



Hope Gushes from the Margins and the Marginalized

Dear Confreres,

God chose to reveal Himself in the world. Instead of coming with the expected glory and power, God chose to enter human history from the margins: born as a baby, in humility and vulnerability. He chose to come to a poor, oppressed people, in an obscure part of the Roman Empire, during a time of great turmoil. God, who could have chosen any status, wealth, or influence, came as a helpless infant, revealing His closeness to the weak, vulnerable, sinful, forgotten, the oppressed, and those pushed to the edges of society. In doing so, God showed that hope and salvation come not from power or privilege, but from the simple, the vulnerable, and the marginalized. The birth of Jesus was not only an entry into the human story but a declaration of love and hope for all, especially for those overlooked by society.

Joseph and Mary, the earthly parents of Jesus, lived on the margins of their society. Joseph was a carpenter, a modest profession that didn't bring wealth or honour, and Mary was a young woman from a small-town Nazareth, with little social standing. When Mary became pregnant with Jesus before her marriage was completed, they faced scandal, rumours, and possible social exclusion. Joseph had to choose to stand by Mary, knowing it would mean enduring judgment from their community. Their journey to Bethlehem for the census was not just a physical journey, but one that highlighted their outsider status, like the migrants of today, displaced and journeying without the support of family or community. In these humble, marginalized lives, God chose to begin His plan for humanity's redemption, honouring those on the outskirts and lifting them as vessels of divine purpose.

Hope is born in the places where the world sees only despair, rising from the edges to transform the centre. Hope thrives among the marginalized, where resilience and faith forge a light that the darkness cannot dim. From the struggles of the forgotten, hope gushes forth like a river, unstoppable and destined to renew the world. The theme of this circular "Hope Gushes from the Margins and the Marginalized" can also be expressed differently as "God of the Margins becomes the God of the Marginalized" revealing the profound truth that God chooses to stand with those who are overlooked and oppressed. By entering the world as a humble child born in a stable, God placed Himself not at the centre of power but on the fringes, on the

margins of society. Jesus' life consistently reflected this; He sought out the marginalized – the poor, the sick, the outcast, and the sinner – bringing them healing, dignity, and belonging. Through His ministry, He challenged systems of exclusion, affirming the worth of those society had rejected. God's identification with the marginalized shows that He is not distant from suffering but is intimately involved, deeply aware of every struggle, and actively working for justice and compassion. In Jesus, God's love reaches out to those on the edges, transforming the margins into places of divine encounter. Thus, the God of the Margins becomes the God of the Marginalized, bringing hope, restoration, and the promise of a new kind of kingdom where every person has value and a place.

Hope coming from the margins speaks of the way God often chooses the unexpected, humble, and overlooked places and people to reveal His purposes. This hope isn't born from power or privilege but emerges in spaces where people have endured hardship, poverty, and rejection, and where, because of their need, they are open to the presence and action of God in profound ways. Through history, both biblical and theological, we see that hope rises from the margins precisely because of the conditions and qualities that arise in places of suffering and humility. Here are some conditions necessary for hope to emerge from the margins:

1. **Openness to God's Presence:** In the Bible, those on the margins often experience God in direct and transformative ways. Mary, an unassuming young woman from Nazareth, responds to God's call with open-hearted faith (Luke 1:38), setting the stage for Jesus, the hope of all humanity, to enter the world. Similarly, the shepherds, overlooked and low in social standing, were chosen to receive the angelic message of Christ's birth because they were receptive. This openness among the marginalized allows them to recognize and embrace hope where others may miss it.
2. **Faith and Dependence on God:** Hope from the margins is sustained by a profound faith that transcends immediate circumstances. People on the margins often rely on God as their primary source of strength because they lack material and social security. This dependence, highlighted in the Psalms and echoed in the lives of saints, creates a fertile ground for hope, as it is rooted in trust rather than self-sufficiency. Liberation theology, for instance, emphasizes how the poor and oppressed experience God's presence as they rely on Him for justice and deliverance.
3. **Solidarity and Community Support among the Marginalized:** Hope from the margins is nurtured in the context of community. The early Christian community, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles, embodies this: believers shared what they had, supported each other, and extended hope to those in need (Acts 2:44-45). Solidarity within marginalized communities provides both material and emotional support, embodying God's love and fostering resilience. It creates an environment where people can find and share hope, even in the face of hardship, turning the margins into places of mutual strength.

4. Willingness to Embrace Vulnerability as Strength: The experience of suffering can deepen a person's or community's spiritual life, producing perseverance, character, and ultimately hope, as St. Paul describes in Romans 5:3-5 "we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." Marginalized communities often endure cycles of adversity, yet their resilience transforms suffering into a form of hope that looks forward to God's promises. This perseverance, seen in the lives of saints like St. Oscar Romero and Mother Teresa, becomes a beacon of hope to others, showing that God works powerfully even in weakness. Hope emerges when people in marginalized state embrace their vulnerability, understanding it as a source of divine strength. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, St. Paul writes, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." This paradoxical truth, that God's power is most present in human weakness, is central to the Christian understanding of hope. Vulnerability invites reliance on God, and in that reliance, individuals discover that God's strength sustains them, turning their marginalized status into a profound source of hope and spiritual resilience.

