of strong words and ways; it was imbued with humility that moved and convinced. He rarely commanded; more often he “begged,” “invoked,” “exhorted,” “expressed a thought;” not forceful expressions, but stronger than certain imperatives. Their fascination stemmed from the fortitude he applied in his own regard. He did not indulge in the weaknesses of nature, in justification of pride or, in general, of passions, adaptations of convenience, or in the deception of compromise. “He was

¹³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 284, § 992.

¹⁴⁰ G. VACCA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 255, § 887.

¹⁴¹ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 291, § 1020.

never disconcerted, nor did he ever lose courage even in the most difficult moments. In those circumstances, one can say, his confidence in Mary Help of Christians doubled. He entrusted and recommended himself to her with the most fervent prayer. And he was able to overcome the most serious difficulties with the most absolute calm and tranquility.”¹⁴²

He manifested the virtue of fortitude in strength of character and in the way in which he faced adversity, with complete self-mastery. “In every circumstance, he was seen to exercise the most eminent and heroic virtue without effort, without showing any disgust or struggle, as if the movement of passions did not exist in him, so much was the calm, peace, and smile that infused his face. He was always serene, always fatherly and amiably kind.”¹⁴³ His was a goodness that knew how to be strong and a fortitude tempered by goodness. These were qualities that harmonized in Fr. Rinaldi’s soul and characterized his personality. This virtue was certainly extraordinary and he practiced it heroically, given that he succeeded in maintaining a balance between his search for his own sanctification, and the spiritual, organizational as well as material work of the Congregation. He prayed, preached, and heard confessions tirelessly and uninterruptedly. He made endless journeys to meet his sons and carried out intense activity throughout his life. Fr. Giacomo Vacca attested, “It seems to me that the virtue of fortitude was like a garment that perfectly fitted his person. His presence and ever-serious words affirmed his possession of this virtue, seemingly part of his very nature. His perfect equilibrium in the face of upsets and the most regrettable unforeseen events, his spontaneous trust in Providence, all with the serenity of mind that edified and made others feel secure, had convinced me that he had arrived at such self-mastery after lengthy, difficult and arduous practice. His life is a confirmation of this. The illness that eventually destroyed him also involved a heroic exercise of strength and resistance on his part. He had no fears or uncertainties about his responsibility. After lengthy periods of prayer and reflection, after asking advice, he acted with such firmness, even in the most complex cases, as to give everyone full confidence of success.”¹⁴⁴

This was the case to the end. “He manifested his strength in resisting passions, putting up with people and adversity, and in illness. Sometimes

¹⁴² T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 21, § 74.

¹⁴³ M. LAZZARI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 307, § 1076.

¹⁴⁴ G. VACCA, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 254-255, §§ 884-886.

he would say to me, 'You see? This eye is already lost, and from the other I can only see double, or black flies and flashes.' Yet he remained cheerful and serene.... In 1924 he believed that everything was over; yet he was imperturbable, and it was often not possible to get him to take a little rest. As for his strength in defending the rights of the Church, the family and the Congregation, especially with regard to the freedom of Christian education, he demonstrated this very clearly."¹⁴⁵

9. Temperance: work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish

Temperance in Salesian tradition is always linked to work, as Don Bosco typically proclaimed on a number of occasions, points to general self-mastery in an austere lifestyle. It is made up of sacrifice, a demanding timetable and is accompanied by a sense of measure and balance as the result of the ability to curb one's reactions. This attitude of temperance should combine with a generally pleasant demeanor, a popular style, and rich in common sense with sufficient room for a healthy dose of shrewdness. "The Salesian," Fr. Rinaldi said, "must know how to hold things steady; he does not go around with his eyes closed, he opens them but goes no further; if things are not going well, he stops. He practices self-mastery including in games; he deals in a measured way with the boy who makes him despair; he can stay silent, hide his emotions, speak up at the right time, and can be shrewd."

His temperance was evident throughout his life. Witnesses say that "he had no special affection for any particular food... he was satisfied with common food... he was very mortified where sleep was concerned... very simple in his dress and room... disengaged from the most legitimate little quirks of interest...." His life was truly penitent and mortified. And all this even though he was superior for almost his entire priestly life. From his youth, he imposed a regime on himself that was as mortified and simple as ever, devoid of refinement and comfort both in his food and clothing, and in the furnishings of his room and office; and this was something he remained faithful to for the rest of his life. It is enough to recall the commitments made as a young aspirant at Sampierdarena and those made on his departure for Spain, where we see a complete program of control over his actions, words and attitudes. Fr. Tarquinio Azzini outlined

¹⁴⁵ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 292, §§ 1025-1026.

Fr. Rinaldi's temperance in the following way. "He was thrifty and temperate. He always kept to the common food, and I remember that in the evening, he usually did not take a drop of wine. He did not like refinement; he did not look for comfort either in his clothes or in the furnishings of his room and office. He hardly gave himself time for sleep, because he went to bed late and got up early. He observed any fasting and abstinence in the Rule in exemplary fashion and added his own mortifications to that. I can therefore testify that his was truly a penitent and mortified life."¹⁴⁶ His unwavering calm and constant self-control, his edifying composure that favored inner recollection, his spirit of prayer and union with God made him a temperate man.

"Allergic" to every comfort, he was described as "more unique than rare," for the particularly arduous temperance he practiced. "He never said more or less than was appropriate or that could offend justice, charity or the reputation of others. Anytime I approached him, I only heard words of edification. Even the very tone of his words revealed a person who by virtue, and long exercise, had complete dominion over himself."¹⁴⁷

Fr. Tomás Bordas attested, "Indeed, he was an extraordinary model of the virtue of temperance. Beginning with his simple way of dressing, to the absence of any search for comfort evident throughout his life, he consistently manifested this virtue. As for food, he was completely at the service of community life, without resorting to special foods.... He was very frugal where sleep was concerned, prolonging his work very often after evening prayers and getting up early in the morning to be present for the practices of piety and the ministry of Confession. He also supported the idea of not taking a nap after lunch. The Servant of God's temperance was not restricted just to the narrow and limited sense of food, drink and sleep, but included control of all passions, which must be subject to reason and faith. His example in this was so outstanding that the frequent exhortations he gave Salesians to inculcate these virtues were very effective, especially through conferences and reminders at retreats. He was ever mindful of Don Bosco's motto, 'Work and temperance will make the Salesian Congregation flourish.'¹⁴⁸ Fr. Zerbino spoke similarly. "The instinctive allergy that Fr. Rinaldi felt for any ease or comfort speaks of the heroic degree to which he had taken the virtue of temperance.

¹⁴⁶ T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 21, §§ 72-73.

¹⁴⁷ G. MATTA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 343, § 1183.

¹⁴⁸ T. BORDAS, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 88, §§ 309-312.

Fr. Rinaldi lovingly accepted the many circumstances of his life as a way of mortifying himself and heroically exercising charity. Among many other penances inherent to his office, he rose at 4:30 a.m., spent long hours over 20 years as Prefect General among the narrow confines of the confessional and gave long hours to audiences for all classes of people. He undertook uncomfortable journeys. His weak eyesight made it difficult for him to read the printed material and letters that he needed to read. The common food was not always suited to his stomach. There is also a very rare kind of temperance in which Fr. Rinaldi was heroic, which is temperance in the use of language. His words were always measured, prudent, serene, and capable of calming any agitated spirit. For me, Fr. Rinaldi joins the category of human beings who are more unique than rare, canonized by St. James when he says, ‘Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle.’”¹⁴⁹

A fragile body, undermined by work and illnesses required constant care. Fr. Rinaldi accepted this, but with so much effort! Mortification was customary for him, with its value of expiation and assimilation to Christ the Lord. “Brother Body” deserves little; it is enough to keep him alive and gives wings to his soul to fly and join God in conversation.

10. A perfect religious: *Coepit facere et docere* (He began to do and then to teach)

Chastity: keeping ourselves for God alone, like Mary

Fr. Rinaldi was a model of the convinced and zealous religious who perfectly observed the vows of his Salesian religious profession. He lived his religious consecration in a profoundly consistent way and we must not forget the fact that this was due to the influence Don Bosco had on him throughout his life, starting with his vocation, to which Fr. Rinaldi gave an almost mysterious meaning. At the crucial moment of the decision, he saw Don Bosco surrounded by light.

A “living image” of Don Bosco, which lacked “only the voice,” he was “an angel of purity.” During the many years that he engaged in various apostolates with women, all admired and revered him for his extreme and unimpaired discretion. “He was always modest, composed, and very

¹⁴⁹ P. ZERBINO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 428, §§ 1477-1479. See James 3:2.

correct. We never found anything improper in what he said or did.”¹⁵⁰ A special manifestation of his chastity is that he had to deal continuously with women – sisters, laywomen and girls at the Oratory – and yet no one ever noticed in him “the slightest weakness.” Put positively, “his outward demeanor showed a sense of reserve and purity which everyone noticed. He was constantly dealing with women; there is no doubt that he had a special gift for understanding the female soul. Yet, throughout his life there was never even the slightest hint of surrender to sentimentality.”¹⁵¹ Sister Pavese’s testimony is interesting in this regard. She had been at the Oratory as a young girl. “Even though he was discreetly regular about coming into a female setting, I never noticed anything about Fr. Rinaldi that was not polite or chaste. As he formed us, he instilled this beautiful virtue in us gracefully, delicately and so convincingly that we fell in love with the ideal model of keeping ourselves for God alone, like Mary. Fr. Rinaldi encouraged us to celebrate a *day of purity*, which he suggested be observed annually.”¹⁵² The consequence of this formation was the proposal that he made to the young people to take the vow of chastity, renewed every six months, both for girls who were preparing for marriage and those leaning toward consecrated life.

A very faithful interpreter of Don Bosco’s pedagogy, he educated and protected the innocence of young people and was very strict about sexual education. “This virtue was all the more precious to him because he was of a very sensitive nature and very much loved the souls entrusted to him. For him, this virtue was the fruit of constant vigilance over himself and of an admirable and constant mortification of the senses. Whoever approached him felt the deepest respect for this virtue, which shined in him, and also sensed the simple familiarity that came from the fatherly kindness with which he treated everyone.”¹⁵³ This also led to a pedagogy of chastity. “All his recommendations for the observance of the preventive system had as their special aim to preserve innocence in young people who had not yet lost it, as well as to avoid contagion and relapses in souls that were already victims of evil.”¹⁵⁴

Fr. Antonio Candela put it this way: “He practiced the virtue of chastity in an exemplary manner. As a Salesian superior, both in Spain and in Turin,

¹⁵⁰ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 292, § 1027.

¹⁵¹ P. RINALDI, *Positio, Summarium*, p.403, § 1379.

¹⁵² U. PAVESE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 450, § 1557.

¹⁵³ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 151, § 521.

