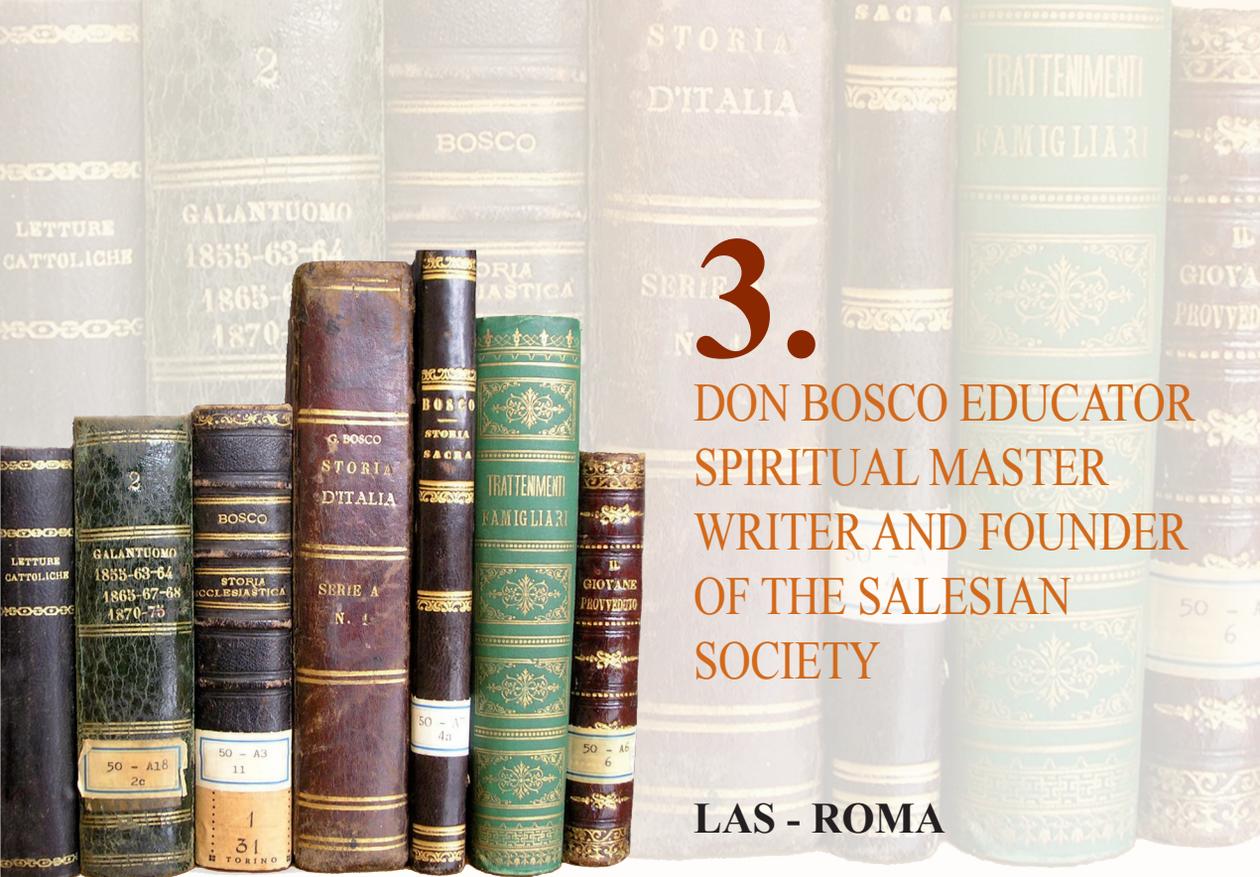


ARTHUR J. LENTI

DON

BOSCO

HISTORY AND SPIRIT



3.

DON BOSCO EDUCATOR
SPIRITUAL MASTER
WRITER AND FOUNDER
OF THE SALESIAN
SOCIETY

LAS - ROMA

Don Bosco: History and Spirit

3. Don Bosco Educator, Spiritual Master, Writer and Founder of the Salesian Society

The topics dealt with in this **third volume** of the series, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*, are large and comprehensive. Basically they present a Don Bosco active in a triple capacity—in his roles as educator and spiritual master, as writer, publisher and controversialist, and as founder of the Salesian Society. Each of these activities was of extremely importance in its own right, and fundamental for the future development of the Salesian work.

