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**FR. NICHOLAS LO GROI, SDB**

*Flamma Ardens et Lucens*

# Introduction

I am happy to present the Obituary letter of Rev. Fr. Nicholas Lo Groi, sdb a happy and holy Salesian Priest, who in his last days was a member of the community of Don Bosco School Park Circus, where he himself had been a rector. Fr. Lo Groi had almost all his life been a formator, most of which was spent in Salesian College, Sonada engaged in training Salesians for the future who would occupy positions of responsibility in the Church and in the Congregation. During the long 30 years at Sonada he assumed various responsibilities of Assistant, Professor, Prefect of studies, Catechist, Principal, Rector, and Confessor. Later at Don Bosco Vidyaniketan, Kalyani he involved himself in the formation of Salesian Brothers. He had a keen interest in the formation of other groups of the Salesian Family too, especially the Salesian Cooperators and Past Pupils. He held positions of responsibility in the province and in the Congregation as Rector, Novice Master, Vice-provincial, Provincial and Extra-ordinary Visitor. As an expert on Salesian spirit and charism, he was often called upon to take classes, conduct workshops and seminars, preach retreats and animate General Chapters, by congregations of sisters belonging to the Salesian Family. Probably his last contribution to the Province was his monumental work, *History of the Kolkata Province of St. John Bosco*'.

It is not easy to sum up the life of an extra-ordinary Salesian like Fr. Lo Groi, who had been one of the makers of Salesian South Asia. The first part of this presentation is autobiographical drawn mostly from the diary of Fr. Lo Groi. The second part contains an appraisal of his person and his contribution. I want to thank Fr. Tomy Augustine and the community of Salesian College, Sonada for helping to compile the obituary letter, which without their research and hard work, would not have been complete.

**Fr. Siby Vadakel**  
Rector & Principal  
Don Bosco School Park Circus

## **FR. LO GROI Nicholas S.D.B (1922-2010)**

Date of Birth: 18 February 1922, Cammarata, Sicily

Father: Francis Lo Groi. Mother: Ursula Lo Groi

Brothers: Salvatore, Giuseppe, Pietro

Aspirantate: 1933-37, Pedara, Catania

Novitiate: 1937-38, San Gregorio

First Profession: 02 September 1938

Post Novitiate: 1938-39 San Gregorio - Catania

1940-41 Salesian College Sonada

Practical Training: Assistant of Aspirants, Sonada 1942

Concentration Camp: 02 December 1942 to 18 October 1946, Deoli & Dehra Dun

Perpetual Profession: 15 August 1944, Dehra Dun

Theological Studies: 1943-48, Deoli, Dehra Dun, Shillong

Ordination: 03 October 1948, Shillong

### **APOSTOLIC ASSIGNMENTS:**

Salesian College Sonada: 1948-66 (Prefect of Studies, Catechist, Rector, Principal, Confessor)

Doctoral Studies (Philosophy): 1951-53 PAS, Turin

Don Bosco Park Circus (Rector): 1966-68

Vice-Provincial: 1968-70

Novice Master: 1970-72, Sunnyside, Shillong

Provincial: 1972-78

In-charge of On-going Formation: 1979-82, KJC, Bangalore

Salesian College Sonada (Rector): 1982-88

Bishop's House Krishnagar (Confessor & Sp. Director): 1988-94

Salesian College Sonada (Confessor & Professor): 1994-99

Extra-ordinary Visitor (Province of Madras): 1995

Provincial House (Archivist & Historian): 1999-2004

Don Bosco Vidyaniketan Kalyani (Confessor & Professor): 2004-08.

Don Bosco Park Circus (Confessor): 2008-10

Died: 14 March 2010, Apollo Gleneagles Hospitals, Kolkata

## Memories

***My Early Years:*** I was born on 18 February 1922 at Cammarata, Sicily. The loving eyes of my father Francis Lo Groi and my three elder brothers Salvatore, Giuseppe and Pietro surrounded me as I lay in the warm embrace of my mother Ursula Lo Groi. Not withstanding the winter of 1922, I was christened a day after my birth, Nicholas Lo Groi. I had no sisters. When I was barely four years old, tragedy struck the family; my father left me for his heavenly reward on 13 February 1926, leaving me nothing but a hazy memory of him. My maternal uncles and especially my two elder brothers, Salvatore and Pietro, took the place of my father. My second eldest brother, Giuseppe, born in 1916 died in August 1932. My father's brother Joseph was against my mother and brothers and we were not on talking terms. It was only after my ordination to priesthood and when I was visiting my family back from India that we were reconciled at my initiative.

As a boy I had a kind of rickets, more due to malnutrition than to any real sickness. So I used to gather the eggs that I could find at home and my mother prepared beaten eggs with some wine and sugar which later restored my health and the perfect use of my legs. At the age of six I was send to the primary school. Even in winter, not withstanding the cold, rain and snow, I never missed school. I frequented the 'ASILO' of the Salesian sisters who prepared me for my first communion, sowing in me the seeds of Salesian vocation. I did well the five years of primary school and at the end I went to the Salesian aspirantate of Pedara, at the foot of mount Etna, about 15 kms from Catania. After completing the four years of Secondary school I went on to the Novitiate in San Gregorio (Catania) and made my first profession on 2 September 1938 at the age of 16 and a half.

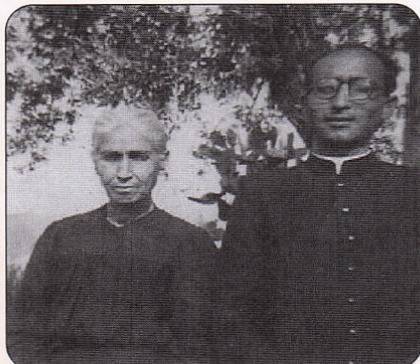
***My Missionary Dream:*** I did not come to the missions from a missionary aspirantate, such as Ivrea. I began my initial formation in Sicily as I had my aspirantate and my novitiate in Pedara and San Gregorio respectively. All the four years of my aspirantate and almost all through the novitiate I never dreamt of coming to India. Like practically all my companions, I was only thinking of becoming a Salesian for the province of Sicily. It was the last month of the Novitiate (1938) that

Rev. Fr. Scuderi, the then Provincial of Assam and Administrator of the diocese of Krishnagar, came to visit San Gregorio where he was very well known by the whole little town as he had been a very successful youth worker in the Oratory and where he had been Assistant of the Novices, one of whom was my Novice Master Fr. Gerolamo Giardina. Fr. Scuderi was on his way to Turin for the General Chapter of 1938. In the evening he gave us a very inspiring Conference on the Assam Missions and on the diocese of Krishnagar. He was a wonderful speaker and at one point he started singing 'Chiro dhonna', a very popular Bengali hymn. I was simply taken up and began to think of India. I went to the Novice Master and told him, "Father, I would like to go to India." He replied "Well, Fr. Scuderi is now in Turin for the General Chapter, but surely he will come again to wish us before going back to India. When he comes back, go and speak to him."