¹⁵⁴ T. BORDAS, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 90, § 318.

he had the opportunity to bring together women from the aristocracy and women of all classes. I was able to see with what dignity and discretion he did so. In his lectures and sermons he strongly recommended purity. On the occasion of the second centenary of the canonization of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, he wrote a letter in the Acts of the [Superior] Chapter recommending purity. Then he referred to Don Bosco as one who loved the beautiful virtue and was a model of mortification in practicing it, exhorting the Salesians to imitate their father.”¹⁵⁵ In his deposition, Fr. Giuseppe Matta said, “I can attest that the Servant of God also practiced the virtue of chastity in a truly exemplary way. Having approached him several times, I had the impression that he was an angel of purity. From his forever-composed bearing, from his forever-chaste word and from everything that transpired from his words and demeanor, one could see that the Servant of God loved and practiced the virtue of chastity, something he inculcated in others by his very presence.... I recall that at his death, one of the most beautiful praises I heard coming from his confreres was praise for his love of the beautiful virtue.”¹⁵⁶

Poverty: I am very comfortable with it!

Fr. Rinaldi practiced evangelical poverty, expressed in his detachment from the goods and comforts of this world. He sought to avoid any suspicion of luxury in the houses of the Congregation. He confided more in Divine Providence than he did in human wealth and wanted every Province to have at least one house supported exclusively by Providence and that would take in orphans and other poor youth *gratis*. When there were earthquakes in Messina (1908) and Marsica (1914), he wanted the houses to be open to orphans. “Both as Prefect General and as Rector Major, he insistently recommended religious poverty, and never tired of inculcating the habits of properly understood economy among his Salesians. He always wanted buildings to be of the size and with the room required for pedagogy and hygiene purposes, but always sought to exclude any hint of luxury or refinement. He would always ask how much general and scholastic furnishings cost.”¹⁵⁷

After enjoying the well-being of his family, as a religious he wanted to be free of all this. As a Salesian he was a superior for most of his life, but he

¹⁵⁵ A. CANDELA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 190, §§ 664-665.

¹⁵⁶ G. MATTA, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 344-345, § 1187.

¹⁵⁷ T. BORDAS, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 92, § 323.

never wanted or tolerated any special treatment for himself. He practiced poverty as a virtue and a vow, exercising mortification and recommending it through detachment from earthly things and in actual practice. “He was a true example of religious poverty. I have no hesitation in saying that his poverty was heroic even in comparison with the other Rectors Major that I have known. The great poverty of the clothes that Fr. Rinaldi wore as Rector Major of the Salesians always impressed me. His cassock was old and faded, shoes very ordinary, and even despite the improved quality of the day, he wore small round glasses bordered by white metal. His office and his bedroom too had poor and not too comfortable furnishings.”¹⁵⁸

Fr. Peter Ricaldone testified, “He practiced poverty with himself in clothing, in food and in his room. After his death, when we had to examine his room, its extreme poverty edified us. He was detached from money, from earthly things and from comforts. He preached poverty as a virtue more than a vow, exercising it himself in mortification and recommending it.”¹⁵⁹ Fr. Peter Rinaldi, his grandnephew, stated, “Together with my father we saw his room. It was truly poor, so much so that my father had asked him if perhaps he should change some of the furniture, especially to a more comfortable bed and desk, both of which were truly uncomfortable and coming apart. The Servant of God then replied, ‘No, no, I am very comfortable with it this way!’”¹⁶⁰

Obedience: submission of the heart

His obedience was above all submission in a spirit of faith to the holy will of God. This spirit gave him the strength to accept the office of superior which was conferred upon him many times during his life. He also had profound respect for the Rule, that is, the Constitutions, to which he himself was “most obedient.” Thus, he was so faithful to his religious duties and to the spirit of the founder that it was possible to see him as “a mirror of religious perfection.”

He had been exemplary in obedience since childhood and throughout the rest of his life. He exercised it heroically from the time he overcame his doubts and abandoned himself to Don Bosco. “In obedience, the Servant of God was a model from the very first days of entering the community.

¹⁵⁸ P. ZERBINO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 431, § 1487.

¹⁵⁹ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 292, § 1028.

¹⁶⁰ P. RINALDI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 402, § 1378.

He came there in obedience to Don Bosco, and as soon as he entered, he was obedient to Fr. Albera, who was his first Director.... As Superior General, then, he was very observant of the Constitutions. He was always on good terms with authorities both civil and especially religious, and showed the greatest deference toward them."¹⁶¹ In the spirit of faith and of obedience he always accepted the more difficult tasks and any tasks that were assigned to him, despite his feelings of inadequacy.

He understood obedience as "submission of heart, seeking only the glory of God." Among the resolutions he wrote down at various times, we read, "I will submit in a heartfelt way to any superior, seeking only the glory of God. Instead of thinking about how they should command, I will think of how I should obey; and when I must command, I will first try to gain at least as much... [unintelligible] consensus as possible by that Superior who points out the rule to me."¹⁶² And again, "I am a stick in the Director's hands. He loves me; he wants me in Paradise; therefore, I must let him think about it, help me, bring me to Paradise."¹⁶³ He did not simply write down these resolutions; he practiced them in an exemplary and constant fashion, as evidenced by the testimonies.

Fr. Pietro Zerbino outlined Fr. Rinaldi's obedience in some detail. "Fr. Rinaldi's heroic obedience can be seen from the detailed consideration of the various authorities to which he submitted and from the insistence with which he spoke of the need to be subject to the authority of the Church, the Pope, etc.... Fr. Rinaldi submitted first to *Don Bosco*. In his humility he always considered himself unworthy and incapable of being a priest, but with edifying docility and obedience he accepted Holy Orders when Don Bosco told him to. He did similarly when Don Bosco chose him to be the Director of the 'Sons of Mary'. Even subsequent positions, including the highest as Rector Major, he accepted always and only out of love for Don Bosco and the Congregation, overcoming his instinctive repugnance for positions and honors. It is interesting that as Rector Major, not being able to make the prescribed *Rendiconto* to the superior, he went to Don Bosco's casket and there he made his filial *rendiconto* to his Father. Second, to *Fr. Rua*. Knowing him well, the future

¹⁶¹ T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 23, § 81.

¹⁶² Philip Rinaldi's resolutions between 1877 and 1881, *Positio, Documenta*, n. VII, p. 534.

¹⁶³ Philip Rinaldi's resolutions between 1878 and 1879, *Positio, Documenta*, n. VIII, p. 534.

Blessed Michael Rua entrusted him with a difficult mission, sending him to develop the Salesian work in Spain, with these simple words, 'I thought of sending you to Spain.' Even when he was Prefect General, and therefore Fr. Rua's Vicar, he was always very obedient. Third, to Fr. Albera.... When Fr. Albera was elected Rector Major, he who was his Vicar and second in authority among the Salesians, made this point. 'If the superior is happy, I will continue to take care of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the past pupils of the Girls Oratory. But if I need to renounce this, I will do so cheerfully.'"¹⁶⁴ Even as Rector Major he lived and inculcated obedience in particular by practicing the Constitutions. "Most observant of the Rule himself, he fostered love for and observance of it in others. Elected Rector Major, the first spiritual *strenna* he gave the Salesians was this: 'Let us try to imitate the Servant of God, Fr. Rua, in the exact observance of religious life.' I am convinced that the Servant of God was describing himself when he said, 'The Salesian who observes the Rule in detail becomes another Don Bosco almost without realizing it. Around him spreads a very special atmosphere that draws young people to him and makes them affectionate in his regard. He wins the benevolence of good people and the deferential tolerance of the bad ones.'"¹⁶⁵

Where the Church and the Pope were concerned, he always accepted their various dispositions and requests with docility and prompt obedience. For example, when it came to the question of the Director-confessor he recognized that the will of God and the desire of Don Bosco lie in obedience to the will of the Pope.¹⁶⁶ Worthy of note were the many statements, especially in the circular letters, of attachment and absolute fidelity to the directives, references and teachings of the Roman Pontiff, which he accepted and which he wanted all his religious to accept simply and meekly without the slightest discussion, as the first and sure norm for making decisions and putting them into practice. "He was always exemplary in obedience, especially when it came to the Pope,

¹⁶⁴ P. ZERBINO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 433, § 1495.

¹⁶⁵ A. CANDELA, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 191-192, §§ 669-670.

¹⁶⁶ [Editor's note] In 1901 the Holy See decreed that superiors of religious communities were not allowed to hear the confessions of their subjects. This went against the practice of Don Bosco in his lifetime and the impression of the first generation of Salesian superiors that the ability of Salesian Directors to hear the confessions of their community members was an integral part of the Salesian spirit handed on by Don Bosco. Fr. Rinaldi as Vicar General to Fr. Rua helped the Congregation to adjust to the new reality.

ecclesiastical authorities and his superiors.... For him the voice of Don Bosco, Fr. Rua, and Fr. Albera was a command. He was also able to obey the doctor, *propter necessitatem* [out of necessity]. I recall that one day he had already left the room with his suitcase to go to Sicily. The doctor told him that in conscience he could not allow him to travel. Fr. Rinaldi made it clear that it was a commitment he had made and that it seemed to him he could reasonably manage it. The doctor insisted and Fr. Rinaldi obeyed.... He was very observant of the rules. Perhaps no one after Don Bosco put them in a better light or illustrated them and promoted their observance better than he did,"¹⁶⁷ as confirmed by the circular letter he wrote in 1924 for the 50th anniversary of the approval of the Constitutions.

Humility: he saw himself as everyone's servant

Fr. Rinaldi's humility was profound. He practiced it and loved to see it in his confreres, especially when it came to taking on some responsibility and office. "We always saw him humble in bearing, speaking and acting. He had a very low concept of himself and I do not remember hearing him talk about himself. He felt unworthy every time he was promoted to a position.... He always hid his humility by his kindness and gentleness. He was always welcoming, and from his way of acting, it was clear that he considered himself everyone's servant. I would add that his humility was understood correctly and did not prevent him from taking up with due decorum his roles as Director and Provincial, Prefect General and Rector Major. And while he himself practiced humility and all the other virtues, he did not fail to inculcate them in his confreres with loving and strong insistence."¹⁶⁸ Fr. Azzini confirmed, "He was truly eminently endowed with the virtue of humility, which he practiced constantly throughout his life. He never aspired to honors, and he never tried to assert himself. He was so modest and so humble that anyone who had not known him personally, and had seen him, would have considered him the least among the priests of our Congregation. Even in the exercise of his duties as superior of the community, he never made his authority burdensome, but always treated everyone with great and truly exquisite fatherliness, so that everyone in the community went to him with the utmost confidence."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ P. RICALDONE, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 292, §§ 1029-1031.

¹⁶⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 293-294, §§ 1032-1033.

¹⁶⁹ T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 23, § 82.

Humility was “his most precious virtue” and, after fatherliness, his most striking feature and the one that greatly impressed people. This was the case for many guests who arrived at the Oratory in Valdocco and saw the spontaneity with which humble coadjutors and children approached the Rector Major, and the friendliness with which he welcomed them. It was his humble attitude that removed any apprehension. Following the example of Don Bosco, in fact, even as Rector Major he only wanted others to call him *Father Rinaldi*. “The practice of humility came from his constant willingness to consider himself small and never to stand out, let alone dominate others. He always accepted the highest offices of the Society out of obedience, but he would have liked a minor role in the shadow of a novitiate.”¹⁷⁰

He never spoke of himself and tried first of all to renounce the office of Prefect General and then, when in later years his infirmities increased, he wanted to resign as Rector Major, believing that his state of health could affect the government of the Congregation and that it should not walk at his pace.