5. Commitment to Faithful Action and Social Transformation: Hope from the margins is not passive; it involves faithful action that seeks social transformation. Jesus' teachings consistently urged His followers to care for the "least of these" (Matthew 25:40) and to be agents of change in the world. This active hope calls for challenging unjust systems, practicing mercy, and living out a radical love that defies societal expectations. Many liberation theologians, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, have emphasized that hope on the margins is both spiritual and practical, it inspires movements for social justice, economic equity, and human rights, seeking tangible change that reflects God's Kingdom on this earth.

These five conditions, openness to God, faith, solidarity, transformative suffering, willingness to embrace vulnerability and commitment to social transformation, enable hope to rise powerfully from the margins. They show that, even when stripped of worldly power, people on the edges of society can witness to hope, firmly founded in God's presence and promises.

In Catholic theology, hope is a profound and multifaceted virtue that unites the spiritual journey of the believer with the promise of divine fulfillment. From St. Augustine to St. Thomas Aquinas, hope is seen as an essential motivator and 'driver' in the Christian life, pointing towards God as the ultimate source of true happiness and salvation. Augustine links hope closely with faith and charity, emphasizing it as a yearning for God's promises, while Aquinas refines this understanding by distinguishing genuine hope from presumption, grounding it in trust in God's power rather than human capability. Mystical theologians like St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Ávila explore hope as both a purifying force and an anchor, especially during the most trying moments of spiritual life. St. Ignatius of Loyola similarly places hope at the heart of active discernment, fostering a confident participation in God's mission. Modern

theologians, like Karl Rahner and Henri de Lubac, expand the concept to include both individual and communal dimensions, viewing hope as a present encounter with grace that drives toward self-transcendence and the collective destiny of humanity in Christ.

The theological discourse on hope continues to evolve, integrating social, historical, and cosmic dimensions. Hans Urs von Balthasar anchors hope in Christ's resurrection, seeing it as a courageous participation in God's ultimate victory over death, while Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) frames hope as a redemptive force that directs human history toward eternal life. Liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez and Edward Schillebeeckx emphasize hope's socio-political implications, advocating for justice and the transformation of society as expressions of fidelity to God's promises. Walter Kasper and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin highlight hope as an ongoing process, either as a communal anticipation of God's Kingdom or as an evolutionary force leading to the Omega Point in Christ. This dynamic understanding is echoed in the works of Romano Guardini and Jürgen Moltmann, who see hope as a response to God's nearness in the Incarnation and an active anticipation of His future, urging believers to engage with the complexities of the modern world. Through these diverse perspectives, hope emerges as both a present reality and future anticipation, a force that sustains personal faith while inspiring collective action toward a world transformed by God's love.

Building on these rich theological perspectives, the Salesian tradition, represented by St. John Bosco, St. Dominic Savio, and St. Mary Mazzarello, offers a distinctive approach to the virtue of hope, emphasizing its role in everyday life, particularly among the young and marginalized. For St. John Bosco, hope was a dynamic force for social change and spiritual growth, grounded in a profound trust in God's providence. He viewed hope as a call to uplift and educate the youth, believing that nurturing their potential would lead them closer to God and contribute to a better society. Bosco's preventive system, characterized by reason, religion, and kindness, embodies hope as an active, joyful, and practical response to God's love, inspiring young people to live virtuously and aspire to holiness.

St. Dominic Savio, embraced hope with youthful fervour, seeing it as the confidence to pursue sanctity even in the face of life's challenges. His motto, "Death rather than sin," reflects a hope that was both pure and courageous, focused unwaveringly on union with God. Similarly, St. Mary Mazzarello, carried forward this spirit of hope by dedicating herself to the education and empowerment of young women. For her, hope was about trust in God's guidance, particularly in times of uncertainty and struggle. She saw hope not just as a theological concept but as a daily lived reality, offering encouragement and fostering resilience within the community. Together, these Salesian saints expanded the Church's understanding of hope by showing how it can inspire not only individual holiness but also social transformation, especially among the most vulnerable. In doing so, they contributed to a vision of hope that is not only eschatological but also immediate and practical, a vision that unites faith with concrete acts of love and service.