On the morning of 2 November 1938 Fr. Scuderi was back in San Gregorio. Seeing him in the refectory for breakfast I decided to follow him on his way to his room after breakfast and so I did. While going another of my companions, Bro. Naselli, was also following us. I was not happy because I wanted to meet Father alone. He probably thought the same about me. When I reached the room he put his hands on both of us and said, "Come in, both of you have the same idea. You have to write to the Prefect General, V. Rev. Fr. Berruti, who is in-charge of the Missions, not now, but in March next year. That is the time when he begins to organize the next missionary expedition due to leave in October 1939. Don't tell anything to the Provincial; Fr. Rector, and Fr. Novice Master know, that's enough". I wrote and received a short typed reply from him with all his pieces of advice and asking me to wait for the end of the school year. We were both doing the first year of Philosophy. In June 1939 the school year came to an end. It was followed by a Retreat and the holidays. During the Retreat we were all going to meet Fr. Provincial. When I came out after meeting Fr. Provincial, Bro. Naselli asked me "did he tell you anything?". I said - "No". And when he came out from the talk I asked him "did he tell you anything?" He also said "No". The following day when I was half way

through the Way of the Cross, a companion told me “Fr. Provincial wants to speak to you”. I went and when I reached the open door of his office, he raised his eyes from his paper and asked. “Did you ask to go to the Missions?”. “Yes” I replied. “You have been admitted”, he dryly retorted. Those who had just finished the first year could go to the Provincial and ask the permission to go home to visit the parents. I too asked the permission. My plan was to go home not merely to visit my people at home, but to go and wish people before leaving for India. When I reached home I found my mother sick in bed. I did not wish to give her this shock when she was sick and so I waited till she began to get up. I told her “Mama I am going to India”. It was definitely a shock for her, but she did not say anything against it, nay, after a little silent pause, she said, “My son, if you feel that this is God’s will for you, go.” But as soon as this was made known to the other members of the family, my brothers, uncles, aunts etc., I found a wall of opposition, especially from my two brothers, and in particular from my brother Pietro. Nobody had a good word for me. But I had the permission of my mother and that was enough for me. To Peter I told at one moment “this is my business!”. Whenever I went home for my holidays he was saying “don’t go back, remain here”. Even just before he died when I went home to celebrate his 90th birthday, he told me “you have made a big mistake!” I replied “we shall see who made the mistake”. He died just 10 days before his 90th birthday. I was present at his funeral. At the end of the Mass I gave him my last farewell, ‘my dearest Pietro, I was here to celebrate your 90th Birthday, not to be present at your funeral. What have you done?’ I could not continue, and I started weeping. But now he must have realized who made the big mistake.

*Fr. Lo Groi with his mother  
Ursula Lo Groi*



## *My Arrival on the Shores of India:*



*The Italian liner,  
Conte Biancamano, that  
brought Fr. LoGroi and his  
companions to Bombay  
on 05 December 1939.*

Three of us from Sicily, Fr. Rosario Stroscio, Fr. Antonio Duca and I left for India on 24 November 1939 by ship, the beautiful Conte Biancamano, from Naples. On the same ship we found our new companions, Bro. Venturini, Bro. H. Fantin, and Bro. Mario Porcu who was coming to make his novitiate, all meant for North India, and Bro. M. Casarotti and Fr. Arduoso meant for South India. There was also a group of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, among whom were Sr. Josephine and Sr. Cleofe, meant for South India. Other Salesians and FMAs meant for the Far East, and Japan were also travelling with us. We reached Bombay on 5 December 1939. The young Fr. Maschio came on board to help us out. He was also coming to collect a new set of Band which was coming on our ship. He played a good trick on us, newly arrived, by serving us hot and spicy food which made us remain with our mouths wide open. Soon after lunch he arranged for us tickets to Calcutta with a stop at Nagpur. There, one group of us going out visiting the city, happened to pass by a Seminary, and met a German priest who knew Italian as he had studied in Rome. This was our Salvation. He would be travelling with us at 10.00pm till breakfast the next day. In the morning before leaving us, he had us invited to breakfast by the station master who was his friend. Back to the train we reached Howrah station next morning but we remained on the train, not realizing we had reached. After some time a middle aged Fr. Uguet hurried down the platform and seeing us told us "Come down!" "But we are going to Calcutta!" we replied. "But this is Calcutta!" We reached Calcutta on 8 December 1939, feast of the Immaculate Conception. As there was no festivity at the Provincial

House, he invited us to go with a young man, Rapati to Liluah where the feast was celebrated. Fr. Attilio Colussi was Rector and Parish Priest. He was conducting the Choir and Fr. Zannini Francesco gave the homily. But we understood not a word. Later Fr. Luigi Ravalico invited us to affix stamps on *Don Bosco In India*, a magazine of which he was the Editor. After lunch we went back to the Provincial house, rested a bit and in the evening we left for Siliguri. There we took a taxi which took us to Salesian College Sonada on 9 December 1939. During the holiday months of December, January and February we were given a series of classes in English for we were asked to join the College in the new academic year. Bro. Duca, Bro. Fantin and Bro. Stroscio joined the first year intermediate I.A. As I had done a year of Philosophy in Sicily, I was asked to join the second year I.A. Fr. Dal Zovo was the English professor. In the I.A books I could count the words I understood, not those I did not understand. Fr. Dal Zovo was regular in asking the lesson to all of us including me. I began by saying a few words in English and then switched to Italian. "English, English!", demanded Fr. Dal Zovo. The first 4 months were real martyrdom for me. But I thank Fr. Dal Zovo, for I would have never managed to master the language otherwise. At the first exam, I managed to pass in all subjects, also in English - Of course my English was worthy of publication!



In the next two years I completed my second and third year Philosophy along with Bro. Borghi and Bro. Pierluca under the care of Bro. Camposta. Fr. Marengo was our Rector and Fr. Dal Zovo Catechist and Prefect of Studies. As we, the Italians, could not go out of the house because of the war all the three of us were made Assistants and Teachers of a group of 18 Aspirants. I had altogether 22 periods of class, besides the band and music practices for them.

