



DIREZIONE GENERALE OPERE DON BOSCO
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Il Rettor Maggiore

Letter of the Rector Major, Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, on the occasion of the Venerability of the Servant of God Msgr. Stefano Ferrando, Salesian Bishop, Founder of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians

Dear sisters and brothers of the Salesian Family

On March 3rd, 2016, the Holy Father Francis authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the Decree concerning the heroic virtues of the Servant of God, Stefano Ferrando, of the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco, Titular Archbishop of Troina, and former Bishop of Shillong, Founder of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. He was born on February 28th, 1895, and died on June 20th, 1978.

Venerable Msgr. Stefano Ferrando knew how to combine his own Salesian vocation with missionary charism and with episcopal ministry. He was born on September 28th, 1895, in Rossiglione (GE, diocese of Acqui) to Agostino e Giuseppina Salvi, and was marked by his ardent love of God and his tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1904 he enrolled in Salesian schools, first in Fossano and then in Turin – Valdocco, where he knew the successors of Don Bosco and the first generation of Salesians, and did his priestly studies; in the meantime, he nourished the desire to leave as a missionary. On September 13th, 1912, in Foglizzo, he did his first religious profession in the Salesian Congregation. Called to arms in 1915, he participated in WWI. Because of the courage he showed, he was awarded the silver medal. He returned home in 1918, and on December 26th, 1920, he pronounced his perpetual vows. He was ordained a priest in Borgo San Martino (AL) on March 18th, 1923. On December 2nd of the same year, with nine confreres, he boarded the ship in Venice and left as a Missionary to India. On December 18th, after a 16 days' journey, the group arrived in Bombay and on December 23rd in Shillong, the place of his new apostolate. As Novice Master, he educated young Salesians to the love for Jesus and Mary and had a great spirit of apostolate.

On August 9th, 1934, Pope Pius XI appointed him bishop of Krishnagar. His motto is 'Apostle of Christ'. On November 26th, 1935, he was transferred to Shillong where he will remain for 34 years. Even though he worked in a serious situation of cultural, religious and social shock, Msgr. Ferrando untiringly dedicated himself to stay close to the people entrusted to him, working with zeal in the vast diocese that comprised the entire region of Northern India. To the car that he could have used, he preferred walking on foot: this in fact allowed him to meet people, to stop and talk with them, to share their lives: such a direct contact with the lives of the persons was one of the main resources of the fecundity

of his Gospel proclamation: humility, simplicity, love for the poor spur many persons to convert and request Baptism. He created a Seminary for the formation of young Indian Salesians, he built a hospital, constructed a Sanctuary dedicated to Mary Help of Christians and founded the first congregation of native Sisters, the Congregation of Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. (1942).

Being a man of a strong character, he did not get discouraged in front of the innumerable difficulties, which he faced with a smile and with meekness. His perseverance in front of obstacles was one of his main features. He tried to unite the message of the Gospel to the local culture in which it had to be inserted. He was fearless in his pastoral visits, which he did in the remotest places of his diocese in order to save the last lost sheep. He manifested a particular sensitivity for the promotion of lay catechists, whom he considered to be complementary to the bishop's mission and from whom also depended a great part of the fecundity of the Gospel proclamation and of its penetration in the territory. His attention to the ministry of the family was also immense. Despite his many commitments, the Venerable was a man of a rich interior life, nourished by prayer and recollection. As a Pastor he was greatly appreciated by his sisters, by priests, Salesian confrères and fellow-bishops as well as by the people who felt him deeply close. He dedicated himself to his flock in a creative way, caring for the poor, defending the untouchables, curing those struck by cholera.

The pivotal points of his spirituality were his filial bond with the Virgin Mary, his missionary zeal, his continuous referring to Don Bosco, as emerges from his writings and in all his missionary activity. The most luminous moment of his virtuous life was when he left the diocese of Shillong. Msgr. Ferrando had to submit his resignation to the Holy Father when he was still in full command of his physical and intellectual faculties, so as to allow the appointment of his successor, who had to be chosen, according to superior dispositions, among the native priests he himself had formed. This was a particularly painful moment, which the great bishop lived with humility and obedience. He realized it was time to retire in prayer according to the will of the Lord. When he returned to Genoa in 1969, he continued his pastoral activity, presiding over ceremonies to administer confirmations and dedicate himself to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He was faithful to the end to Salesian religious life, deciding to live in the community and renouncing the privileges he might have enjoyed because of his position as a Bishop. In Italy he continued to be «a missionary». Not «a missionary *who moves*, but [...] a missionary *who is*». His life in this last phase became an “irradiation”. He then becomes a “missionary of prayer” who says: «I am happy I left, so that others might take over to do such wonderful works». From Genoa Quarto, he continued to animate the mission in Assam, sensitizing consciences and sending material help. He lived this hour of purification in a spirit of faith, of abandonment to the will of God, of obedience, tangibly experiencing the meaning of the gospel expression, «We are useless servants », and confirming with his life the *caetera tolle*, the oblatinal-sacrificial aspect of Salesian vocation. He died on June 20th, 1978, and was buried in Rossiglione, his hometown. In 1987 his relics were taken back to India.

During this year in which we are committed to *journey together with Jesus in an adventure of the Spirit*, let us joyfully accept the luminous witness of this son of Don Bosco, founder of a flourishing Congregation, a true pastor of the Church after the heart of Jesus.

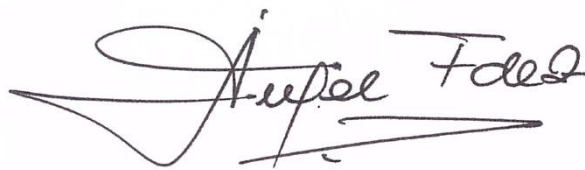
In docility to the Spirit, he exerted a fruitful pastoral activity, which showed in his great love for the poor, in his humility of spirit and in his fraternal charity, in the joy and optimism of the Salesian spirit.

As I congratulate in particular his spiritual Daughters, who see the heroic virtues of their founder are recognized, I invite all the members of the Salesian Family to get acquainted with the witness of this Bishop and Salesian missionary, with his great apostolic zeal for the salvation of the youth and the poor. Together with many missionaries who shared with him the adventure of the Spirit in India, among whom the Servants of God Fr. Francesco Convertini, Costantino Vendrame and Oreste Marengo, Msgr. Ferrando inaugurated a new Salesian method, which is being an itinerant missionary. Such an example is for us a providential admonition, especially for religious congregations that are tempted by a process of institutionalization and of closure, not to lose the passion to reach out to people and to situations of greater poverty and of material and spiritual need, going to places where nobody wants to go.

Finally, I wish to entrust once more our Salesian Family to Mary Help of Christians, of whom Venerable Msgr. Ferrando was a devout son. He wrote: « I look with confidence to the future, trusting in Mary Help of Christians... I will entrust myself to Mary Help of Christians who already saved me from many dangers ». I wish you may draw inspiration from this example of Salesian Sanctity, getting to know his testimony and asking through his intercession the grace of the miracle that may open the way to his beatification.

Rome, 18 March 2016

(Anniversary of the Ordination to the Priesthood
of Venerable Msgr. Ferrando in Borgo S. Martino - 1923)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Angelo Ferrando". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'A' and a long horizontal flourish at the end.