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Getting To Know  
Don Bosco Series  
**His History**



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## Preface

For every member of the Salesian Family, and every person who resonates with the spirit of Don Bosco, August 16, 2015 is a highly meaningful day to look forward to, as we will celebrate the bicentennial of Don Bosco's birth. As a way to get all of us ready for this great day, a three-year preparation period has been set, through which we can enrich our knowledge of Don Bosco as a founder, father and educator for the youth. Starting from 2012, we have placed our focus on different major areas in the personality and charism of Don Bosco, namely "His History", "His Pedagogy" and "His Spirituality," so that we can come to know and imitate him better.

In this book, we have brought together a series of monthly articles written for the Salesian Family by Fr Pascual Chávez, Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco, under the theme of "His History" in his Strenna 2012. These enlightening articles will guide you through the journey of exploring the history of the time of Don Bosco, how he coped with circumstances, what was behind his determination to cultivate his lifelong mission for the young, and how he accomplished this remarkable mission.

It is our hope that after reading this book, you will be inspired by how Don Bosco overcame the challenges and issues of his time and social context. You will also be willing to preserve his spirit to continue his work of serving the underprivileged youth in this ever-changing world.

In the Appendices to this book, we have included a commentary of Fr. Chávez on his Strenna for 2012. It gives a detailed account of the reasons for studying the history of Don Bosco, the background and social environment of his time, and

how he responded to God's call to serve poor and abandoned youth. It helps to gain more insights and inspirations to live out the mission given by God in his life, for us to gain more insights and inspirations to live out the mission of Don Bosco in our time and social environment. In addition, a brief biography of Don Bosco presented in point form, is also provided for the readers' easy reference.

Fr. Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti  
24 May, 2013  
Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians

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# 1

## God's Call

Don Bosco's Choices are Determined by  
the Call of God, the Lord of History

*At the heart of the Old Testament there is a call from God to Moses, on the day of the burning bush. The Lord said: "I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to a land rich and broad..." (Exodus 3, 7-8).*

*"I have seen... I have heard... I am well aware... I mean to*

*deliver them". These are four words about perfect fatherliness. God does not abandon his children. Don Bosco was called to incarnate God's fatherliness in our times.*

### A time of wounds

Don Bosco was living and working in a period of rapid and epoch-making change. This change was traumatic, especially in the social and ecclesiastical fields. In particular, the process begun with the *Enlightenment* was accelerated. This had put an end to the *societas christiana*, through the triumph of agnostic and anti-Christian ideologies, with their declared incompatibility between reason-science and faith, the progressive disaffection of the middle and working classes with ecclesiastical institutions (more rapid in the cities, more gradual in the countryside). In Italy the Roman question opened a painful wound in the heart of believers. Under the pressure of the lay anticlerical intelligentsia and of the bourgeois business class, which, through the press, fashioned public opinion and lifestyles, the new generations, being formed in a school which was progressively agnostic, became disoriented, an easy prey to ideas and behaviour far removed from Christian practice. At the same time, new forms of poverty were appearing, massive internal and external migration, cultures being uprooted, the exploitation of the work-force and moral brutalisation of the poorest groups in the population.

### Saving the young

It was precisely this historical context, these social traumas and these tensions which were for Don Bosco the stimulus and the valuable occasion to discern the voice of God. While others argued, condemned, bewailed the sad state of affairs of their times, he was able to perceive God present and active in human history. Trained as he was to feel himself a pastor called to work for the salvation of the human race,

especially for that of youth, he became immersed in his own times, critically, but lovingly and creatively, fully a part of the often deeply-felt events taking place around him, ready to give his life for the mission which he felt himself called to undertake, convinced that the grace of God is stronger than any human obstacle and effectively supports anyone who works to spread in peoples' hearts Christ's Kingdom.

The situation of the poor boys he met in Turin in the '40s and '50s, but also ecclesial, political-social events and the new laws, encouraged and shaped in practical ways his gift for education, his pastoral zeal, his natural talents, and they led him towards a discernment which was proactive and preventive.

In the decades which follow, the situations will change, new problems will arise, but his way of thinking and his spiritual approach will lead him to expand his horizons, to formulate activities and plans, to multiply his operations, co-involving ever growing hosts of disciples, supporters, benefactors and well-wishers. In this way the expression "poor and abandoned boys" will acquire an ever broader significance, not only in socio-economic terms, but also spiritual, cultural and moral.

**"I can do all things in Him who gives me strength!"**

His modernity consists in this: not only new ideas in tune with the requirements and the tastes of the times and of the young, but responses, prompt and really effective (since they were far-sighted and the result of a process of discernment and of a genuine love of God) to new problems, new challenges, new needs, new "satanic" attacks, starting from a solid faith, an unwavering hope, from an total gift of himself to God and to his brothers (and sisters), from an inner freedom, the result of purification and self-detachment. He wrote to a priest who was discouraged: "There is work to be done? I shall die on the field

of work *sicut bonus miles Christi*. I'm good for little or nothing? *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat*. There are thorns? With the thorns changed into flowers the Angels will make you a crown in heaven. Times are difficult? They always were, but God will never fail to come to your help: *Christus heri et hodie*." (25 October 1878, E. Ceria, *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco III*, p. 399).

For us it is a lesson of hope and of courage, an invitation to shake ourselves, and to renew our fidelity, our commitment, and our trust in God.