***My Memoirs of the Concentration Camp:*** From 10 June 1940, when Italy also entered the War at the side of Germany, all the Italians of Salesian College were confined to the premises with a number of restrictions, the main one, not to move beyond one mile radius of the College. In practice we could not go down beyond the road because the Manager of the tea garden would not allow us to go down beyond Hope Town and Margaret's Hope. We could go up to Sonada, to the villa of the PIME Fathers, now the Holy Cross Convent, and down to the Lovers' Park. Up the mountain above the college, we could go up to any place because at that time there was no one living there, and we were freely going everywhere for the two years we were living in the college doing our studies of Philosophy and I.A. Programme.

At the end of November 1942 we were intimated by the Darjeeling Police to get ready to be taken to the Concentration camp. On 2 December 1942 we were taken to the Concentration camp at Deoli in Rajasthan where the Italians and Germans of Assam had been interned already from August 1942. A few days after our arrival in Deoli, also the Italians of the South were taken together with their professors and Provincial Fr. Cinato who became the Provincial of all the Italians. In March 1942 we were all shifted to the Concentration camp at Dehra Dun. There Fr. Scuderi and about 20 Salesians were already interned together with other religious, Capuchins, Dominicans with Bishop Cialao of Multan and others. We were very happy to have our Provincial Fr. Scuderi. But our joy was of a short duration as Fr. Scuderi was taken away to a parole camp near Bombay and Fr. Cinato was made the Provincial of all the interned Italians and Germans. We were very sad to lose our Provincial and those of the North did not find easy to adjust with Fr. Cinato.



*Fr. Lo Groi with some of his companions  
Fr. Venia, Fr. Paviotti, Fr. Stroscio.*

The whole group of Salesians were divided into two communities. The Priests and the Brothers with Fr. Bachiarello as Rector, and all the students with Fr. Peter Meliga as Rector. In March 1943 there were about 600 inmates in Wing No.3 which included 300 civilians and 300 religious. The Salesians alone were about 140. Soon the Government prepared a smaller camp for about 150 Religious. Either the Salesians alone could be there or all the other Religious. The civilians asked the Salesians to remain in Wing no. 3 to give a little life to them by teaching languages, games and occasional entertainments on feast days.

Soon the Government began to release several groups of Salesians but all had to go South to Tiruppattur, even those of the North, as the Japanese were trying to enter Nagaland. I heard the names on the four lists of people who were released but my name and that of Bro. Frassey were not on any of the lists. Finally only 11 Salesians were left and we also were released on 18 October 1946. Fr. Marchesi was at the head of the group and we were allowed to go straight to Shillong where we reached on 21 October. At the end of December 1946 I was made Assistant of the novices. On 6 January 1948 the novices made their profession and went to Sonada for the study of Philosophy. I was asked to go to Dibrugarh for some holidays. After the holidays I went to Shillong and the Provincial, Fr. Ugret asked me to complete the treatises of Moral theology, which I had not done in the Concentration

camp where I had done all my theology, and prepare for Ordination together with Bros. Borghi, Pierluca, Larrea, and Codello from the South. In June we were ordained Subdeacons. All other minor orders had been received in the Concentration camp. On 14 August we were ordained Deacons and on 3 October 1948 we were ordained Priests by Bishop Stephen Ferrando.

### *My Days at Salesian College Sonada:*

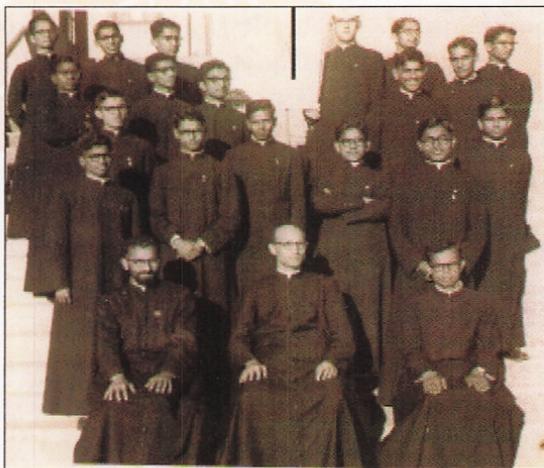


The long 30 years of my connection with Sonada was not at a stretch but in five different periods of my life. Three days after my priestly ordination, Fr. Ugues, Provincial, called me and told me to go to Sonada to replace Bro. Henry Fantin as teacher of Science and Mathematics. About 10 days after my arrival, Fr. Arneodo, the then Prefect of studies, of both aspirants and the brothers told me, "Father I am going to Italy for holidays". I congratulated him as he was going home after 23 years in India. Then he continued, "but I am teaching Philosophy - Logica Maior (Critics) and you have to take my place". I objected putting forward my inexperience and lack of preparation. "Well", he said, "for me it was worse, but I had to take it in 1946 when the brothers were coming up from Tiruppattur, after one year of Philosophy there (Bro. O'Hara, Bro. Peter Lourdes and Bro. Felix) and three more were coming from Dibrugarh soon after their Novitiate". So I too had to take it. It was the last chapter of Critics. I worked over it

for five hours. Next day I entered the classroom of the first years, those to whom I had been Novice-assistant in Mawlai (Bro. Sylvanus, Bro. Baroi, Bro. Cajetan Biswas and others). I put my book on the table but never looked at it again. I had prepared a good sketch which I placed on the notice board and explained. The brothers were simply taken up. But for me it was a real challenge to continue teaching at that standard. Soon I had to add History of Philosophy, Indian Philosophy, and various treatises of Philosophy, to substitute Fr. Doro who was also going to Italy. Besides Philosophy and History of Philosophy I had to take up Latin, Music and on the third year, the duties of Prefect of Studies. In May 1951, the new Provincial, Fr. Pianazzi, came for yearly visitation. He called me and told me, "the brothers are happy with your teaching. Go to PAS (Pontificium Athenaeum Salesianum) in Turin to take your Degree and come back". At the end of August 1951 I went home after 12 years in India. I went to see my mother, brother and other members of the family. In the beginning of October I went up to Turin for the official beginning of the academic year. Fr. Ricaldone, the Rector Major, gave the inaugural address. The following month, on 25 November 1951 he died. Fr. A. Alessi was the last Provincial appointed by him.