One of his youthful resolutions was, “I will try to acquire true humility...” and he faithfully kept this in word, deed and gesture. “In all the time that I knew him, he seemed to me to be humility personified.”¹⁷¹ Fr. Pietro Zerbino attested, “Fatherliness and humility are for me the characteristic virtues of the figure of Fr. Rinaldi.... At Fr. Rua’s death, Fr. Rinaldi took on the government of the Congregation in accordance with the Rule. And when the members of the Superior Chapter gathered for the first time after that, he begged them, during the time of *sede vacante* [the vacancy of the office], not just to feel sorry for him, but to assist him with help and advice on the government of the Congregation. And when he was elected Rector Major, after the death of Fr. Albera, he told his electors, ‘This election is confusing for me and for you.’ He also demanded humility from missionaries. ‘We must go on mission with humility to learn from others, bringing our wealth of experience and good will, in order to work and pray. Only the Saints do good.’... His humility also encouraged him to ask those who worked closely with him to correct him. In a letter to the Catechist General, Fr. Tirone, he wrote, ‘There must be rudeness, haughtiness or something boring about my words that irritate others. See what is there, perhaps things I don’t even see, and warn me about them and anything else

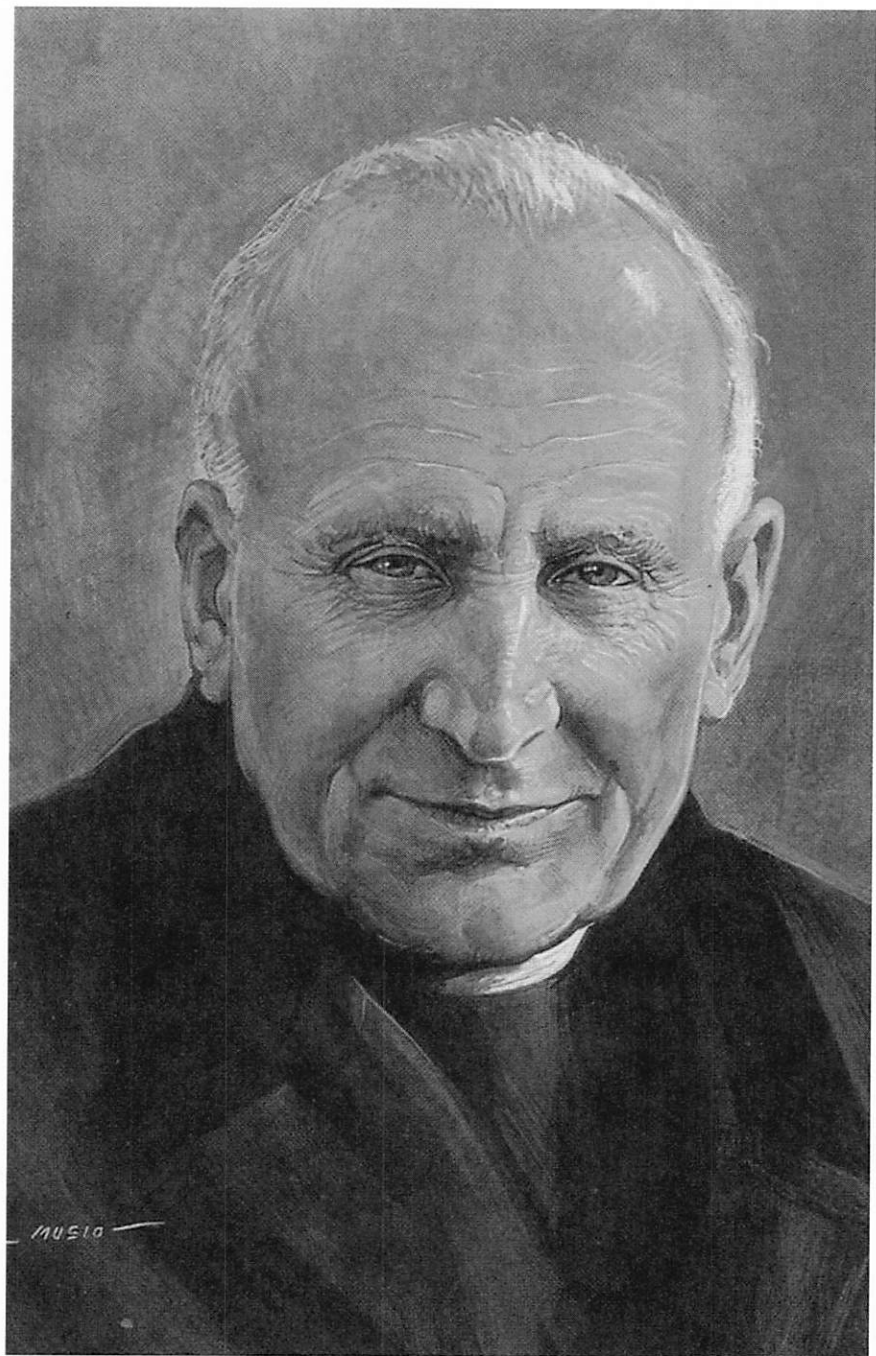
¹⁷⁰ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 155, § 534.

¹⁷¹ E. VALENTINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 525, § 1815.

so that I am not here recommending charity and union to everyone else, and ruining things with those closest to me. I expect this charity from you, that you will tell me what you need to tell me, without fear of upsetting my own self-respect, which needs to be humiliated.’ ... Fr. Rinaldi also had the appearance of a humble man. He wandered the corridors and courtyards slowly, recollected, eyes cast down as if he were the least of the house, yet he was the first! He was always ready to pause if anyone wanted to talk to him or even just kiss his hand.”¹⁷² Fr. Giuseppe Matta said, “The Servant of God was always most humble despite being honored with important tasks and responsibilities. I never heard him speak of himself; he loved to hold the least positions. In many of his addresses, as well as in his annual letters, he referred all the good achieved by the Salesians to the Lord, to the goodness and protection of Our Lady, to the inspiration of the founder. There was no danger that he would praise his own work; indeed, he would have preferred his prodigious efforts to be ignored.”¹⁷³

¹⁷² P. ZERBINO, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 434-435, §§ 1499.1501-1502. 1503. 1508.

¹⁷³ G. MATTA, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 346, § 1193.



Chapter Three: A Very Special Testimony

1. Sister Maria Lazzari, Foundress of the Missionary Sisters of the Passion of Jesus

Maria Virginia was born in Turin on June 6, 1885, into a very religious family, the eldest of three children. She was only ten years old when her father, transferred to Portici for work, died of an infection. Her mother, a very cultured woman, raised her children and passed on healthy Christian values and an excellent education. Virginia graduated and continued her university studies, having Fr. Philip Rinaldi, third successor of Don Bosco, as her spiritual director from the age of twenty-one. To support her family, she worked as an employee in the State Railways although she felt the call to consecrated life. Fr. Rinaldi suggested the Secular Institute of the Daughters of the Heart of Mary. She entered in 1909 with the religious name of Margaret Mary of Jesus, a name she kept for the rest of her life. In 1912, she took her vows and in the same year, having won a competition, she began her school career as a teacher and secretary. First, she went to Camerino, then she was transferred to Pinerolo, then to “Rosa Govone” Teachers College at Mondovì and again to Pinerolo. From 1917 to 1923, Virginia taught at “Berti” Teachers College in Turin, and then moved to “D’Azeglio” Liceo (High School). On December 5, 1931, her confessor, Blessed Philip Rinaldi, died, and three years later her beloved mother. Virginia was already living with vows in secular society with a profoundly Christian spirit for twenty-four years when she was left with no family. In her free time, she was at the Cottolengo or other institutes teaching, free of charge, or visiting the poor, to whom she brought assistance but above all, the word of God.

As early as 1922, Fr. Rinaldi had recommended that she pray for a great mission for which she was destined. He spoke to her about it from time to time without being able to specify what it was. Finally in Lent during the Holy Year 1933, while at the Visitation Monastery, she received a package of holy pictures depicting the Holy Face of Jesus. She understood that her calling was to spread devotion to “An Hour with Jesus during the Hours of His Holy Passion.” She had it printed and distributed, getting her many acquaintances to commit to the devotion, and thinking that she would entrust the Work to a religious institute. In July 1933, she met the Provincial of the Passionists and spoke to him about it. In the autumn of

1934, she turned to the Sisters of Nightly Reparation in Florence. In January 1935, however, an inspiration came to her unexpectedly, as if dictating to her to write a “plan” that she presented to the Handmaids of the Holy Trinity in Padua. It went nowhere. She came to know Fr. Alessio Magni, a Jesuit, who after careful examination told her, “I do not agree with you trying to entrust this to others. Go to Turin and start this Work by bringing together young women who show signs of a vocation.” Virginia then wrote in her memoirs, “I understand that to act differently would be contrary to the Divine Will and yet feeling my own insignificance so deeply, I place myself completely at God’s disposal.” She had nothing, not even a place where she could bring possible companions together. She had always rented lodgings near religious institutes. At the time she usually stayed near the Tertiary Carmelite Sisters in Pozzo Street. Providentially, one day she came across a small book dedicated to the Passion written by Fr. Giuseppe Petazzi, a Jesuit from Trieste, whom she succeeded in contacting. They came to a mutual agreement to spread the booklets and the holy pictures.

In December 1935, she wrote a meditation in preparation for a period of probation and a formula of admission. On Christmas night she carried this out privately in the church of the Visitation, and in the morning, repeated it with three friends in the Chapel of the Shroud. It was the beginning of the Work. By May 31, 1936, Pentecost Sunday, she moved with the little furniture she had to a house in the center of Turin. The nascent congregation, the result of Providence, began to be known, counting among its supporters the Servant of God Bishop Giovanni Battista Pinardi, Auxiliary Bishop. The first aspirants arrived, while Virginia began to travel to carry out her mission. At the beginning of August, she went to Rovigo where she stayed with some relatives, then to Brescia. On September 30, 1936, Cardinal Maurilio Fossati received her in audience and gave her encouragement. On December 5, the Statutes of the Missionaries of the Passion of Jesus were approved, and two days later the Decree of Erection as a Pious Union was issued.

The small community immediately received many requests for collaboration from priests and bishops. They came from Navasa di Limana near Belluno, from Padua and Trieste, and from that Jesuit whom she knew. For these reasons, Virginia asked to teach at an institute in that city. At the time, her salary was their only sure source of income. She would finish her school career three years later.