As educator and spiritual master in the community of students at the Home Attached to the Oratory he set forth an educative method and a way of holiness that has been proved valid to this day. As founder of the Salesian Society he gathered the force that would transmit the method and the way from one generation to the next. As writer and publisher he committed his Salesians to a ministry that would gain decisive momentum in defense of the Catholic faith and the Christian ethos, though Don Bosco the controversialist drew inspiration from a nineteenth-century apologetic style that is no longer regarded as valid.

Don Bosco's activity through this decade (roughly 1849-1861) is set against a background of social change and political evolution—leading to the unification of Italy.

The series *Don Bosco, History and Spirit* consists of **seven volumes**. The first three volumes survey the life and times of John Melchior Bosco ("Don Bosco," 1815-1888) up to 1864, with particular attention to nineteenth-century political, social and religious history. This survey looks at Don Bosco's own education, at his spiritual and theological formation. It examines the growth of the work, and the founding and initial development of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, in the context of the liberal revolution and the unification of Italy (1848-1861). The next four volumes describes Don Bosco's life and work in the period following the unification of Italy. In this setting *Don Bosco, History and Spirit* discusses the institutional developments and organization of the Salesian Society. It describes Don Bosco's further ministerial choices, and surveys the expansion of the Salesian work. At the same time it examines the development of permanent structures to guarantee the continuance of the Salesian work, and discusses some of the founder's insights and ideas, especially as they emerge from the reflective writings of his maturity.

Vol. 1: *Don Bosco's Formative Years in Historical Context*

Vol. 2: *Birth and Early Development of Don Bosco's Oratory*

Vol. 3: *Don Bosco Educator, Spiritual Master, Writer and Founder of the Salesian Society*

Vol. 4: *Beginnings of the Salesian Society and Its Constitution*

Vol. 5: *Institutional Expansion*

Vol. 6: *Expansion of the Salesian Work in the New World and Ecclesiological Confrontation at Home*

Vol. 7: *Don Bosco's Golden Years*



Arthur J. Lenti, who has published many articles on Don Bosco and Salesian topics in the *Journal of Salesian Studies* and in the *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane*, has degrees in Scripture, Systematic and Spiritual Theology. After over 20 years of teaching Scripture in Aptos, Alma, and Josephinum, Fr Lenti came to Don Bosco Hall in Berkeley in 1975. Since 1984, he has been the lead instructor at the Institute of Salesian Spirituality in Berkeley (an affiliate of the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, member school of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley). His most recent book is *Don Bosco his Pope and his Bishop*.

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ARTHUR J. LENTI

DON BOSCO: HISTORY AND SPIRIT

Vol. 3

DON BOSCO EDUCATOR, SPIRITUAL MASTER, WRITER
AND FOUNDER OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY

(Edited by Aldo Giraudò)

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DON BOSCO: HISTORY AND SPIRIT

A Survey of the Life and Work of Saint John Bosco (1815-1888)

A Word to the Reader

The chapters that make up this series of volumes are a survey of the life and times of St. John Bosco, framed and punctuated by the events that brought both the Western Church and the Western World into modern times.

I call this survey, “Don Bosco, History and Spirit”—“History,” because Don Bosco’s life and work were played out in the context of the fateful events that created a new religious and political world, and thereby also shaped his thinking and action; “Spirit,” because through discernment, interpretation and acceptance he discovered the meaning of this new world and courageously responded to its challenges: his vocation.

These chapters were born, so to speak, in the classroom. The historical materials were the burden of private reading as well as of the instructor’s presentation. But the “Spirit” in them emerged through fairly intensive critical reflection involving the collaboration of both instructor and students.

For the present purpose the material had to undergo considerable revision and re-writing for greater readability, and a number of chapters had to be expanded with Appendices. These contain biographical sketches of figures that were deemed relevant to the matter under treatment. They also contain texts that seemed necessary or useful for a better understanding of the topic under discussion.

Acknowledgments

The presentation at many point is indebted, sometimes heavily, to the work of scholars, too numerous to mention, who have labored diligently and critically in the field of Salesian Studies, and other related fields. To them goes my grateful acknowledgment.