Thanks to my three years of teaching Philosophy and History of Philosophy, I was accepted as a student of the 3rd year, the year of Licentiate. I was asked to sit for an oral examination of two treatises - Theodicy and Ethics and got 30 out of 30. But I must say at once that my doctoral thesis was a poor one and I got a meagre result only, 26 out of 30 - *cum laude*. The fault was partly mine but it was also due to the fact that I received no help from my guide. During the one year and a quarter of my research I did not give all the attention to thesis, but thinking of my future work in Sonada after my return from Turin, and sure that besides teaching Philosophy I might be asked to help in other fields such as Education, I was attending various courses on Psychology and allied subjects, and for some of those I also gave the examinations. The future proved that my expectations were true. In the meantime, my mother born in February 1885, died in my hands on 24 April 1952 at the age of 67, plunging me in deep sorrow and sadness. On 1 August 1952 I started writing my thesis. On that day I received a

letter from the Provincial, Fr. A. Alessi, asking me to be in Sonada before Christmas that year. I took it very seriously. As I finished each chapter, written in rather poor Italian, I was giving it to my guide and he was returning it to me without any comment at all. Probably it was due to my poor handwriting but I did not have all the facilities that students have at the UPS (Universita Pontificia Salesianum) at present. When I finished writing, I typed out six copies of it and presented it to the Dean of Philosophy, Fr. Miano. Considering the urgency of my need he took the required copies and gave me one month instead of the usual two months to prepare for defence. The same evening I left for home to wish my relations before leaving for India. On coming back from home I was asked to give my '*Lectio coram*' in Latin before the defence of the Thesis. But I spent the days preceding the '*Lectio coram*' in Valdocco trying to procure all what I was asked to bring to Sonada by Fr. P. Sheehy, the Prefect. The '*Lectio*' was well appreciated by the professors but when it came to answering questions my lack of practice in speaking Latin became a block but the professors were good enough to allow me to answer in Italian. The day of the defence was fixed but even then the time for immediate preparation was spent in procuring things for Sonada. At the defence the one who made more objections was my own guide. But the other professors such as Fr. D. Composta were more positive. The result was what I said before. In the evening, Fr. Rector, Fr. Miano invited me to supper with the superiors and asked me to give the good night. Next morning I left for Genoa and by 10.00am I was on the ship 'Asia'. On reaching Calcutta I found a letter from Fr. Provincial, asking me to go to Sonada, not as Prefect of Studies but as Catechist. On 23 December 1953 I reached Salesian College together with Fr. Constantine Bili who was coming as Prefect of the house. Fr. O. Paviotti was the Rector, and Fr. Piasecki and Fr. Bacchiarello were confessors. I was Catechist, Teacher and Music master for 4 years. When Fr. Sheehy became Rector, I was Prefect of Studies of the students of Philosophy, Fr. Baroi was Prefect of Studies of the Aspirants and Fr. Piemonte was the Catechist both of the students of Philosophy and of the aspirants. Fr. Cajetan Biswas was the Prefect of the house. As the university did not accept the qualifications of Fr. Sheehy, I was appointed Principal of the College.



*Fr. Lo Groi, Rector, (1959-65) Salesian College Sonada*

I was appointed Rector of Salesian College Sonada on 30 September 1959 and I finished my term of office in January 1966. From March to December of the same year I remained in Sonada as Confessor. My contact with Salesian College Sonada did not end there. In 1982 I was appointed Rector of Salesian College Sonada for a second time till 1988. From 1994 till 1999 I was sent to Sonada once again as teacher and confessor.

***My Other Apostolic Assignments:*** Besides being in Salesian College Sonada, I was appointed Rector of Don Bosco School Park Circus from December 1966 to May 1968. This was followed by my appointment as Vice Provincial. Then I went on to Sunnyside, Shillong, as Rector and Novice Master from May 1970 to December 1972. Soon after I was appointed Provincial of the Salesian Province of Kolkata for a period of six years from 15 December 1972 to 31 December 1978. After completing my term as Provincial, I assumed the responsibility of organizing the On-going Formation programme for confreres at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore from 1979 to 1982. From October 1988 to May 1994 I was at Bishop's House Krishnagar as Confessor and Spiritual director of Religious communities. In the year 1995, the Rector Major entrusted to me the extraordinary Canonical Visitation of the Salesian Province of Madras which I did from 9 July to 4 December 1995. From September 1999 I took up the task of the

archivist and was asked to author the history of the Province of Kolkata which I completed in the year 2004. From then on till 2008 I was at Don Bosco Vidya Niketan, Kalyani, as Confessor and Teacher, after which, my health failing, I retired to Don Bosco School Park Circus.

***The Last Days at Don Bosco Park Circus:*** Fr. Lo Groi enjoyed fairly good health in spite of his frail constitution and a weak heart. Although confined mostly to his room and to the care of his nurse, he followed with interest the events and activities of the community and the province. He maintained his austere self in matters of food and comfort, was punctual and observant in practices of piety, and witty and humorous in moments of community togetherness. We enjoyed his presence in the community and he was the centre of attention and conversation.

***Fr. Lo Groi at Don Bosco School Park Circus 2008-10***



On Saturday 06 March 2010 Fr. Lo Groi took ill and was rushed to Apollo Gleneagles Hospitals, Kolkata. He was diagnosed with Aspiration Pneumonia. His lungs had a lot of fluid which had to be extracted. Initially he was placed in the I.C.U where he stayed for about four days. Thanks to medical attention his health improved over the next few days and he was shifted to the normal ward. He was once again his cheerful self, speaking of returning to the community. However, in the afternoon of 14 March 2010 his cardiac condition suddenly worsened and at 3.15pm had a cardio respiratory failure. Before his confreres could reach his side Fr. Lo Groi had breathed his last. His mortal remains were brought to the Provincial House at 6.00pm and the confreres of the city gathered for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist at 7.00 pm after which his body was taken to the

mortuary. On 16 March 2010 his body was brought to Don Bosco Park Circus where a prayer service was organized and the staff, students and neighbours paid him their last respects. He was then taken to Bandel Basilica, and at 2.00pm in the afternoon, he was buried there in the presence of Rt. Rev. Joseph Gomes, bishop of Krishnagar, Fr. Maria Arokiam, the regional, Fr. Thomas Ellicherail Provincial and a large gathering of religious, Priests, members of the Salesian Family, friends and well-wishers.

*The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God (Wis. 3:1)*



## *Mission And Person*

**Missionary:** 'My first love was the missions and I came to India to be a missionary' Fr. Lo Groi used to say. Enthused by the missionary zeal of visionaries like Msgr. Mathias, Fr. Scuderi, Fr. Marengo and others, Fr. Lo Groi dreamt of the missions of Assam and Krishnagar. His missionary dream never died; even at the age of 66 he attempted to learn Bengali. However, the will of God was that he should instead train missionaries of the future, which he did with great enthusiasm and earnestness. Young Salesians formed under his care soon became ardent missionaries of Salesian India, especially in the North East. As Provincial he was instrumental in expanding Salesian mission among the Santals of Murshidabad and the Adivasis of Chottanagpur. He initiated young and enthusiastic Salesians into mission work and trusted them with responsibility for the apostolate.