We have received the baton from our father and founder not only to run with hope among the despaired youth but become true embodiments of hope. Young people on the margins, those who may feel excluded from mainstream society or who face significant challenges, often see us Salesians as persons who embody hope in three distinct but interconnected ways: **givers of hope, nurturers of hope, and hope itself**. Here's how these roles are often visualized by youth:

Salesians are Givers of Hope

Salesians are often the first to see and reach out to young people who are frequently overlooked by society. This act of giving hope goes beyond mere assistance; it is a powerful affirmation of the inherent dignity and potential of each young person. By meeting basic needs—providing food, shelter, and safety—Salesians offer immediate relief that stabilizes lives. Their constant and supportive presence becomes a dependable anchor for those navigating uncertainty, embodying a safety net when all else feels insecure. Above all, Salesians convey a profound and unspoken message: “you matter.” This message becomes a beacon of hope for the young, showing them that they have value in a world that may have let them down.

Salesians are Nurturers of Hope

Once trust is established, Salesians take the next step by nurturing the hope they have ignited. Through teaching practical skills, providing education, and offering vocational training, they equip young people to transform their circumstances. Personalized mentorship plays a crucial role, with Salesians investing deeply in each individual, showing them they are worth the time and effort. They encourage the dreams and ambitions of young people, inspiring them to envision a future they might never have imagined possible. This nurturing role is often likened to that of a gardener, tending to young, fragile seeds in difficult soil—cultivating potential, fostering resilience, and patiently guiding growth.

Salesians are Hope Itself

As relationships deepen, Salesians become more than just mentors; they transform into symbols of hope for marginalized youth. They embody stability and reliability, consistently showing up and offering grounding in lives marked by chaos and uncertainty. Through their commitment to faith and resilience, Salesians model a way of life that speaks to those who feel abandoned or alone. Beyond individual guidance, Salesians create communities where young people find acceptance, connection, and a sense of belonging—a crucial lifeline for those who feel isolated. In the eyes of these young people, Salesians evolve into a living embodiment of hope, radiating the strength, faith, and values they themselves wish to embrace. This enduring presence provides not just support, but a tangible pathway to a brighter, more hopeful future.

To conclude, as we approach the celebration of Christmas, a season of hope, peace, and joy, we are reminded of the deep and lasting significance of this moment in our faith journey. The birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in a humble manger, embodies a radical message that resonates

with us all today: hope is born in the margins. In our world, where so many are struggling—whether due to poverty, conflict, displacement, or injustice—Christmas calls us to recognize the presence of Christ in those who live on the edges of society. Pope Francis, in his continuous efforts to call the Church to be a “Church of the poor,” challenges us to see the face of Christ in the marginalized. This Christmas, let us open our eyes and hearts to the countless individuals and communities who suffer most, just as Christ was born in a poor, humble stable.

The journey toward the Jubilee Year 2025, which Pope Francis will begin, invites us into a time of renewal, reconciliation, and transformation. The Jubilee is a sacred occasion, calling us to deepen our commitment to hope, justice, peace, and compassion, especially for the poor and the excluded. It calls us to be agents of hope in a world in desperate need of healing. For the Salesian Family, this is an especially significant moment, as we continue to live out St. John Bosco’s charism – a charism rooted in loving kindness, reason, and religion – and to carry his dream of offering hope to young people, especially the most vulnerable. St. John Bosco, in his time, understood the importance of offering a sense of dignity and future to the young who were left behind by society. He created a home for the poor, a school for the ignorant, and a playground for the abandoned. Today, this mission continues through the Salesian Family’s presence around the world. As we prepare for Jubilee 2025, we are called to renew our commitment to Don Bosco’s vision, to be signs of hope to those who have none, to be instruments of peace where there is conflict, and to build communities of love and solidarity that uplift the marginalized.

Dear Confreres, here are some questions for your reflection to make the virtue of hope our daily breath. Here are five reflective questions based on the theme of hope, particularly as it relates to the Salesian charism and the broader theological perspectives:

- (1) How can we, as Salesians, embody the practical and joyful hope of St. John Bosco in our work with the young and marginalized today?
- (2) In what ways does our engagement with those on the margins reveal the deeper theological hope that sustains the Church, as seen in the lives of saints like St. Teresa of Ávila and St. Mary Mazzarello?
- (3) How does our understanding of hope challenge us to address both spiritual and social needs, following the examples of Gustavo Gutiérrez and St. Dominic Savio’s pursuit of holiness amidst real-world struggles?
- (4) What can we learn from the ‘dark night’ experiences described by St. John of the Cross, and how do we remain hopeful leaders for the youth during their moments of uncertainty and difficulty?
- (5) How does our Salesian mission of education and accompaniment express the theological virtue of hope, transforming lives and communities in tangible ways?

A blessed Christmas and Prosperous and Hope filled New Year 2025. Wishing you a fruitful preparation for the Jubilee Year ahead!

Yours affectionately,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fr. Don Bosco SDB', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Fr. Don Bosco SDB

INM Provincial

Date: 01.12.2024

Place: Chennai - 10