To Father Aldo Giraudo, of the *Don Bosco Studies Center* at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome, go my most heartfelt thanks for his interest and support. He has devoted precious time and care to reading and editing the material.

I owe a large debt of gratitude to Very Reverend Father Pascual Chávez, Salesian Rector Major, Father Francesco Cereda, Department Head for Formation, and to Father Luigi Zuffetti of the Mission Procure in Turin, for approving and supporting the project.

Finally, I thank the Director and Staff of Don Bosco Hall for their support over the years.

Arthur J. Lenti
Institute of Salesian Spirituality
Don Bosco Hall
Berkeley, California (U.S.A.)

DON BOSCO EDUCATOR, SPIRITUAL MASTER,
WRITER AND FOUNDER OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY

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Each of these activities was of extreme importance in its own right, and fundamental for the future development of the Salesian work.

As educator and spiritual master in the community of students at the Home Attached to the Oratory he set forth an educative method and a way of holiness that has been proved valid to this day. As founder of the Salesian Society he gathered the force that would transmit the method and the way from one generation to the next. As writer and publisher he committed his Salesians to a ministry that would gain decisive momentum in defense of the Catholic faith and the Christian ethos, though Don Bosco the controversialist drew inspiration from a nineteenth-century apologetic style that is no longer regarded as valid.

Don Bosco's activity through this decade (roughly 1849-1861) is set against a background of social change and political evolution—leading to the unification of Italy.

Chapter 1

DON BOSCO'S REGULATIONS FOR THE BOYS ORATORY AND EARLY EDUCATIONAL AND DEVOTIONAL WRITINGS (1844-1849)

Summary

1. Don Bosco's Regulations for the Boys Oratory
2. First Oratory-Based Youth Associations
 1. The Company (Sodality) of St. Aloysius (1847)
 2. The Mutual Aid Association (1849)
3. Don Bosco's Early Educational and Devotional Writings
 1. Introductory Comments
Don Bosco's Early Writings and the "Apostolate of the Press"
Writings Listed in Don Bosco's Last Will and Testament of 1856
Don Bosco the Writer: Method and Style
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The Comollo Biography (1844)
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The Companion of Youth (1847)
The Bible History (1847)
The Young People's Friend (a journal) (1848-1849)
Virtues and Christian Refinement According to the Spirit of St. Vincent de Paul (1848)
Introduction to the Metric System (1849)

Appendices: 1. Excerpts from the *Companion of Youth*; 2. from *L'Amico della Gioventù* (The Young People's Friend)

Archbishop Frasoni's Decree (1852) naming Don Bosco spiritual director-in-chief of the three oratories, after a period of challenge and crisis, closed a chapter in the history of the oratory movement. It also opened new horizons for Don Bosco in his commitment to young people. It would be natural therefore to pursue the ensuing developments. At this point, however,

we need to return to the period of the early Oratory and to some important aspects of Don Bosco's activity during that period.

We shall therefore consider briefly Don Bosco's regulatory activity in the "festive" Oratory (*Piano di Regolamento...*) and the first Oratory-based youth associations—the Company, or Sodality, of St. Aloysius and the Mutual Aid Association—established in response to felt needs of the oratory boys. We will then survey Don Bosco's earliest educational and devotional writings.

I. Regulations of the Boys Oratory

Opere Edite 29, 31-94 (*Regolamento dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales per gli Esterni*) (comprises only the text of the Regulations as printed in 1877); *IBM* III, 86-108 (Chapters 8 and 9) edited in *EBM* III, 64-72 (Don Bosco's research into various oratories and composition of the Regulations); *EBM* III, 441-453 (Appendix 1: Regulations); *EBM* III, 454-458 and 463 (Appendices 2-5 and 8: Early additions to the Regulations, Part II); Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco per i giovani: l'"Oratorio" una «Congregazione degli Oratori. Documenti* (Roma: LAS, 1988), 12-15 (critical examination of archival manuscripts of the *Introduction*, *Historical Outline* and *Regulations*; 18-21 (dates of composition and historical context). A complete copy of the *Regulations* is in *ASC* D482 *Regolamento dell'Oratorio*, *FDB* 1,955 D6-1,956 B3 (*Regolamento primitivo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*). It comprises the *Regulations* proper prefaced by the *Introduction* and the *Historical Outline* (1854) critically edited by Braido.