**Provincial:** At the helm of the Province as Provincial, Fr. Lo Groi showed himself to be a visionary. He had a tremendous capacity to animate and govern with clear vision and realistic goals in the immediate post-Vatican era. During his tenure of office as Provincial, he established the first National Catechetical Centre at Don Bosco Nitika. He deeply understood the role of media and thought of training personnel to enter into the world of media. He dreamt of a

School of Graphic Arts to take the place of the Catholic Orphan Press that the Salesians had to close down. His vision for the Post-novitiate formation of Salesian Brothers materialised in the setting up of a Juniorate for them, first at Nitika and later at Don Bosco Vidyaniketan, Kalyani. Taking a departure from the practice of the time, he boldly initiated young clerics into the missions especially among the Santals. He expanded the vocation-base of the Province to the Chottanagpur area by setting up the Aspirantate at Hatia, Ranchi. To foster communication at the provincial level he initiated the *Salesian News Calcutta* which other provinces soon emulated. He never lost sight of the youth. In order to strengthen youth ministry in the province he brought the YCS movement under Salesian animation. Another milestone in the ministry of education in the province under the guidance of Fr. Lo Groi was the laying of the foundation stone of Don Bosco school Siliguri on 31 January 1973.

In order to further the qualification and competence of the Salesians he made bold to send them for secular studies, placing tremendous trust in his young confreres most of whom he himself had groomed. He had a keen sense to identify talent and aptitude and urge confreres to strive for excellence. As a Provincial he had a clear vision, foresight, and ability to read the signs of the time, to dare and hope, and to lead the province on a road less travelled.



*The National Catechetical Centre initiated by  
Fr. Lo Groi at Don Bosco Nitika.*

**Builder:** Unlike many of our pioneers, Fr. Lo Groi built no house but it was provinces that he helped to engineer. In shaping the future of Salesian India he played a crucial role through his work as a formator and initiator of On-going Formation in India. It was sometime in the middle of 1968 that the then Provincial, Fr. Rosario Stroscio and his vicar Fr. Nicholas Lo Groi, with due permission of Msgr. Albert D'Souza, archbishop of Calcutta, set up units of Salesian Cooperators in the archdiocese Don Bosco Park Circus and Liluah, as well as



Auxilium Dum Dum and Bandel. He would do the same in Salesian College Sonada in 1986. He forged close ties with the members of the Salesian family and expressed his anguish at moments of strained relationship. He had the good of the FMAs, the SMIs and the MSMHC close to his heart and took great care to animate and instill in them the Salesian spirit. He was often called upon by sisters of the Salesian family to take classes, preach retreats, offer animation and guide their General Chapters.

*Fr. Lo Groi presides over the Eucharist with his former Novices*



He maintained cordial relationship with past pupils especially those of Salesian College Sonada. In making the extraordinary visitation of the Province of Madras in view of its division, at the behest of the Rector Major, Fr. E. Vigano, he manifested sound judgment, clear vision and direction for the province. No doubt Fr. Lo Groi ranks among the foremost makers of Salesian South Asia.

“Fr. Lo Groi will be long remembered for the example of his life and for the great contribution he has made to the growth and consolidation of the Province of Kolkata, particularly in the field of formation of young confreres. He had great love for the Congregation and he sought to instill that love into the young Salesians he was in touch with.”

- Fr. Francis Alencherry, sdb former councilor for Missions

**Formator:** Fr. Nicholas Lo Groi was a formator par excellence. Formation was what he thought, spoke and lived. Almost all his life was spent in formation houses, especially in Sonada. Fr. Mathew Pulingathil, former Provincial of Dimapur wrote in the Visitors' Book at Sonada, “among the former superiors, Fr. Lo Groi occupies the first place”. “Sonada is in my heart” Fr. Lo Groi often repeated. It was he who gave the motto *Flamma ardens et lucens* to Salesian College Sonada where he assumed the role of Assistant, Catechist, Professor, Prefect of Studies, Principal, Rector and Confessor. Even when he had moved out of Sonada he was engaged in initial and on-going formation of confreres and members of the Salesian family. He was much sought after for courses on Preventive system, Preparatory courses for perpetual profession for both Salesians and sisters of the Salesian family. He pioneered the concept of On-going formation for Salesians in India and the specific formation of the Salesian brother at the Post-novitiate level.

“An out-standing salesian, a man of great learning and a much-admired formator”

- Fr. James Poonthuruthil, Provincial of Dimapur

I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

- (Jn. 6:38)

**Professor:** In an interview in 2003 Fr. Lo Groi said, “I never asked to be allowed to come to India in order to be a Professor but the Lord ordained that I should exactly do the job of a Professor of Philosophy, Pedagogy and allied subjects.” Though forced by circumstances to teach Philosophy, Fr. Lo Groi excelled as a professor of Philosophy

almost immediately. His systematic yet simple exposition of the treatises, anchored mostly on Scholastic Philosophy, won him the applause of both staff and students. He had a thorough knowledge especially of Western Philosophy and in later years took a keen interest also in Indian Philosophy particularly Vedanta. Though he was unsparing in his demands as a teacher, he was compassionate as an examiner.

**Historian:** In August 1998 Fr. Lo Groi was commissioned by Fr. Francis Alencherry, the then Provincial, to write the History of the Kolkata Province of St. John Bosco, the first canonically erected Province in Salesian India. He undertook four years of tedious and

strenuous work to bring to light the dark treasures of bygone days in 596 pages supported by 882 footnotes. "This must have indeed been a labour of love...anything else would have collapsed half way!" says Fr. Peter Lourdes.



What Fr. Lo Groi came up with was a chronicler's history which was soon dubbed 'history with a soul' albeit authenticated by available documents and authored by someone who had been part and parcel of most of that period. What he himself had seen and heard, lived and experienced is brought to light to inspire and enthuse future generations of Salesians. Hence he chose to make it an inspirational reading than a critical survey of events and persons, highlighting their 'light' and ignoring their 'shadows'.

