

**BLESSED
EDOARDO GIUSEPPE ROSAZ:
A LASALLIAN BISHOP**

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To call him a Lasallian bishop is no exaggeration. Blessed Edoardo Giuseppe Rosaz was not simply a great benefactor of the Brothers. He also admired and valued their work and had a profound devotion to St. John Baptist de La Salle, as this short article will try to show.

A holy priest

July 14th 1991 was a memorable day in Susa, a little Alpine diocese near the French border: Pope John Paul II beatified Mgr Edoardo Giuseppe Rosaz, a former bishop of the diocese.

He was born in Susa in 1830, and it was in the familiar setting of his native town that his vocation to the priesthood matured, and his pastoral ministry as a priest, founder and bishop was exercised. And finally he was beatified in his much loved Susa. In brief, that was his life. As his biographers point out, he was a person who would have preferred to lead a hidden life, as the Gospel recommends. Providence, however, wished to honour him in a special way. His beatification adds another name to the already long list of "social saints" and charities that characterised Turin and Piedmont in the second half of the 1800's: John Bosco, Benedetto Cottolengo, Giuseppe Cafasso and Leonardo Murialdo.

On August 15th 1856, the young priest Edoardo Rosaz founded the "Ritiro" with 4 orphan girls and a pious lady. This charitable foundation was run first by the girls themselves and then, when the Franciscan Third Order of Sisters founded by him replaced them, it gradually developed. The reason for Rosaz' commitment was the dramatic realisation of an urgent need: to look after those that no one cared for; to look after the boys and girls who could not be left to roam the streets.

The Brothers in Susa

In 1842, the Brothers opened a little school in Susa for the children of the mountain dwellers. It was called the Charity School and was completely free. The Brothers lived totally on charity: they gave and they received. It was Mgr Rosaz who drew up a statute to ensure the survival of the Brothers. The Brothers' school continued to be constantly in the thoughts of the bishop, and all the biographers stress the help he gave the Brothers and his joy on seeing the number of Brothers increase in Susa. This is reflected in a letter sent by him to the Visitor of Turin:

"Dear Sir, I accept with gratitude the gift you have been good enough to make to our town, by sending another Brother at your expense to work in the 4th form and to help the Brother Director. I undertake to pay 300 lire in addition to the 600 lire paid as a fee to the Brother in the 1st form. God only knows the good the Brothers are doing with their teaching of religion. To a great extent, it is to them that we owe the maintenance of the faith in our region. I bless you and express my profound esteem for you. Yours most affectionately in Christ, Edoardo G. Rosaz."

The holy bishop was convinced that the mission of the Christian school to educate and evangelise was very valuable. This is shown clearly by the fact that 4 of the pastoral letters he sent to the diocese of Susa were devoted to the question of the Christian education of youth. The first pastoral letter is entitled "The Christian education of youth", and was followed some time later by a second one on the same theme. One would think, on reading them carefully, that he had paraphrased the educational teachings of De La Salle. The other two letters are entitled "The study of catechism". These feel as if they were inspired by the Lasallian approach to catechesis.

Among the printed works of the holy bishop we find a treatise on good manners with the title "Rules of politeness for young ladies" (Turin, 1901) inspired by De La Salle's "Regles de la bienséance".

Admiration for St. La Salle and devotion to him

In his own pastoral ministry of education to young people, and in the formulation of the constitutions of the religious institute founded by him, Rosaz drew abundantly on his daily contact with the Brothers in Susa, on his familiarity with the works of De La Salle acquired by his frequentation of the Brothers, and on his reading of the works of the Saint which he had in his library.

Blessed Rosaz was a fervent and enthusiastic devotee of St. La Salle. He took part in the celebrations surrounding his beatification (1888) and canonisation

(1900) in Susa, Turin and even Rome, and had ample opportunity to express his devotion to the Saint and his admiration for the Brothers.

However, what most clearly expressed his devotion for De La Salle and his gratitude to the Brothers was his visit on September 1st and 2nd 1901 to Thermignon in Savoy, the place of origin of his family. The occasion was the unveiling of a statue of De La Salle in the main aisle of the parish church. Blessed Rosaz presided over all the ceremonies, delivered a panegyric in honour of the Saint, and expressed to the Brothers of the small community at Thermignon his affection and admiration for the work done for poor children.

A permanent guest of the Brothers

Whenever the "vagrant" bishop, as he was nicknamed, came on a pastoral visit to a town where there were Brothers, he always found time to visit them and share a frugal meal, never failing to encourage them and express his admiration. And so he met the Brothers in Susa, Turin, Piacenza, Genoa and even Rome. Many of the Brothers were longstanding friends of his. They returned his affection and stood by him in difficult and painful circumstances, especially at the time when the "Ritiro" foundation was being consolidated. His familiarity with the Brothers of Susa and Turin enabled the Brothers to reciprocate in the best of ways. The biographers of the Saint note that he would come to Turin almost every week on pastoral or administrative business and would stay at the Collegio S. Giuseppe. Here he was particularly friendly with the bursar who lent him money in order to meet urgent needs. He was helped very willingly, and more than once, the Director of S. Giuseppe refused to accept repayment of the debt. At the College also he came to know Br. Solenne, a clever and gifted architect, whom

he recruited to plan and build the church and bell tower of the "Ritiro", which can still be admired today as a typical example of the neo-Gothic style. Br. Solenne, all the while respecting Lasallian gratuity, continued to make his services available to the bishop, and over a number of years was involved in drawing up plans and renovating many of the buildings in his charge.

In Rome also, Mgr Rosaz was very much at home with the "very dear" Brothers as he loved to call them. On his ad limina visits, he would stay with the Brothers at Piazza Poli or Piazza di Spagna. It was a great pleasure for him to greet the Visitor Br. Casimiro whom he had known and appreciated in Turin. He would have recourse to the Visitor on occasions to expedite the processing of documents, some of them of a delicate nature, by the Roman Congregations. He asked his help also to obtain the relics of St. Callista for the "Ritiro" church, and to ask the Congregation of Rites for a liturgy for the feast of Our Lady of Intercession.

The Visitor of Turin, Br. Genuino, who greatly admired Mgr Rosaz, found in him a prudent and wise counsellor. It was he who, at a time when vocations were scarce, advised him to open a juniorate at Grulisco. Vocations came immediately and the Superior was able to satisfy the numerous requests for Brothers. In 1888, Mgr Rosaz was affiliated to the Institute.

On May 5th 1903, at the funeral of Blessed Rosaz, the pupils of the Charity School of Susa and the Brothers had the honour of heading the funeral procession and accompanying him for the last time. And it was right they did so, for they were the favourite sons of the holy bishop. Moreover, the Brothers remembered how often Rosaz had written to say: "I would rather sell my ring and pectoral cross than allow the Brothers' schools to close. We need them too much in Susa and they serve also the surrounding area".