Braido points out that a longer title, "*Piano di Regolamento per l'Oratorio maschile di S. Francesco di Sales in Torino nella regione di Valdocco*" appeared on the manuscript of the *Regulations* proper, and was struck through and transferred to the page containing the *Introduction* (when the *Introduction* and *Historical Outline* were added in 1854). At this time the shorter title (*Regolamento primitivo dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*) took its place. From these titles it would seem therefore that the *Regulations* were drawn up by Don Bosco only with the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in view. Braido writes:

The *Regulations* have their own separate history [*separate* from the *Introduction* and *Historical Outline*] and, at least in their extant original sections, could be dated as early as 1851/52. This would take us back to a time before 1852, the

time before Archbishop Louis Fransoni appointed Don Bosco Spiritual Director-in-chief of the three Oratories [...].¹

The *Regulations* proper, therefore, began to be drafted in the early 1850s, hence before the *Introduction* and *Historical Outline* (1854) were added as a preface in 1854.

For our purpose, to convey the idea of the organization imparted to the life and activity of the Boys Oratory, we translate the headings from the first printed edition of 1877, reprinted photographically in *Opere Edite* (listed above).²

1. Contents of the 1877 Printed Edition

Regulations of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales for the Externs

Part 1

Purpose of the Oratory (3-4) – Ch. 1: The Director (5-6) – Ch. 2: The Prefect (6-7) – Ch. 3: The Catechist or Spiritual Director (7-8) – Ch. 4: The Assistant (8-9) – Ch. 5: The Sacristans (9-12) – Ch. 6: The Monitor [Leader in prayers...] (12-13) – Ch. 7: The Chapel Supervisors [Helpers of the Assistant] (13-14) – Ch. 8: The Catechists (14-18) – Ch. 9: The Archivist or Chancellor (19-20) – Ch. 10: The Peacemakers (20-21) – Ch. 11: The Choirboys (21-23) – Ch. 12: Organizers of Recreation (23-25) – Ch. 13: Patrons and Protectors (26-27).

Part 2

Ch. 1: Duties of all Oratory Workers (28-29) – Ch. 2: Who may attend the Oratory, under what conditions (29-31) – Ch. 3: Deportment during recreation (31-33) – Ch. 4: Deportment in Church (33-34) – Ch. 5: Deportment outside the Oratory (34-35) – Ch. 6: Religious exercises (36) – Ch. 7: Confession and Communion (36-39) – Ch. 8: Subject matter of sermons and moral instructions (40-41) – Ch. 9: Feast days enriched with indulgences (41-42) – Ch. 10: Special Religious Ob-

¹ Cf. Braido, *Don Bosco per i giovani*, 20. Lemoyne dates the early Regulations in 1847 (*IBM* III, 97) and compares this (supposedly) earliest draft with the printed edition of 1887, the last published under Don Bosco, noting that “differences are not so great”—likewise, *EBM* III, pp. 72 and 441ff.

² *Opere Edite* 29, 31-94. It was a booklet 5 x 3.5 in. of 59 pages, counting the title page and frontispiece. We use the pagination of the original.

servances (43-44) – Ch. 11: Company [Sodality] of St. Aloysius [Additional to the rules] (45-46).

Part 3 (Elementary day and evening classes)

Ch. 1: Classes and conditions for enrolling and general duties (47-49) – Ch. 2: The Porter (49-50) – Ch. 3: Evening classes of business and music (50-51) – Ch. 4: The instructors (51-53) – Ch. 5: General rules [for special occasions] (53-58) [a] for the feasts of St. Aloysius and St. Francis de Sales; [b] for the end of carnival days and the beginning of Lent; [c] for Lenten catechetical instruction and for Confirmation; [d] for the spiritual retreat and Easter, [e] for the Seven Sundays in honor of St. Joseph and the Six Sundays in honor of St. Aloysius; [f] for Assigning the boys to catechism classes; [g] for raffles [at the Oratory]; [h] for the Librarian – the end –.

2. Excerpts From the First Printed Edition of 1877

The following excerpts exemplify how deeply spiritual and challenging was the rule of life put before simple lads from the streets of the poorest districts of Turin. And how powerfully, too, were the Oratory workers challenged to engage in the work of education and formation of these youngsters.