By the end of 1936, it was possible to acquire a house in Villanova near Mondovì, thanks to a Salesian Sister who was a friend of the late Blessed

Rinaldi. It was dilapidated but suited to their financial possibilities and by happy coincidence, stood on a hill called Monte Calvario. This is their current Mother House. They were years of great sacrifice but lived in a Christian way. Mother Margaret was the mother and teacher, counselor and confidante of everyone. Their poverty was great, but their enthusiasm was of equal measure. Requests for help multiplied. The first came in autumn of 1938 from the parish priest of Chiusa Pesio who had spent years looking for Sisters to open an orphanage. Others followed, and Mother Margaret responded as she could, overcoming enormous difficulties and driven by the awareness of the good that they were doing. This was during the Second World War which painfully affected the house in Trieste. This house, purchased thanks to the generous help of a noblewoman, allowed the apostolate to spread to the most marginalized in the peripheries. But it saw the birth of a group of dissident Sisters led by a Jesuit. It was her "trial by fire." After so many difficulties, in 1942 Mother Margaret, with the help of the Servite Fathers, was forced to close the house. Those who remained faithful to her testified to her words. "Take care that you overlook every offensive word we may have received and do not hold a grudge against anyone, because otherwise your heart dries up and you paralyze the most delicate feelings of charity."

Three years later an extraordinary event happened, almost as a response from on high to the apostolic zeal of the Work. On her way to Mondovì by train, a burst of machine-gun fire mortally wounded one of the most talented Missionaries, Sister Carla De Noni. She was rushed to a hospital but near death, and Mother Margaret stayed with her. Inexplicably, she survived, but on April 26 she was taken to the Mother House so that she might die among her Sisters. There was no hope, humanly speaking, but Mother Margaret, having gathered the community together, asked them to pray, seeking the intercession of Fr. Rinaldi, of whom she had a handkerchief as a memento. She gave it to poor Sister Carla who, to everyone's amazement, showed sudden improvement. After escaping death, she had to undergo about twenty short and very painful operations to extract the bone splinters in her face. Her jaw remained disjointed because two centimeters of bone were missing and her tongue hung loose. One afternoon, Sister Carla fell asleep, and when she woke up, the bone was healed, as shown by the x-ray. The miracle sealed the beatification of Fr. Philip Rinaldi in 1990.

The institute quickly prospered in Piedmont. Mother Margaret, who from 1942 had accepted the care of the Retreat House for the Diocese of Mondovì, opened a free nursery school in 1947. From 1949, she was

responsible for the Casa Alpina in Balma di Frabosa for poor workers, and three years later she was entrusted with the Men's Hospice in Mondovì, which was about to close. She accepted by sending the only nuns she had at home to help her. In 1958, it was the turn of Marina di Finalpia (Savona), and in 1960, the retirement home at Piozzo. On many occasions, and there were hundreds of them, she had to say no; that it was absolutely impossible. In the last two years of her life, Mother calmly prepared herself for death. On May 15, 1961, she left with some of her Sisters for Lourdes, and on July 14, she was at Villanova for the last time. She retired to Turin and died peacefully at dawn on December 12. The solemn transfer of her remains to the Mother House at Villanova Mondovì took place in 1964.

2. Testimony of Mother Maria Lazzari

“My name is Maria Lazzari, daughter of the late Giovanni and Chiara Giuditta, and I was born in Turin on June 6, 1885. I am the Superior of the Pious Union of the Missionaries of the Passion of Jesus. I am a registered teacher. I live in Villanova di Mondovì where the Mother House is.

I met the Servant of God in unusual circumstances. Wishing to find a confessor in keeping with the needs of my spirit, I prayed to Mary Help of Christians to obtain such a grace for me. In the early days of September 1906, I had the inspiration to go to the Church of Mary Help of Christians to make my confession; but not with the intention of looking for a regular spiritual director, because the Sanctuary was too far from my home, which was close to the Salesian Church of St. John the Evangelist. At the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians I turned to the sacristan to call a confessor for me. A venerable priest came, the Very Reverend Fr. Philip Rinaldi, then Prefect General of the Pious Salesian Society. I went to confession to him, and immediately knew that I had come across someone completely given to God. I felt very good about this. From time to time I returned there, but then I became convinced that it was worth the expense of crossing the city every week to receive direction from that holy priest who showed that he had been chosen by Mary Help of Christians to look after my soul.

I spent more than twenty-five years of my life under the guidance of the Servant of God. During that time, I always saw in the Servant of God a true master of spirit, and as everyone called him, including the priest in charge at Mary Help of Christians, Fr. Roberto Riccardi, another Saint John Bosco, a confessor and ideal director, a saint of unparalleled virtue....

I am convinced that the Servant of God practiced every virtue in a truly eminent and exceptional way. His humility, charity, patience, purity and spirit of poverty shined most remarkably. Admirable was his zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. He was completely dead to himself and to all earthly things.

The Servant of God was goodness personified for everyone. He was a true father to all, though not expansive by nature, not mushy, and a man of few words. He was always poised, composed, very cultured, and respectful of anyone in every situation. I saw him approach small boys, listen to them kindly, and treat them with expressions of fatherliness, virtually with respect and heartwarming interest. He was always compliant, especially if he could do a favor or render a service to someone. One day, while I was waiting to speak to him, a poor elderly lady asked him for a note of introduction and recommendation. But she was never happy with the form used by the Servant of God; she had him do it and redo it several times, until, with an expression almost of subservience and great goodness, he said to her, "You tell me what you want me to write, and I will write it."

In 1910, a very good young man fell ill, and the Servant of God mentioned to me how desolate his poor mother was. She was also in serious financial straits. He showed a strong desire for me to raise some money among the people I knew to come to the aid of that poor family but without naming names. When I brought it to him, he thanked me with deep gratitude.

In December 1918, he also came to our house, where my mother, my brother and I were suffering from influenza, commonly known as the Spanish flu. When he heard that we could not find some Sisters to come and keep an eye on us, he went, found, and sent us the mother of an Oratory girl whom he asked on other occasions to provide the same service to other sick people. That same evening, we saw the good lady arrive, and we admired the great charity and solicitude of the Servant of God. Since my mother and I were quite seriously ill, and therefore unable to seek help when my brother died on Christmas Day, he offered to send, and in fact did send, two young men to prepare the body. I believe they were Salesian Brothers. During my illness, after going to confession, I told him that I was afraid of dying. He gave me courage, and told me to be at peace, that I would not die, but that I would still have many things to do.

During that time, not only did he visit us, but he also visited and comforted many other sick people, taking a fatherly interest in their needs, and helping them according to his possibilities.

Following the example of St. John Bosco and above all the Divine Master, he did good for everyone, lavishing the treasures of his charity, which was fatherly, all-embracing, and inexhaustible. You can say that he was able to understand all kinds of sorrow and alleviate all kinds of miserable situations. Whether people were rich or poor, adults or children, he welcomed them all with great kindness, showed them great understanding, and gave them all the help that was possible. He did everything he could for everyone, not just as a father, but as a humble and devout servant. He showed respect to everyone and would never allow the least word that might discredit a neighbor or point out a neighbor's faults, minimal though they may be.

He recommended shaping one's heart according to the Heart of Jesus himself; and he was a faithful copy of this. I can testify that he sought only the good, the greatest possible good, and he wanted good to be done well, as he so often recommended. He looked after every soul and every matter that was entrusted to him as if he had nothing else to bother with.

In the direction of souls, he was both firm and gentle. He knew how to make piety loveable; he showed the exercise of perfection to be easy and desirable. And he encouraged the practice of the most robust virtues. He led souls to God almost without them realizing it and knew how to instill ardent devotion and love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians. He supported the working of grace in them and did not anticipate it in the sense that he knew how to wait for God's right moment. He led everyone to the perfection of the state to which he or she was called, not according to his own personal views, but according to the particular plans of Divine Providence.

Everyone misses his exquisite and saintly fatherliness, and many agree that we can no longer find another Fr. Rinaldi.

You could say that the constant exercise of virtue had become second nature for him. In every circumstance he was seen to exercise the most outstanding and heroic virtue, without effort, without showing any disgust or struggle, as if the stirrings of human passions did not exist at all in him, so much was the calm, the peace, the smile that infused his face. He was always serene, always fatherly, always friendly and good.

The Servant of God was able to discern spirits, so that the souls who were under his guidance felt secure. He understood everything. He often read my heart and knew what I was not telling him. In various circumstances he proved that he knew the future perfectly and many of the things he announced before his death came true after he soared to Heaven.

Nine years before his death, in July 1922, he recommended that I pray and prepare for a great mission. He spoke to me of this mission several times over the course of the nine years, making it clear that I would have to do this work very well. In fact, a few years after the death of the Servant of God, our Institute came about, without my thinking about it, and I could not explain how.

In various circumstances, the Servant of God showed that he knew things that were unknown to anyone else. Among others, the Servant of God once went to the Salesian Institute in Milan. While he was there, I absolutely needed to talk to him, but no one knew this. I went to Milan for a few hours and went immediately to the reception area in the Salesian Institute to ask for him. In fact, he came to the parlor, and since I showed my surprise at finding him at home, he replied that he was waiting for me. Wondering about this I asked him how it was possible that he was waiting for me, as even I did not know I would be coming, since it was a sudden thing. He told me in all simplicity that during the morning he had felt that I would certainly come to talk to him that day.

I went often to pray at the tomb of the Servant of God to ask for his help and graces, and I noticed that other people, not belonging to the Salesian Society, were also praying at his tomb, attracted by his reputation for holiness and by the desire to obtain his valuable protection.

While he was alive, I saw a true model of the priest, religious, spiritual director and superior in the Servant of God. Many people with whom I spoke shared this opinion. He had received most precious gifts from God and through his constant correspondence to grace he produced marvelous fruits of goodness for the benefit of souls. After the Servant of God's death, his reputation for holiness certainly did not stop. On the contrary, it has been growing among those who knew him.

I never read or heard anything against the general reputation for virtue and holiness that surrounds the memory of the Servant of God. It seems to me impossible to find any fault regarding his holiness of life and virtues, having demonstrated by his life that he was someone well beyond all human miseries.

Deeply convinced of the holiness of the Servant of God, after his death I had a Salesian close to him give me some items that belonged to him, that I may keep them as a precious relic for any eventuality.

I understand that many people recommended themselves to his protection, intimately convinced of his holiness. I personally had recourse to him in

various circumstances, and through his intercession, I obtained a great many graces. For some time, I had the beginnings of a cataract in my left eye. The ophthalmologist said it was caused by long work under electric lights. I had something like a fog in my eye that often prevented me from seeing clearly. When I approached the Servant of God's bier, that illness disappeared in a moment, as if by magic. I recall that I had told him about my poor eye while he was still alive, and that he had told me to stay calm.

A few months after the Servant of God's death, while I was at school, I realized that I had lost a document of great importance. After looking for it for a long time without success, I turned with confidence to the Servant of God, that he might give me the grace to find it again, even though I really did not know where to look for it anymore. As soon as I finished my brief prayer, I saw a piece of paper falling to the ground in the middle of the school grounds, as if someone had thrown it down there. I was alone in the classroom. I got up immediately to collect the paper. I cannot tell you with what emotion and gratitude I collected the document I so much needed and for which I had so unsuccessfully searched.