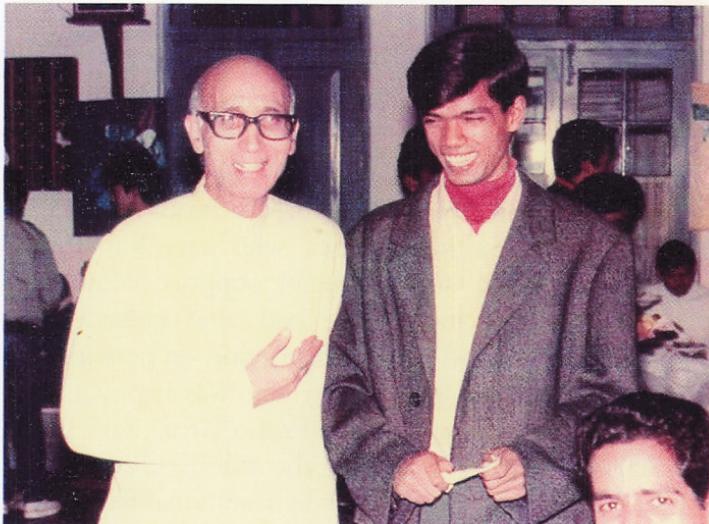
Appreciating Fr. Lo Groi's monumental work, *History of the Kolkata Province of St. John Bosco*, Fr. Francis Alencherry wrote in his foreword: "Although not a professional historian, Fr. Lo Groi was a natural choice for this difficult task. His intellectual and scholarly acumen, meticulous artistry, vast experience and exemplary dedication to an assigned task, more than qualified him for it. And indeed, he has produced a work of very great value." The value of his work lies in the fact that it brings alive the heroic days of the past, the spirit of dare and hope, the sacrifice and broad vision that characterized the early

Salesians which the present and future generations ought to emulate. He was not just a historian but a protagonist as well, since he had the privilege of rubbing shoulders with the giants of Salesian history in India. Fr. Lo Groi was convinced that 'he who neglects history forgets his own roots' and he endured strenuously to make Salesians 'know their roots'.

**"I always admired his sincerity of purpose, his love for the confreres and his delicacy of approach, his fidelity to congregation and to the Church."**

- Archbishop Thomas Menampambil.

**Deeply Human:** In Fr. Lo Groi one finds a rare combination of the head and the heart, of love and learning, of firmness and kindness.



**"He believed in the Transforming power of love. Every meeting with Fr. Lo Groi was an on-going formation for me."**

- Fr. K.A. Joseph, former Provincial of Kolkata & New Delhi.

Fr. Rosario Stroscio, his companion, sums up his impression of Fr. Lo Groi as "a clever, clear, single-minded, holy and an authentic Salesian". Colleagues and confreres have often reiterated his goodness and kindness.

“He was above all a very good man, apart from being a very good religious and Salesian. His extraordinary human qualities influenced most of us. He had no malice and sought the good of all of us. No doubt, his love for Don Bosco and the congregation was extraordinary”, reminisced Fr. Scaria Thuruthiyil, a former colleague at Sonada and now at UPS, Rome.

Uppermost among his human qualities was his unfailing Fatherliness. In the Visitors’ Book at Sonada, Dr. George Kallingal, Guam, USA, one of his past pupils wrote, “You, Fr. Lo Groi, were so fatherly to me as you always had been. I want you to know that you stand out as a giant significant other in my life. I am extremely grateful to you for your paternal care.”

**“Fr. Lo Groi has left his footprints in Salesian South Asia through the work of formation of generations of Salesians.”**

- Fr. Maria Arokiam Kanaga, Regional, South Asia.

**Deeply Spiritual:** His fatherliness was also truly spiritual. Fr. C.M. Jose, former Vice provincial of Kolkata and one of his novices spoke of him as a ‘Spiritual Father’ who gave him the ‘help and nourishment, guidance and prayerful support without fail’. His spirituality was convincing for he had ‘that radical honesty and wonderful ability to found verbal exhortation on personal witness of life’. “If I ever knew a Salesian priest who was happy and upright in living out his vocation, it was for me Fr. Lo Groi”, says Fr. C.M. Jose. His spirituality consisted in seeking the will of God in his daily life assisted by the Spirit and supported by traditional Salesian devotions and practices of piety. He anchored his spiritual life on the daily celebration of the Eucharist, the filial trust in Mary Help of Christians and the daily living of the Salesian Constitutions.

**“Fr. Lo Groi was a father to me and I was nourished by his Spiritual fatherhood.”**

- Bp. Joseph Gomes, Bishop of Krishnagar.

**Deeply Salesian:** Fr. Lo Groi was thoroughly Salesian in every sense of the term. He was not only an authority on the Preventive system but also an embodiment of the same. His love for Don Bosco and his profound understanding of the Salesian identity and charism made him an authentic guru of Salesian values. His knowledge of the history of the Salesian Constitutions based on his own personal study and research as well as the experience of participating in several General Chapters himself, made him an authoritative interpreter of the Constitutions.

He exhibited a keen understanding of the Salesian identity and at times even vehemently clarified, distinguished and defended it against eclectic and syncretic approaches to Salesian life and mission. He often warned of the dangers of superficiality and generism in living out

Salesian Charism. Never was he tired of emphasizing the two fold aspects of Salesian charism, the lay and the clerical. He was convinced of the role that Salesian cooperators and members of the Salesian Family could play in the promotion of Salesian mission in the Church and took an active part in their growth.

He was a constant reminder of Salesian family spirit, the practice of the Preventive System, and the community style of life and mission. His openness to new and innovative ideas, his flexibility and adaptability toppled the apparent conservative outlook that his frail and austere frame exuded.



**“I will always remember Father Lo Groi as a very human person who found his happiness in total dedication to his vocation both as a person and a Salesian Priest. To leave his country, come to a new one, live and love what he found here the way he did, I believe, is example enough for any of us who may be struggling to find meaning in our own lives...”**

**Fr. Lo Groi has influenced me in no small measure...He will remain one of the finest inspirations I know.”**

**- Joe Thannickal, Programme Director DBRC, Bangalore**

His spirit of obedience was truly remarkable. After his last stint as Rector at Sonada, in a letter to the Provincial from Rome he expressed his desire for the next assignment but concluded by saying, "However, you have the last word. I'll do what you want me to do. Just leave word at Provincial House, if you should be out of Calcutta when I reach there." He possessed few things and in the use of money and material goods he was worthy of imitation. His capacity for affection bloomed into spiritual fatherhood and he grew old gracefully. Fidelity was his watch-word and he became an exemplar of Salesian religious and priestly life.



*The Rector Major V. Rev. Pascual Chavez honours Fr. Lo Groi for his remarkable contribution to Salesian India*

"I will feel rewarded if you imitate the zeal and the total dedication of our pioneers to work tirelessly for the glory of God, for the good of the souls, in the footsteps of Don Bosco and under the maternal protection of Mary Help of Christians."