Purpose of the Oratory

Regulations, 3-4 in *Opere Edite*, 33-34; edited in *EBM III*, 67-68.

The purpose of the festive oratory is to entertain youngsters on Sundays and holy days with pleasant and wholesome recreation after they have attended religious services.

1. We say, “*To entertain youngsters on Sunday and holy days,*” because we are particularly interested in young apprentices who, more than others, are exposed on these days to severe moral and physical dangers. We do not, however, exclude school children who wish to attend the oratory.

2. We say, “*With pleasant and wholesome recreation,*” meaning play that truly recreates rather than fatigues, because games or activities that may harm the health or morals of the boys are not permitted.

3. We say, “*After they have attended religious services,*” because religious instruction is the oratory’s primary objective, while the rest is only an accessory, an inducement for the boys to attend.

This oratory is placed under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales, because those who intend to dedicate themselves to this kind of work should take this saint as a model of charity and affability.

Further Excerpts on important topics, listed as edited in EBM, are recommended for reading:

Part 1, Chapter 8, *The Catechists* (EBM III, 446-448).

Part 1, Chapter 10, *The Peacemakers* (EBM III, 448-449).

Part 1, Chapter 13, *Patrons and Protectors* (EBM III, 451-452).

Part II, Chapter 2, *Admission Requirements* (Who maybe be accepted in the oratory and under what conditions) (EBM III, 68; cf. *Opere Edite* 29, 59-61 [29-31]).

Part II, Chapter 3, *Behavior during Recreation* (EBM III, 455).

Part II, Chapter 7, *Confession and Communion* (EBM III, 456-457).

II. Early Oratory-Based Youth Associations³

MO-En, 303-310 (Company of St. Aloysius and Feast); *EBM III*, 147-151, 459 (St. Aloysius Sodality: establishment and regulations); *IV*, 52-56 (Mutual Aid Society), 208-212 (Spiritual role of St. Aloysius Sodality), 518-520 (Regulations of Mutual Aid Society); P. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 259-269, and *DB:RO&S*, 349-360; Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 242-243, 312-313.

The youth associations sponsored by Don Bosco fall into two main periods, each with its specific context. The earlier associations were created for the boys' oratory, in response to the needs of the oratory population. The later associations were created for the Home Attached to the Oratory, with special (but not exclusive) reference to the student community and in response to its spiritual and educational needs.

Here we give a brief account of the two earliest oratory-based associations: the Company (Sodality) of St. Aloysius and the Mutual Aid Association. (The second type will be discussed later.)

³ The term "company" reflects the post-Tridentine nomenclature of religious associations. English usage favors such terms as association, society and sodality, especially as traditional parish forms.

1. Company (Sodality) of St. Aloysius

Establishment and Purpose of the Company

The Company (Sodality) of St. Aloysius was established by Don Bosco for the Boys Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in 1847. Although Don Bosco had been involved with a fairly large group of boys since 1844, this was the first youth association that he devised. Its purpose was to promote the practice of the Christian life and service by its members among the larger oratory population.⁴