More important are two facts that I consider truly miraculous. The first took place in our Girls Orphanage at Chiusa Pesio in the summer of 1940. A little girl named Rita Dadone, who attended our recreation center, contrary to the repeated warning of one of the Sisters, took advantage of a moment when she was not watching, clung to a seesaw while it was still moving and had a bad fall, breaking her leg. You can imagine how upset the Sisters and her parents were. She immediately received the care she needed and her leg was put in a cast. But after the prescribed time, when the doctor removed the plaster in the Mondovì clinic, he noticed that the leg had not healed. A surgeon from Turin visited the girl and ordered an x-ray. He then declared that the bone was out of place, that he had to operate, and that whatever happened the girl would remain lame. One can imagine the pain of the family and especially the father's anger. Our Sisters were very saddened by it. That evening they did not have dinner, but they immediately went to the chapel where they spent most of the night in prayer, begging the Servant of God that he might obtain from the Lord the grace that everything would go well, and the girl would not remain lame. They promised that if they received this grace, they would inform the Salesians. The next day was set for the operation. Before proceeding with the operation, the surgeon wanted to redo the x-ray of her leg; and to his great astonishment he found it healed, perfectly healthy and the same length as the other leg. Of course, there was no more talk of surgery. With a sense of deep gratitude, the Sisters thanked the Servant of God. We sent

a report on the miracle to the Very Reverend Fr. Ceria, a Salesian. I do not know if the fact has been taken into consideration, but Rita Dadone always had a perfectly healthy leg, and it has now been ten years.

The second miraculous event happened as follows. On April 20, 1945, Sister Maria Carla De Noni, born Caterina De Noni, a Sister of our Institute, was on the electric railway that connects Villanova to Mondovì. She had been asked to bring a considerable amount of food to the partisan leaders hiding there. They had almost reached Mondovì when three airplanes suddenly appeared and zoomed in to attack the railway. Our Sister was severely wounded; her lower jaw was smashed and dislocated, she received two serious puncture wounds to her left lung, and one to her arm. Her condition immediately turned out to be very serious; she had to receive the Last Rites while being transported to the clinic. There we expected her death at any moment.

Immediately, we had recourse to prayer to the Servant of God. After some days there, we brought her to our Mother House at Villanova Mondovì. On April 27, toward ten o'clock in the morning, she was at death's door and the doctor had already declared that there was no more hope. I remembered having a handkerchief that belonged to Fr. Rinaldi. I went to get it and entrusted it to Sr. Celina who brought it to the dying woman, while I ran to the community to tell the other Sisters that Sr. Carla was dying and that we would have to go to the chapel immediately to pray for the intercession of Fr. Rinaldi to bring about a miracle. Then, I went deeply upset to Sr. Carla's bedside.

When the Sister placed the Servant of God's handkerchief on the dying woman, Sr. Carla told us that she immediately felt herself pulling away from death. She felt great relief, and, with gestures since she had been hit with machinegun bullets and was no longer able to speak, to our amazement, asked for a drink. We offered her some milk, which she was able to drink. From that moment on she improved. In a short time, the scars closed and the flesh and missing skin on her face grew in a truly surprising way. But the jawbone was still missing, so her mouth could not be closed, her tongue hung loose, and Sister could neither speak nor eat. Sometime later, Sister Celina, who stayed with her, said to her, "You will see, Sister Carla, that Fr. Rinaldi does not do things by halves, and your bone will also grow back." In fact, after a few days, one afternoon Sister Carla fell asleep and slept peacefully for an hour and a half; when she woke up, she felt something hard in her mouth. She unwrapped the bandage, touched her chin, and noticed that the bone in her jaw had grown back. From that moment on she felt completely cured; she could close her mouth, talk, feed

herself, and resumed her normal life. The Curia at Mondovi has begun the Process for investigating this miraculous healing.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ M. LAZZARI, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 303-312, §§ 1063-1089.



Sketch by Antonietta Parrucci, 1977

Blessed Philip Rinaldi and founding members
of the Secular Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers

Chapter Four: Fr. Rinaldi, Founder

You can say that Fr. Rinaldi was a true prophet. He gave life to the Association of Zealous Promoters of Mary Help of Christians, whose members clearly had an orientation toward secular life, and which has today flowered into the Secular Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers. This he did more than 30 years before the Church would begin to speak officially of Secular Institutes.¹⁷⁵

In many ways, he was a man of his times and conditioned also by the theological and ascetic language of the era. For example, he attributed the adjective “religious” to a state of life that he himself really wanted to describe as being “non-religious.” Today, especially after Vatican Council II, we describe it better with the adjective “consecrated.” Yet, it is likewise true that in many other things, Fr. Rinaldi anticipated and went beyond his times, something especially true – keeping on topic – with regard to the concept of “secularity,” not so much in juridical and lexical terms but certainly in terms of its substance. He went well beyond the “sociological” notion of secularity to something that touched on a theological understanding of it.

¹⁷⁵ With the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* of February 2, 1947, on the Feast of the Purification, a brief history of the “states of perfection,” from Religious Orders to Congregations and Societies of Common Life, was first outlined. As a final step, it introduced into Canon Law a new category of institutions of lay people (and regular priests) consecrated to God, giving it the title of “Secular Institutes.” It was a decisive step, an achievement that gave a juridical foundation and a place in the Church to a new form of consecrated life in the midst of the world. On March 12, 1948, Pius XII issued the *Motu Proprio, Primo Feliciter*, which not only clarified *Provida Mater*, but on some points offered the key to its correct interpretation. If *Provida Mater* offers the juridical foundation of Secular Institutes, *Primo Feliciter* talks about the life of their members. A few days later the decree *Cum Sanctissimus* was issued by the Sacred Congregation of Religious, which is a kind of official commentary on the directives concerning Secular Institutes.

Speaking of the founding of the Salesian Association of the Zealous Promoters in his work *Beato Filippo Rinaldi, vivente immagine di don Bosco (Blessed Philip Rinaldi, Living Image of Don Bosco)*, Fr. Luigi Castano presents it in a chapter that significantly bears the title, *Fondatore in penumbra (Founder in the Shadows)*. He put it this way: “Fr. Rinaldi came to conceive of and implement a new form of consecrated life in the world and to establish the beginning of an Institute that today recognizes itself in him and honors him as its inspiration and father. One could say that this was the most intuitive and personal work of the Servant of God, even if it is true that he wanted to remain with Don Bosco’s ideal, attributing what he did to the Founder. If initially it might seem a simple derivation of his spirit, in reality this was not so. Rather than sharing in the mission of his Father and Teacher, Fr. Rinaldi aimed to broaden his work, spread his aspirations and increase the vitality of the Salesian Family tree. In fact, looking at things now in light of history, he managed to emulate and completed the figure of his great model, and has gained citizenship among the creators and initiators of new religious associations in the Church. That is to say, he understood and anticipated the path that led to *consecrated secularity* to uplift and sanctify the world. This was completely new to the Salesian spirit, which was enriched by an intuition of such quality.”¹⁷⁶

1. Fr. Rinaldi, an adult vocation attentive to secular life

The family environment in which he lived until he turned twenty undoubtedly played a decisive role in the formation of his personality. There, the daily presence of women, his mother and his sisters, marked his sensitivity and ability to relate calmly and positively with the world of women. “In family life, under the firm and loving care of his mother, and in contact with four brothers and two sisters, the Servant of God learned to know and appreciate women. The living and energetic model was his mother who was diligent in everything, concerned with educating her children in a Christian way, forgetful of self so she could be all things to all of them, ready for sacrifice without complaining, ever serene and composed, rich in virtues and wise teaching.... In a conference he gave to the oratorians at Valdocco on the mission of a woman, Fr. Rinaldi could not give her better praise by saying, ‘I thank God for having given me a strong mother, a wise mother, a holy mother!’ Along with his mother there

¹⁷⁶ L. CASTANO, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

were his sisters, the eldest of whom, Philomena, was his godmother at Baptism, and for whom he always had special respect and affection. She reciprocated this affection and respect so much so that she was seen several times going to confession to her brother. It seems a small thing, but, in general, the boy who grows up in a family with sisters, rather than only with brothers, acquires a particular mindset. His personality seems to become more complete, as his strength becomes gentler from a sense of chivalrous protection toward those who are weaker than he is, while the kindness and grace of his sisters affect his emotional and moral formation. This is also relevant for Fr. Rinaldi's understanding of the psychology of women. [We have seen] the extent to which Fr. Philip was a master in this difficult field where the apostolate often encounters almost insurmountable difficulties, and certainly finds, along with greatly satisfying experiences, many risks and sharp thorns."¹⁷⁷

Already during his time in Spain and especially in the years when he was Prefect General, Fr. Rinaldi showed himself to be a man of great creativity, attentive to interpreting the needs of society, and a promoter of numerous groups and educational, apostolic and social activities. It is worth remembering that the nursery that formed the new shoots of the Salesian Family tree, as a result of Fr. Rinaldi's apostolic zeal and prophetic energy, was the small but very lively world of the Girls Oratory at Valdocco of which he was the Director. Under his guidance and direction, over a few short years a real constellation of initiatives and foundations was created for the spiritual and material benefit of the girls, and it became an expanding universe of which Fr. Rinaldi was not only the driving force, but its mind and soul. We are referring to the Girls Oratory at Valdocco in Turin, opened by Don Bosco in 1876, when he called the first Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to Turin from Mornese and found lodgings for them in poor rooms near the cradle of Salesian works.

In order to grasp fully the novelty and openness with which Fr. Rinaldi approached the world of women, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the century, with a mentality so far removed and closed by comparison with today's. Even in his conferences to the oratorians and members of various women's groups, he showed no fear of novelty when he simply addressed such topics as engagement, marriage and married life, work and involvement in social life. Likewise, in the many activities and initiatives

¹⁷⁷ L. LARESE – CELLA, *Il cuore di Don Rinaldi. Terzo Successore di S. Giovanni Bosco*, L.I.C.E. – R. BERRUTI, Torino, 1952, pp. 6-7.

that he gave rise to and animated, he knew how to respond dynamically and in an original way to the needs of the times. He perceived the traits of the feminine soul, valuing women for their potential and in every aspect of their lives.

Already in 1905, before his appointment as Director, he had suggested establishing a small Mutual Aid Society among the oratorians. The members paid modest monthly fees and in case of illness were entitled to be helped. Fr. Rinaldi observed that these subsidies “were not alms, but grants due to them by right, according to the Regulations.” The auditing of the accounts was carried out periodically before all the parties concerned.

In 1906, he managed to set up a group of Patronesses to defend young female workers in the Valdocco district and its surroundings. Under the title of ‘Friends of Working Women,’ they were ladies from Turin who used the influence of their social position to protect and help young female workers, especially if they attended the Sisters Oratory.

From 1907 until his election as Rector Major in 1922, he was the animator and Director of the Girls Oratory, and the promoter of activities and associations aimed at the spiritual, cultural and social good of the young women who frequented it. They became more than ever regular attendees, happy to support and follow him in his proposals and undertakings. In particular, his catechesis, his preaching and his conferences touched the hearts of his listeners and from the very outset, Sisters and girls began to take notes and record what the Director was offering and presenting, appreciating the inner richness and deep Salesianity that distinguished him.