- Fr. Lo Groi (extracted and modified from his Preface to the *History of The Kolkata Province of St. John Bosco*)

# Conclusion

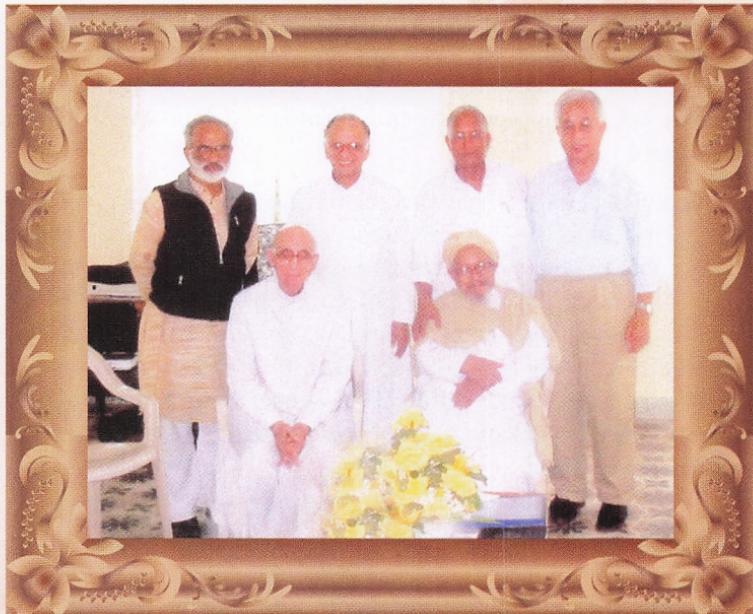
Fr. Nicholas Lo Groi, you were a valiant son of Don Bosco and your dream to be a missionary brought you to the shores of our land. You corresponded with God's plan and your dream materialized, albeit within the walls of formation houses, becoming a missionary by forming future missionaries and opening up new missionary ventures. Your fatherly goodness touched and transformed us, the magic of your love! The love you have for the Lord and your filial devotion to the blessed Virgin and your adherence to the Constitutions mark you out as a faithful Salesian. Your understanding of Salesian vision and mission, your unflinching devotion to duty and your daily fidelity to your consecration inspire and enkindle our hearts as you enter into the joy of your Master.

At last your gallant soul took flight  
into the land, where, there is no night  
But your name is carved in our hearts to stay  
as we think of the things, you used to do and say  
so you are not dead, you've only gone on  
into a brighter, more wonderful dawn.

For people like you were not born to die,  
but like the sun that shines in the sky  
you warm the earth and the hearts of people  
and in happy remembrance you live again  
so while you sleep and your voice is still  
your spirit goes on and it always will.

*Your Spirit Moves Us On*





## APPENDIX- 1

### CONDOLENCE MESSAGE FROM THE PARISH PRIEST OF FR. LO GROI

Parrocchia Chiesa Madre  
di Cammarata

*Cammarata, 15-Mar-2010*

Al nostro caro Don Lo Groi,

L'Arciprete don Mario Albanese e la Comunità tutta, non potendo essere presenti, come meriterebbe, al funerale di Don Nicola Lo Groi, voglia gradire e accettare un umile omaggio che sgorga dal nostro cuore per l'affetto e la stima che abbiamo nutrito per la sua squisita persona. Abbiamo appreso con vero dolore la notizia della sua morte, speravamo ancora di rivederlo qui nella sua amata e sempre ricordata Cammarata, paese natale, dove era cresciuto e ricevuto i sacramenti della iniziazione cristiana e dove era nata e maturata la sua vocazione al servizio e per la missione educativa di Don Bosco, rispondendo con generosità ed entusiasmo al Signore che lo chiamava: **“Eccomi sono pronto”**. Caro Don Nicola ti abbiamo voluto bene, da te traspariva la presenza stessa di Gesù Maestro.

Salesiano dotto, umile e santo, osservante e pio, hai trasmesso a tanti il calore della Fede e i Valori intramontabili del Vangelo. Ricordiamo la gioia che hai provato per la celebrazione del tuo 50° anniversario di ordinazione sacerdotale con la presenza del Vescovo di Agrigento, dei sacerdoti, dei tuoi amati nipoti e la Comunità tutta insieme al Sindaco del tuo caro Paese che mai hai dimenticato.

Quando venivi da noi ti rigeneravi nel corpo e nello spirito, attingendo all'amore dei tuoi nipoti e ai ricordi dei tuoi cari e della tua infanzia che restano scolpiti nel cuore di ogni persona dovunque si trovi. Provavi grande gioia nel rivedere la tua cara **CHIESA MADRE** sempre più bella e splendente. Ora ti trovi lassù in cielo, ormai sono passate le cose di questo mondo, dove hai sofferto, creduto e amato per il regno di Dio. Ricordati ancora di noi, dei tuoi cari nipoti, della Comunità e del tuo Carissimo Arciprete Don Mario, a cui volevi tanto bene e che da te abbiamo ricevuto edificazione, rispetto e stima per la tua sincera fedeltà al Signore Gesù.

Firmato

*Arciprete Don Mario Albanese*

## APPENDIX- 2

### CONDOLENCE MESSAGE FROM THE FAMILY OF FR. LO GROI

*Cammarata, 15-Mar-2010*

**Carissimo Zio,**

Noi tutti siamo rimasti colpiti dalla fulminante notizia della tua scomparsa ricevuta domenica mattina. Da sempre il nostro pensiero era sempre quello di rivederti dopo ogni tua ripartenza da Cammarata per la tua amata India, terra della tua Missione. Invece, siamo qui a rivolgerti il nostro ultimo saluto con un banalissimo messaggio di posta elettronica, per questo ti chiediamo scusa per la nostra mancata presenza in questi ultimi tuoi giorni.

Siamo anche sicuri che in questi giorni sei stato in ottime mani, attorno alla tua gente, ormai divenuta la tua famiglia. Ricordiamo infatti, che ci raccontavi sempre di essere circondato da splendide persone che si prendevano cura di te come avremmo fatto noi. Noi ti ricordiamo sempre, abbiamo impresse nella nostra mente tutta la tua esperienza di missionario che diventava cibo per la nostra fede quanto ci raccontavi la tua storia. Ogni tua venuta a Cammarata, era una festa per tutti, la tua presenza diventava catechismo di vita che affascinava ogni parente e uomo che ti veniva a trovare.

Quando ci intrattenevi a te, raccontandoci la storia di Don Bosco come esempio di vita, il nostro corpo rimaneva incollato alle sedie affascinati dalla tua umiltà e gentilezza nel modo di essere Cristiani in Gesù Cristo.

Carissimo zio, anche se la tua permanenza qui a Cammarata non era lunga, ci hai lasciato tantissimi ricordi e insegnamenti di vita che non dimenticheremo mai.

