

THE FIRST LETTER OF THE NEW RECTOR MAJOR

An Analysis of Don Rua's First Circular Letter

Source: *COMITATO DI STUDI STORICI DON RUA 2010, Documenti di don Rua [CD]. Istituto Storico Salesiano.*

1. Presentation
 - 1.1. Author – Don Rua
 - 1.2. When – March 19, 1888
 - 1.3. To whom – Salesians of Don Bosco
 - 1.4. Why – The Superior Chapter has already written to all the houses. It is his turn now as Rector Major to write to the confreres.
2. Analysis
 - 2.1. Structure of the text
 - 2.1.1. Index (Main headings. Cf. 2.1.4. Body.)
 - 2.1.2. Place and date (Torino, 19 Marzo 1888)
 - 2.1.3. Opening address: My dearest sons in Jesus Christ (Carissimi Figli in G.C.)
 - 2.1.4. Purpose: After the letter send to all the Salesian houses by our revered Superior Chapter, today for the first time I write to you in my new capacity as Rector Major... (Dopo la lettera spedita a tutte le Case salesiane dal nostro Rev.do Capitolo Superiore oggi per la prima volta vi scrivo nella nuova mia qualita' di Rettor Maggiore...)
 - 2.1.5. Body
 - 2.1.5.1. The esteem enjoyed by Don Bosco before the ecclesiastical authority. (Stima che godeva Don Bosco presso le autorità ecclesiastiche.)
 - 2.1.5.2. Recommendations to initiate as soon as possible the Cause of Beatification (Raccomandazioni per iniziare quanto prima la Causa di Beatificazione.)
 - 2.1.5.3. Let us seek to make ourselves ever more worthy sons of such a father. (Cerchiamo di renderci sempre più degni figli di tanto Padre.)
 - 2.1.5.4. Thanksgiving and prayers. (Ringraziamenti e preghiere.)
 - 2.1.5.5. First audience with the Holy Father: Important directives from His Holiness. (Prima udienza avuta dal S. Padre: importanti direttive di Sua Santità.)
 - 2.1.5.6. May the house in Rome be a model house. (La Casa di Roma sia una Casa modello.)
 - 2.2. Sources
 - Personal experience (for example, his experience with the Pope and Cardinals during his visit to Rome)
 - 2.3. Style
 - 2.3.1. His tone is fatherly. This is not surprising since being the successor of Don Bosco he has now assumed the office of father.
 - 2.3.2. Reading the letter I had the feeling that there was already familiarity between Don Rua and those to whom he was writing, in this case, the Salesians. Is this because of the family spirit?
 - 2.3.3. There seems to be sense of urgency and excitement regarding the start of the beatification process of Don Bosco. And it is the excitement of a family.
3. Synthesis and Assessment of the Principal Contents
 - 3.1. Beatification of Don Bosco
 - 3.1.1. Don Bosco had been dead only two months. Those who came in contact with Don Bosco felt that they had come in contact with a Saint. Hence, his beatification and canonization was not a matter in question.
 - 3.1.2. Perhaps the experience of Don Rua with their Cardinal protector in Rome made him take concrete steps toward that direction.
 - 3.2. Fidelity to Don Bosco
 - 3.2.1. The Father and Founder is gone. He has bequeathed to his sons his work and his way of doing things. Don Rua as successor of Don Bosco feels it his duty to remind the Salesians to develop the work Don Bosco has begun. But more than that he asks them to act as Don Bosco did, to take him as model.

- 3.3. Gratitude and prayers
 - 3.3.1. It is difficult to fill in a great man's shoes. Don Rua must have felt some fear at taking the place of a 'celebrity'. But more than this he must also have felt the burden of the responsibility that is now on his shoulders.
 - 3.3.2. Hence the letters coming from the confreres promising respect, obedience and affection must have comforted and encouraged him tremendously. And for this he thanks them.
- 3.4. Conclusion to the letter
 - 3.4.1. Don Bosco on his death bed told his Salesians that he will be waiting for them in heaven. Don Rua reminds them of this when he wrote: "May it be given to us to find ourselves together, no one excluded, from singing his praises in Paradise, where he, our most loving father Don Bosco, awaits us just as he wrote (...ci conceda di trovarci un giorno tutti insieme, nessuno escluso, a cantare le sue lodi in Paradiso, dove ci attende siccome ce lo scrisse, il nostro amatissimo Padre Don Bosco.)" But at the same time, Don Rua takes the occasion to encourage them to fidelity and perseverance in their vocation.
 - 3.4.2. Heaven was one of Don Bosco's favorite themes. And Don Rua learned this from Don Bosco and makes use of it in this circular letter.
- 3.5. First audience with the Holy Father: Important directives from His Holiness
 - 3.5.1. Don Rua is now the father of the family. And he behaves like a father, just like Don Bosco. In this particular instance, he tells his sons some news about his visit to the Holy Father, news which they were certainly eagerly to hear.
 - 3.5.2. But I think there were two other reasons why Don Rua adds this section to his circular letter. The first. Don Bosco's heritage is one of love and obedience to the Holy Father. Therefore, it was important for the Salesians to know what the directives of the Holy Father were. In fact, in the letter Don Rua writes: "From the Vicar of Christ for whom our beloved Don Bosco inculcated in us such unlimited obedience, respect and affection (...dal Vicario di Cristo, a cui il nostro amato Don Bosco c'inculcava cotanto di professare la più illimitata obbedienza, rispetto ed affezione.)"
 - 3.5.3. The second. Don Bosco time and again made known to his Salesians the affection of the Holy Father for them. Reading Don Rua's account of his audience, you couldn't help but feel the concern and the interest the Holy Father had for the congregation. And surely this would encourage the Salesians, something which they certainly needed after the death of Don Bosco.
4. Conclusion
 - 4.1. I have read that once Don Rua became the Rector Major he showed himself a father to his confreres. This circular confirms this observation.
 - 4.2. In one of his conferences, Don Caviglia said: "Don Bosco wished it so, has done so, has taught us so, and has lived so; and I in order to be a Salesian of Don Bosco, ought to be so. (Don Bosco ha voluto così, ha fatto così, ha insegnato così, è vissuto così; ed io per essere salesiano di Don Bosco, devo essere così.)" The concern of Don Rua as Rector Major was to make sure that the Salesians follow Don Bosco's example, that is, "they ought to be so (devono essere così)".