In 1911, at the first Past Pupils Congress of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Fr. Rinaldi had grasped the desire of some who were closer to the Institute and who, while remaining in the world for reasons sometimes independent of their own will, wanted to integrate themselves into the Salesian Family. They wished to live the spirit of Don Bosco and exercise, to some extent, the works characteristic of his apostolic zeal. For Fr. Rinaldi, accustomed to weighing matters carefully and sensitive to the aspirations of souls, this group of past pupils soon recalled Don Bosco’s plan to have “External Members” as part of the early draft of his Constitutions. The Roman Curia’s overseers had discarded this idea as a novelty that did not fit with the traditional forms of religious life. In actual fact the two projects – the one the Saint initially had and this innovative one that the past pupils were planning – were not destined to be associated

with one another, because of the difference in the forms of life being considered. One was the simple life of Christians, the other of people who took vows and came together in association. However, the request in 1911 was an invitation to the Salesian Society to pass on Don Bosco's spirit in a new and openly religious way among lay people destined to remain in the world. A sketch of some Regulations was also drawn up, but it was not followed up because it "did not correspond to the needs of souls who were to live in the world." Fr. Rinaldi sensed the meaning of what was maturing and followed a true path of discernment in the Spirit, marked also by misunderstandings and difficulties, which however did not distract him from his purpose and the search for God's will regarding this new form of incarnating the Salesian charism.

2. Salesian Association of Zealous Promoters

On October 3, 1916, in agreement with three young women from the Oratory at Valdocco who were his spiritual daughters, he submitted a Statute (a set of regulations) in seven points to Fr. Paul Albera, Rector Major. The elements of consecrated secularity clearly emerged from these points. In his presentation, Fr. Rinaldi spoke of a "tenor of life," of a "flow of ideas," evocative images that speak of something which is the source of something else, orientating it, accompanying it in harmony with the spirit of Don Bosco. He wanted to link its members to the Salesian Cooperators, underlining the lay character that must distinguish them; but he also wanted them to be consecrated women. Moreover, in the fourth point he indicated that their field of action must be the family and society, where in accordance with their state they should give good example and take part in works of public charity and devotion. They should also commit themselves to disseminating wholesome printed materials and showing special care for young people in need by giving them spiritual or material support. Finally, he pointed to the Salesian connotation of this new vocation. In this first draft of the Regulations, we already find all the elements of consecration, secularity and Salesianity that, once developed and enriched, would flow into the final set of Regulations of the Zealous Promoters of Mary Help of Christians making them the seed that became the Salesian secular institute now known as Don Bosco Volunteers. Fr. Rinaldi proceeded with caution and prudence. It is interesting to note that in the various comments and presentations over those years, he used the expressions "in accordance with your state," "in accordance with your circumstances" and the like, terms he used insistently both when he spoke about vows, and when he illustrated their life of prayer and apostolate. In

short, they were to understand and live their entire life in an atmosphere of authentic “secularity” with all its legitimate needs, unlike the needs of “religious” life.

After Fr. Albera gave his approval to the project, the milestone for this incipient group of consecrated persons in the world was laid on May 20, 1917, during the novena for Pentecost and at the beginning of the triduum for the Feast of Mary Help of Christians. They were three *Daughters of Mary*, Maria Verzotti, Francesca Riccardi and Luigina Carpanera, cornerstones of a “Society of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Secular Life.”

In the historic first meeting that marked the founding of the Institute, Fr. Rinaldi stressed many elements that indicate not only a spiritual journey, but also the features of secular and Salesian consecration. After having called them by name, he addressed them in words that one can truly describe as both foundational and programmatic at the same time. We offer some of the most significant passages from this address as one of the first members, Luigina Carpanera, recorded them.

“For a long time, the Very Reverend Superiors have been receiving several invitations to establish a Society of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in secular life. Different persons have felt this desire to unite themselves more closely to D[on]. Bosco, to live by the same spirit, to perfect themselves and to carry out the same work that the Salesians do, but in secular society.... The superiors have always welcomed these wishes all the more because this was something that Venerable Don Bosco truly had in mind and had been planning. In the report that he himself wrote regarding his work, he spoke of two distinct classes of people, observing the same rule, one would form Communities and the other would live in the world, fostering in it, through practical activity, the spirit of the Congregation. Perhaps Venerable Don Bosco would have carried out this project had not the volume and extraordinary spread of his work completely taken up his time and effort. This was the period between 1875 and 1880; and this is the reason why, later on, there was no mention of a work that he really had in mind to do. However, the superiors will study the ways and means of being able to start this work. Indeed, the Very Reverend Father Director added, after the three of you visited the Very Reverend Father Albera for the third time, in which you explained your wish, he spoke to me about it, expressing his very real interest in starting a new good work.... We begin this work in obscurity, and we will begin with the three of you here. You will unite morally in the same spirit, will strive for perfection above all in a specific practice of prayer, but in

accordance with the spirit of the Venerable Don Bosco, that of much simplicity, no complications. No one must know what is maturing in your heart; just continue to be as you are. The Sister who lives in community can more easily practice works of piety because a fixed schedule regulates them, but you will have to do them when and as you can. Yet it is essential that there is order, union and uniformity of prayer for you, too. First of all, study well the spirit of Venerable Don Bosco, and be diligent and orderly in the practices of piety which will be the same as the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, but somewhat reduced. Namely, attend Holy Mass daily, then, later, say the prayers of the good Christian, do ten minutes of meditation, recite the Holy Rosary. You can use the Holy Rosary as a preparation for Holy Communion, and meditation as thanksgiving or vice versa, whatever you think best. You should not omit meditation without a serious reason; even just five minutes, because it is in recollection, in inner silence that you hear the voice of God and form the religious soul. The same goes for the other practices of piety, that is, going to Holy Mass and Holy Communion every day. In the afternoon, you will make a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, during which, if you can, do a little reading and then be recollected for a moment. If it happens that you neither have time to make this visit nor read, briefly recollect yourself in the evening in your room before going to sleep and bring yourselves in spirit to the Church at Jesus' feet in the Blessed Sacrament, and in this way make your visit and do your reading at home.... Another practice of piety is to make a day of retreat once a month. Choose a day of the month, a Sunday if possible, to recollect and meditate a little more on some points, especially concerning your inner life, making resolutions and intentions to improve yourself. Sanctify this day as if it were the last day of your life. Each year make a Retreat of at least three days. In the world, practice the virtues that you will certainly acquire through a more perfect life, working and making yourselves available to do the greatest possible good, always in accordance with the spirit of Venerable Don Bosco. But I repeat, much simplicity in any of your works or practices of piety. You are but a few, only three of you, but that does not matter. The works of the Lord are born in poverty, humility and take shape in silence. It is better to have a few but with a good spirit; it is better to have a single shrub, but with a strong and healthy root, rather than many scattered ones with weak roots. Be silent, call no one to follow you; your good example will suffice. Be united among the three of you; form one heart, one soul. There are three of you;

this is the perfect number, for three also are the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity.”¹⁷⁸

Fr. Rinaldi concluded his address by expressing his pleasure at the fact that the first meeting took place on the eve of the triduum for the Feast of Mary Help of Christians and during the novena in preparation for Pentecost. He asked them to pray that the Holy Spirit might enlighten the superiors.

In July, Celestina Dominici and Giovannina Peraldo were added to the first three; and in November, Caterina Borgia and Teresa Salassa. The yeast had begun to have its effect. However, there were also moments of difficulty due to misunderstandings and attempts to change the nature of the group. Fr. Rinaldi asked the Rector Major in all humility if he should continue in his task of animation and direction of the Girls Oratory and indirectly of this small group, but Fr. Albera confirmed him in his role and reassured him in his mission. Consequently, throughout 1918 and 1919, Fr. Rinaldi continued to prepare the young women for the kind of life that they intended to lead in the world as consecrated women in the spirit of Don Bosco. In the meantime, following directions from John Cardinal Cagliero, he drew up the Regulations of the Salesian Association of Zealous Promoters, outlining the elements of consecrated lay Salesian life. The first seven made their professions on October 26, 1919, in the chapel next to Don Bosco's bedroom, as if to signify that it was an offshoot of the tree of the Salesian charism that had now germinated in a new form of life. Cardinal Cagliero received these “first fruits” in the presence of Fr. Rinaldi. On January 29, 1921, Fr. Rinaldi wanted this first group of consecrated young women to have a lay council as well, a clear orientation toward lay autonomy.

It is worth recalling the words that Fr. Rinaldi addressed to the Zealots in June 1922, a few months after his election as Rector Major. The occasion was the Feast of the Sacred Heart, the central reference point for pastoral charity, the core of the Salesian charism to which these consecrated women were called to bear witness in the world.

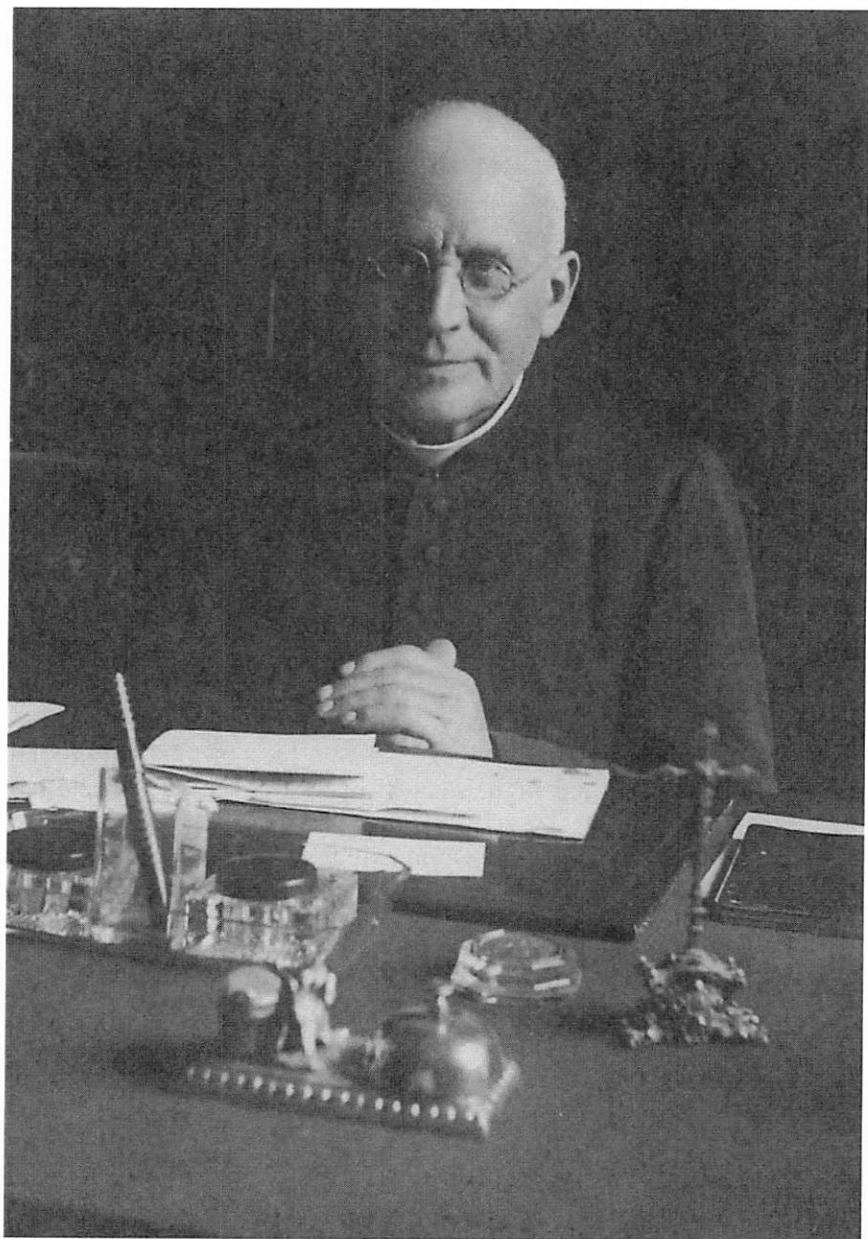
“Do everything possible to you. The Lord did not use the great ones of this earth, nor the philosophers, nor those with doctorates, nor kings, to