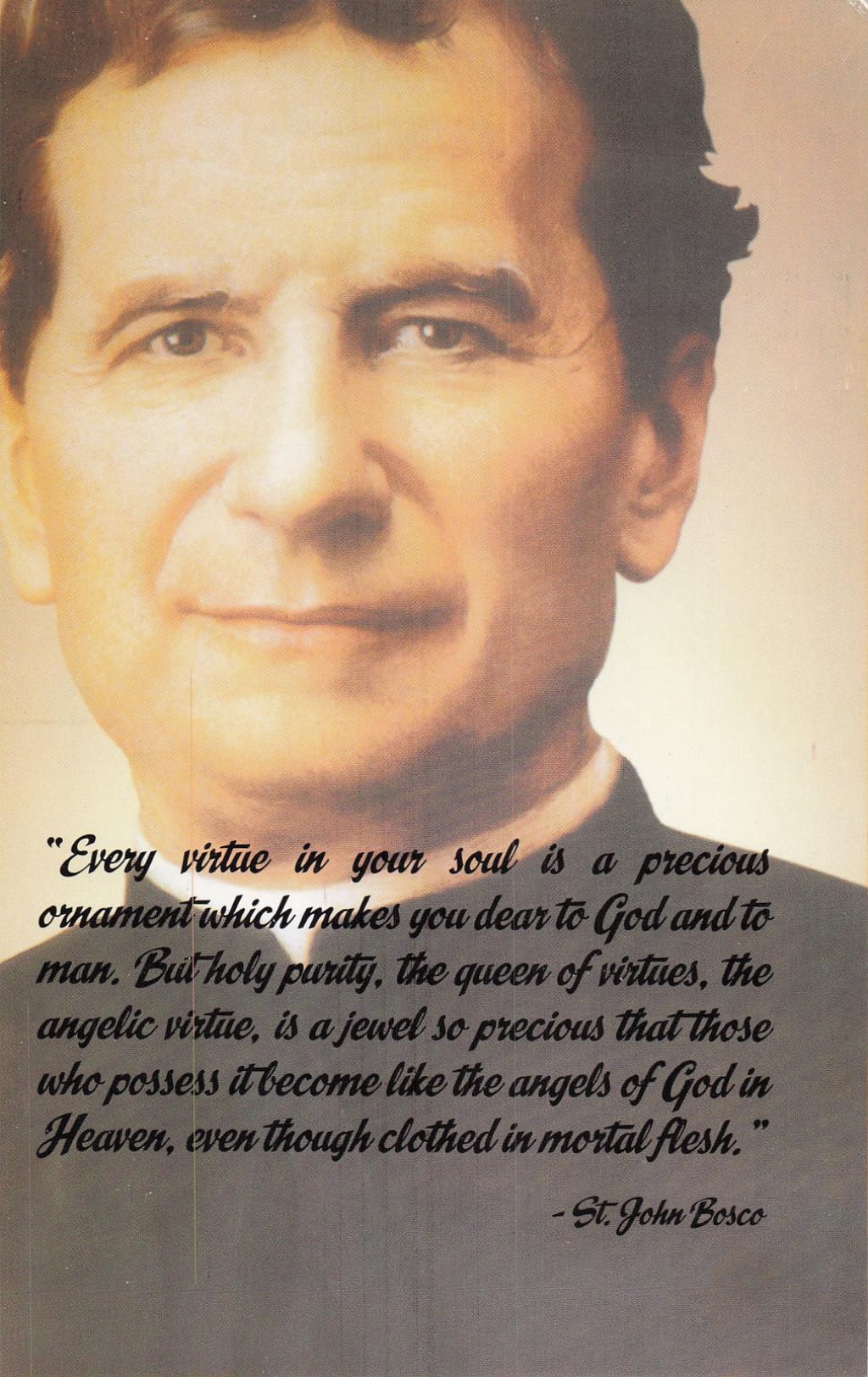
Questo messaggio non potrai leggerlo come hai letto tutti gli altri che ti abbiamo mandato dalla tua terra nativa ma preghiamo che arrivi diritto al tuo cuore lassù nel cielo con il nostro caloroso saluto.

**Ricordati sempre di noi, noi pregheremo per te, tu prega per noi come sempre hai fatto!**

**Firmato**

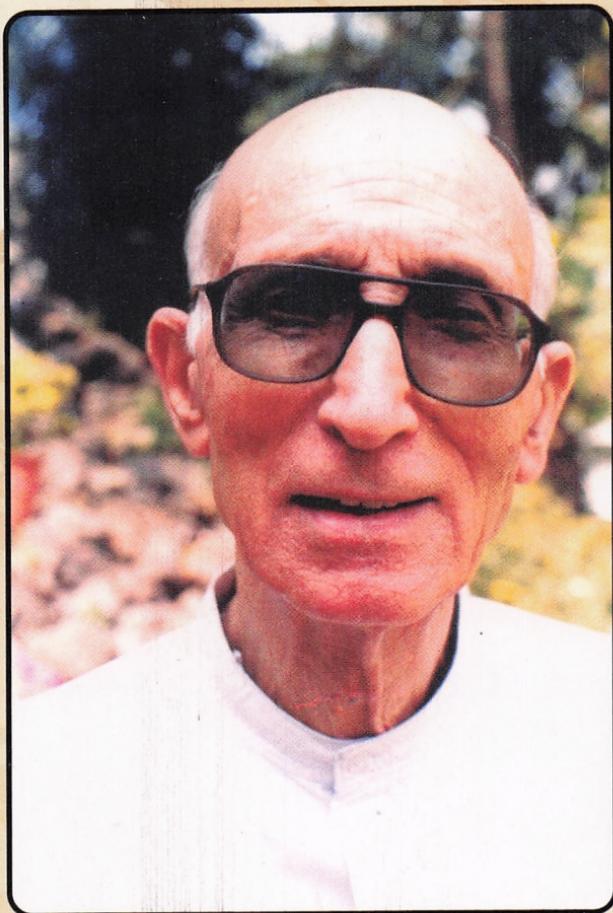
*Famiglia Lo Groi*

# Notes...



*"Every virtue in your soul is a precious ornament which makes you dear to God and to man. But holy purity, the queen of virtues, the angelic virtue, is a jewel so precious that those who possess it become like the angels of God in Heaven, even though clothed in mortal flesh."*

*- St. John Bosco*



***“Fr. Lo Groi was truly un altro Don Bosco”***

Fr. Thomas Ellicherail, Provincial

**FOR NECROLOGY**

Born: 18 February 1922, Cammarata, Sicily

First Profession: 02 September 1938, San Gregorio

Ordination: 03 October 1948, Shillong

Death: 14 March 2010, Kolkata