¹⁷⁸ ISTITUTO SECOLARE “VOLONTARIE DI DON BOSCO,” *Documenti e testi*, V, “Quaderno Carpanera.” Le conferenze spirituali di don Rinaldi alle Zelatrici di M.A. (1917-1928), Roma 1980, pp. 1-7.

propagate His teachings, but poor fishermen and with them He converted the world, He spread His Gospel. The Lord chooses the humble to make it clear that it is not we who do things, but He who is at work. He uses the lowliest things to obtain the best results and make His power shine forth. It is enough on our part to follow His desires, get to work and let Him guide us, because we are small and capable of nothing. Cooperate, therefore, in working with all your strength, raising up your heart to God, trusting in Him, doing good for souls. May it be an awakening of true piety that corresponds to your mission, not to live according to your taste but to cooperate in doing good everywhere and always. Don Bosco, because he was convinced that he was seeking only the glory of the Lord, said that one always and everywhere does good as much with pious people as with sad types. And you, wherever you find yourselves, be true Daughters of Don Bosco, in workshops, factories, offices, in the streets, among the crowds. Never fail to live up to your goal. Be always of equal temper, consistent with yourselves, your feelings. Be pious, serious, and zealous. Work with simplicity and candor, without ostentation, like Our Lady and as worthy Daughters of Don Bosco, expressing your piety, and comforting others with your good, gentle, charitable words.¹⁷⁹

Fr. Rinaldi continued to accompany and spiritually direct the new association in his fatherly and reserved style, always remaining in the shadows, like the good and faithful servant who has done his work. The Church has recognized him as the founder of what, over time, would be the Secular Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers (1959), the embodiment of a project of consecrated life in the world with the spirit of Don Bosco.

¹⁷⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 150-151.



Courtesy of Salesian Central Archives – Photographic and Audiovisual Archive
Fr. Philip Rinaldi at his desk

Conclusion

In Fr. Philip Rinaldi we have a very pertinent example of a religious and holy life. He generously spent his life not only in the performance of hidden and humble tasks, but also in the office of superior with serious responsibilities involving the Congregation, the Salesian Family and the Church. He was superior for almost his entire priestly life (1883-1931), and for the last thirty years, he was part of the highest level of government of a very large religious Congregation in full development and expansion. He reconciled the firmness of authority with the fatherly goodness that everyone recognized. In government, he was a faithful custodian and transmitter of the authentic Salesian spirituality originating from Saint John Bosco. The authority he wielded did not make him dizzy. He was *humilis* (humble) before he was *fortis* (strong), and it was from his humility that he would draw the arguments most likely to shake up the lukewarm, bringing them back to the love of Salesian consecrated life; and all this in the critical period of the first generations after the death of the founder. He knew how to live as a perfect religious, in continuous union with God, with a profound spirit of theological faith, love and hope. He was humble, hardworking and serene in all circumstances, generously sacrificing himself for the good of his Institute, the Church and souls. He was a superior given to the exclusive service of God. He sanctified himself by governing and giving everyone, confreres, members of the Salesian Family and men and women of the Church, the model of the consecrated religious, priest and apostle.

He did not do extraordinary things, but the way he acted was certainly extraordinary. A priest with a great interior life, he was modest and humble, a man of exceptional judgment and practical criteria. He had a goodness and fatherliness that manifested in all his acts and a strength and ability to work that defies explanation, especially considering his often precarious health in the latter days of his life. His style of action showed a keen sense of realism and concreteness. When accepting new vocations he would jokingly see if their hands had calluses to guarantee good workers for the Lord's vineyard. At Don Bosco's school and following his method, he saw to piety, charity and hard work. "To preserve vocations, he used to say that if it was a question of morality or defects contrary to religious life, one had to be inexorable. Instead, if it was a question of other shortcomings, it was necessary to tolerate and correct them. He was very

keen on the suitability of supporting personal inclinations that were in no way contrary to religious life.”¹⁸⁰ He was very understanding and fatherly in the discernment of vocations, above all when he was dealing with young persons who were not exactly ill but were not giants of health. He always had at heart the care of vocations and formation of new generations, encouraging vigilance in accepting novices, being strong in formation, prudent with admissions and sending away the superficial and fickle.

His innate, realistic attitude and total inner integrity made him a free and frank person when speaking and acting and, if necessary, in resolving situations. For example, “He encouraged a girl who had a true vocation to remain at home with her already elderly father, and he did not allow her to enter the Institute until her father married again by his own decision, thus having the necessary assistance.”¹⁸¹ When girls were unemployed, he became interested in finding work for them. Similarly, the numerous organizations he founded had the main purpose of forming wise and capable women, who would become true spouses and mothers. He used to say that “good domestic training of women is the best safeguard for good order in the family and that a well-maintained home is also loved by her husband. Because he feels happy, peaceful and at ease at home, he no longer thinks about deserting the family and looking for hangouts and entertainment.”¹⁸²

He brought the same clarity of vision in the area of prayer. For example, he had no difficulty in having children say or sing Vespers in Latin. “Yes, it’s true that they don’t understand anything about these prayers and these hymns, but... *supplet Ecclesia* [the Church supplies], that is... it’s not the individuals who pray, but the whole mystical body of the Church that lifts up its arms in prayer to the Lord.”¹⁸³ Also, with amazing Christian realism, he spread the practice among young women of a vow of chastity renewable every six months, to form tomorrow’s healthy Christian families and to prepare consecrated women who would be totally dedicated to their vocation and mission. In dealing with others, be it in ordinary social relationships or spiritual direction or in the government of the Salesian Society and even when strenuously defending human rights in the courts, he was always transparent and firm. “He was frankness personified. Not

¹⁸⁰ C. GENGHINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 209, § 725.

¹⁸¹ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 146, § 504.

¹⁸² *Ivi*, p. 104, § 362.

¹⁸³ A. CANDELA, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 177-178, §§ 613-614.

only did he abhor any untruth, but we could say that he was clarity personified.”¹⁸⁴

From what has been said, it follows logically that his character was extremely balanced, sensitive to both its own shortcomings and those of others, and to the smallest virtuous act. Witnesses are unanimous. “Already by nature he was a person with a calm, balanced and serene character. He had further perfected this through vigilance and prayer.”¹⁸⁵ Besides, “his outstanding characteristic was the beautiful gift of equilibrium and reflection; he was above all remarkable for his profound humility.”¹⁸⁶ The result was a strong human and religious impetus to urge even the most rebellious to the heroic practice of virtue. “His words, full and overflowing with fatherly kindness, great simplicity, but great conceptual depth, and always suited to the people who listened to him and to the circumstances, descended with full effectiveness on those who listened to him.”¹⁸⁷ On one occasion, he seemed to be hard, even rude toward a woman whose constant gossip was compromising the peace and good name of the group. “Remember that you can go to hell even for the language!” he told her, while on another occasion he seemed really angry. It concerned a poor fellow whose conduct had made a very bad impression among the young people.

A finely chiseled summary of the interior and Salesian profile of Fr. Rinaldi comes from the biographer, Fr. Peter Rinaldi, his grandnephew. “In my opinion, the characteristics of the Servant of God are his deep interior life and dynamic activity accompanied by great fatherliness.”¹⁸⁸ Rightly so, his serenity and imperturbability of character were the feature most noted and most appreciated by witnesses. Fr. Rinaldi is a treasure of spirituality and virtue, an exemplary and sublime figure in every aspect, “a genuine saint” as Cardinal Maurilio Fossati, Archbishop of Turin, described him, and “a saint of the first order,” in the judgment of his great friend, Archbishop Evasio Colli, who came from the same place and was Archbishop of Parma. He was a perfect example, and not only for Salesians, of how religious can and should be faithful to the charism of their founder, as reflected in the lives of the surest interpreters. His was a

¹⁸⁴ T. AZZINI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 21, § 71.

¹⁸⁵ *Ivi*, p. 20, § 67.

¹⁸⁶ T. BORDAS, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 77, § 271.

¹⁸⁷ T. GRAZIANO, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 127 § 433.

¹⁸⁸ P. RINALDI, *Positio, Summarium*, p. 398, § 1362.

soul totally inspired by God, intent on living his consecrated and priestly life to the full in simplicity and serenity of spirit.

As a “*man of God*” he distinguished himself for the generosity with which he aimed at the perfection of holiness, living completely and only for God, from his youth to the end of his life. From his intimate union with God flowed an imperturbable serenity and calm spirit, a tireless zeal in promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and the religious sense which always inspired him in the face of challenging responsibilities of a superior.

As an “*apostle*” he went out to meet the men and women of his time with that special characteristic of goodness that made everyone recognize him as a “beloved Father.” With an inexhaustible variety of good initiatives, he showed a boldness and faith that led him to undertake great enterprises especially in the missionary field, fully in accordance with the needs of the new times.

Years later, his holiness still towers and we can witness the exceptional results of the service he rendered to the Church through the Salesian Congregation and the groups of the Salesian Family, in particular those he founded. Among all those who gravitate around Don Bosco’s Family and beyond, his reputation for holiness has not only established itself, but it is continually growing, as shown by reports of graces, the continuity of his works and the interest shown in his person.

In the years following Vatican Council II, during which the Church urged religious institutions to revive the spirit of the founder, we look to Fr. Rinaldi as the one who most faithfully interpreted and continued it. He can be therefore, for the new generations, a point of reference and virtually a bridge that links us to and leads us back to Don Bosco.

His holiness is a convincing stimulus of sanctification for the People of God. Priests and consecrated individuals will be able to look to him in the present difficulties of their life and mission as a guide and model who was able to harmonize an intense interior life with the dynamic ardor of the apostolate.

Recalling what has been said and written about Blessed Philip Rinaldi, and in particular based on the Procedural Acts leading to his beatification and the testimonies and documents, we can say that we find ourselves before a wonderful figure of a man, a Christian and a Salesian priest. He was an apostle and founder worthy of being proposed to the faithful for imitation. His canonization will not only be of great importance for the Salesian

Family, which will feel encouraged and impelled to work ever more and ever better in the vast field of its mission. It will also be the reason for a more intense Christian life for all the faithful, to whom Fr. Rinaldi has left an indelible legacy of deep and profound Salesian spirituality, which will contribute to a very significant increase in vocations to consecrated, priestly and lay life.

Fr. Rinaldi offers a form of very simple, coherent, attractive and lovable holiness. It is not a type of holiness that reveals itself in extraordinary events, but through an entirely heroic life. He aimed at the constant search for good, acted in constant fidelity to his duty, and lived in perfect control of himself in the midst of all the great and small difficulties of daily life. Characterized by his enlightened wisdom of government, prudence in acting, charity and firmness, and by the unparalleled fatherliness of his being, he was a superior exclusively at the service of God.

Fr. Rinaldi's holiness shows itself under the banner of his fidelity to the figure and spirit of Don Bosco, of whom he was a worthy disciple and original continuation. He was the third successor of St John Bosco to lead the Salesian Society, after Blessed Michael Rua and Fr. Paul Albera. In the almost ten years of his being Rector Major, the Salesian Congregation achieved the rapid spiritual and cultural development of its members, who increasingly committed themselves on a worldwide level to the delicate areas of educating young people and the missions. In over 50 years of Salesian religious life, he distinguished himself as a faithful interpreter of the spirit of Don Bosco and a mirror of his heroic virtues.

On April 1, 1934, Easter Sunday, Don Bosco, founder of the Salesian Congregation, was canonized. There followed, on October 29, 1972, the beatification of Fr. Michael Rua, his first successor. On April 29, 1990, Fr. Philip Rinaldi was beatified. Without doubt, this is an important fact which redounds to the honor of the Salesian Family and, at the same time, highlights the profound spirituality impressed on the Congregation by the founder and kept alive by his immediate successors. Fr. Rinaldi followed completely in the spiritual wake of Don Bosco, who enlightened him in his vocation, helped him overcome his uncertainties, followed him with special care, respected him and prepared him for the important tasks that he then entrusted to him.

We conclude with a spiritual portrait of Blessed Philip Rinaldi offered by Salesian Fr. Guglielmo Viñas Pérez. Born in 1879 in Auiga (Huesca) and died in 1956 in Barcelona, he was a witness at the Information Process held in Barcelona in Spain.

“I would like to attempt to sketch out a poor and humble profile of Fr. Rinaldi, not a complete one. That would be too difficult a task, if not an impossible one since it would mean embracing every aspect. I will speak of Fr. Rinaldi in his forties, Fr. Rinaldi in Salesian Spain, which represents the period in which we lived with him and had the best of relationships with him.

“In physical terms, he was a great fellow! Just look at his photographs. In Spain, in the language of the people, we called him a good and very graceful lad!

His face was very pleasant! Full of fatherly goodness and distinction.

His eyes, glasses slightly tilted, were a secret, like a magnet for most of those who knew him. Only after many years did they realize that one of those eyes was blind!... But everyone could enjoy the fatherly and attractive glances that gently penetrated to the depths of souls...who were immediately captivated!

In prayer he seemed immersed and as if he were talking to God; it was intimidating to distract him, call him or pass on some errand to him.

In his zeal for the education of young people he was a true apostle and in forming his confreres he was a Don Bosco. In his dealings with the Salesians, he was a father.

His gentle, mild and pleasant smile was contagious, not because he burst forth into great laughter, which was not his style, but because seeing their father happy and satisfied made his children rejoice and be happy.

Abrupt gestures or strong manners were not part of his character, he was always gentle and at the same time calm.

His words were few rather than too many! He did not waste words. From his mouth all gathered their manna, what was for them, what they needed, what apparently came to them as inspired or prophetic language.

His outward demeanor was elegantly simple and dignified, always virile without being jarring. He attracted through the magnetism and fragrance of his virtues.

His deep humility and abandonment to God made him intrepid in his exploits... and Salesian Spain took off from there!

All his virtues, lived with burning zeal, were bright stars which reached the heights of the Saints, but his fatherliness was an undying sun. Under that sun we all felt good, confident, captivated... children!!

With him we felt protected. We had nothing to fear.

Undoubtedly and overall, this is what our glorious Patron, St. Francis de Sales, must have been like.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ G. VIÑAS PÉREZ, *Positio, Summarium*, pp. 373-374.



Courtesy of Salesian Central Archives – Photographic and Audiovisual Archive
Fr. Rinaldi with young missionaries of Manfredini di Este
in October 1929

Chronological Overview of the Life of Blessed Philip Rinaldi

May 28, 1856

Born at Lu Monferrato (Alessandria).

October 15, 1861

Sees Don Bosco for the first time, passing through Lu with his boys.

1856-1877

Secular life at Lu Monferrato (Alessandria).

1866

One year in the Junior Seminary at Mirabello. Meets Don Bosco twice. At year-end, returns to the family.

October 1877

Goes to Sampierdarena, Genoa to the house for adult vocations.

1877-1879 Completes his secondary education.

September 8, 1879 Novitiate at San Benigno Canavese.

October 20, 1879 Clerical investiture.

August 13, 1880 Perpetual profession.

1880-1883

At San Benigno Canavese for theological studies.

1882

September 17 Tonsure and four minor orders at Biella from Bishop B. Leto.

September 23 Sub-diaconate at San Benigno from Bishop B. Leto.

October 8 Diaconate at San Benigno from Bishop E. Manacorda.

December 23 Priesthood at Ivrea from Bishop D. Riccardi.

1883-1889

Director of adult vocations at Mathi and St. John the Evangelist, Turin.

1889-1892

Director of the Salesian House of Barcelone-Sarriá in Spain.

1892-1901

Provincial of the Salesian Houses in Spain and Portugal.

1901

Fr. Michael Rua appoints him Prefect General (Vicar) of the Congregation.

1904

Confirmed as Prefect General by the 10th General Chapter.

1910

Re-confirmed as Prefect General by the 11th General Chapter.

April 24, 1922

Elected Rector Major, third successor of Don Bosco, by the 12th General Chapter.

December 5, 1931

Dies in Turin.

Cause of Beatification

Fr. Rinaldi's cause of beatification and canonization had a singular beginning. His successor, Fr. Peter Ricaldone, who was with him for 20 years, said at the time that he had doubts about the convenience of promoting it. He explained that Fr. Rinaldi "did not let anything extraordinary shine through in his person" and that before taking the initiative, he had been waiting for an extraordinary sign which would impeccably demonstrate the will of the Lord to glorify his Servant. Fourteen years after Fr. Rinaldi's death, the sign came, and it was a resounding one. In 1945, Sister Carla De Noni, a Sister of the Missionaries of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, founded by Mother Margherita Lazzari, spiritual daughter of Fr. Rinaldi, was attacked (it was during the Second World War) in a bombing raid and among other injuries, suffered a smashed and partially torn lower jaw. Following the application of a handkerchief belonging to Fr. Rinaldi, her jaw unexpectedly grew by a few inches, allowing the Sister, who was in the throes of death, to gain back her life.

1947-1953

Ordinary Process in Turin with twenty-two witnesses, all *de visu* (interviewed in person) and all favorably. Of the witnesses, eight were Salesians and six Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Added to this list were a religious, Foundress of the Pious Union of the Missionaries of the Passion of Jesus, a diocesan priest, three laymen and three laywomen.

1949-1950

Rogatory Process in Barcelona with twenty witnesses, all *de visu*.

February 19, 1956

Decree of Approval of the Writings.

June 11, 1977

Decree of Introduction of the Cause.

1980-1981

Apostolic Process in Turin. Since those from the Ordinary Process had died, all but one of the 22 witnesses was *de visu* and knew Fr. Rinaldi especially in the last 15 years of his life.

June 25, 1982

Decree of Validity of the Processes.

1985

Examination by the Historical Commission.

October 14, 1986

Special Congress of Theological Consultors.

December 23, 1986

Ordinary Session of Cardinals and Bishops.

January 3, 1987

Decree of Venerability.

March 3, 1990

Decree of Recognition of the Miracle.

April 29, 1990

Pope John Paul II beatified him in St. Peter's Square in Rome.

Prayer for Canonization of Blessed Philip Rinaldi

O God, Father of infinite goodness,
who called Blessed Philip Rinaldi,
Third Successor of Saint John Bosco,
to inherit his spirit and works
and to initiate several charismatic undertakings
in the Salesian Family,
in particular the Secular Institute
of Don Bosco Volunteers;
grant that we may imitate his goodness,
apostolic resourcefulness
and tireless energy sanctified by union with God.
Grant us the graces which we entrust
to his intercession.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

For information and to send notice of graces received

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About the Author

Fr. Pierluigi Cameroni, born on December 27, 1955, knew the Salesians from when he frequented the Salesian school in Vendrognio (LC), his native place.

He professed as a Salesian of Don Bosco on September 12, 1976, at Pinerolo (TO) and on June 23, 1984, was ordained a priest at Arese (MI).

On May 24, 2007, the Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chávez, appointed him World Spiritual Director of the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA), founded by Don Bosco, a post he held till 2021. On July 6, 2010, Fr. Chávez appointed him Postulator General for the Causes of Saints for the Salesian Congregation.

He has published various spiritual and hagiographic works among which are *Don Bosco un cuore che vede* (Elledici 2006) and *Come Stelle nel cielo. Figure di santità in compagnia di don Bosco* (Velar 2015).



FR. RINALDI

Good Father and Humble Servant of All A Spiritual Profile

Fr. Rinaldi was born in 1856 at Lu Monferrato in the Alessandria area of Northern Italy. After his ordination as a Salesian priest in 1882 he became director of the Sons of Mary, today called pre-novices. He then went to Spain where he spearheaded a large expansion of the Salesian works. Called back to Turin in 1901, he began a 20-year period of apostolic and administrative activity as Prefect General.



He instituted the World Federation of SDB Past Pupils and of FMA Past Pupils. He supported the work of the Salesian Sisters, promoted Salesian Cooperators and founded the Zealous Promoters of Mary Help of Christians, known today as the Secular Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers.

In 1922 he was elected third successor of Don Bosco as Rector Major of the Salesians. He died in Turin in 1931. St. John Paul II beatified him on April 29, 1990. His remains rest in the crypt of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians.

Saints are more than just our intercessors. They accompany us above all in our pilgrimage of holiness by their witness and present to us a fluorescence of the living and faithful God who walks beside us in our history and loves us with the tenderness of a Father. Fr. Philip Rinaldi, living image of Don Bosco, is one of these.

Fr. Pierluigi Cameroni's precious text outlines a profile that highlights the great spiritual strength of our Blessed that makes him a true mountaineer of the Spirit.