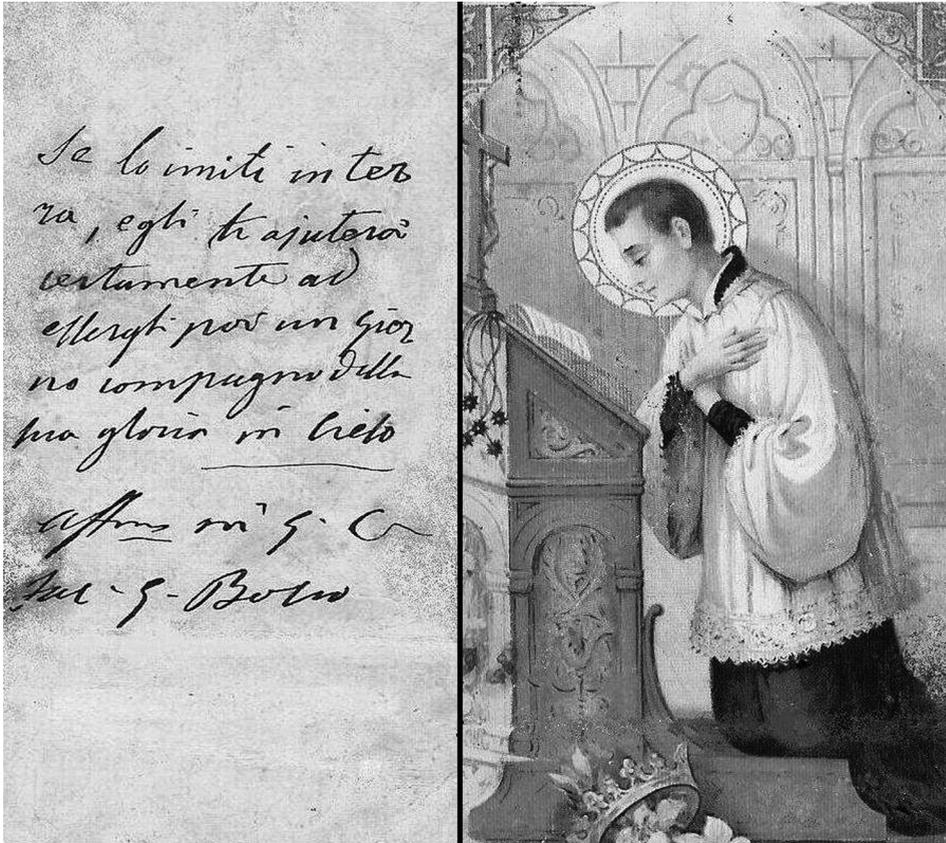
By choosing St. Aloysius as a patron, Don Bosco intended to adapt to his youngsters' circumstances and needs the model of piety and of the spiritual life sponsored by the Society of Jesus that had already been accepted in schools and parishes. A "Company of St. Aloysius," established by Father Giambattista Rubino for young men, was active in parishes of the Cuneo diocese.

In 1846 Don Bosco had compiled the little booklet entitled, *Six Sundays in Honor of St. Aloysius* and included it in the *Companion of Youth* (see below). The *Six Sundays* was used for the feast of St. Aloysius celebrated toward the end of June, and was carried by oratory boys as a kind of membership card. In 1847 Don Bosco established a second oratory, under the patronage of St. Aloysius. These facts show Don Bosco's intention of placing St. Aloysius before the boys as a model.

The regulations of the Company of St. Aloysius, in particular the nomenclature employed therein, also stand in the tradition of post-Tridentine religious associations. The members are called "Confreres;" the ecclesiastical superior is called "Spiritual Father;" the moderator (a lay person elected by a plurality of votes) is called "Prior." But many new elements were introduced by Don Bosco, the most novel of which was that the Company was intended for a large number of young people gathering at the outskirts of the city and having no connection with traditional parish forms.

The feast of St. Aloysius was celebrated for the first time at the Oratory in 1847, and the Company played a major role in its celebration. Archbishop

⁴ For the ideas and the process involved in the foundation and approval, and for the organization and running of the Company of St. Aloysius, see *MO-En*, 303-304; *EBM* III, 147-151. For further activity and illustrious membership, see *EBM* IV, 208-212.



1 - Holy picture of St. Aloysius Gonzaga bearing Don Bosco's autograph keepsake and signature: "If you imitate him here on earth, he will surely help you to be one day his companion sharing his glory in heaven. Yours affectionately in J. C. Fr. J. Bosco." (Picture courtesy of J. Coggiola)

Fransoni conferred the Sacrament of Confirmation at a solemn Mass. Vespers and a procession followed in the afternoon. There followed parades, skits, release of colorful balloons, and fireworks (while from the *Giardiniera* tavern in the Bellezza house next door came the sound of revelry, dancing and music).

The Company functioned not only as the organizer of religious festivities, but from the start also as the instrument whereby the religious and spiritual guidance of Don Bosco and Father Borel affected the oratory masses.

It should be emphasized that the Company was set up for the oratory boys. At this time (1847ff.) the Home was just getting off the ground.

The lay “Prior,” elected by the “Confreres,” might be a well-to-do gentleman who could help with the activities also financially (as by providing occasionally special afternoon snacks, or treats on feast days). One of the more outstanding members of the Company would be elected “Vice-prior.” Both, according to the regulations, could lead the boys in prayer and singing. This is an indication of Don Bosco’s desire to enlist the help of the youngsters themselves (rather than “clerics”) in various capacities.

Regulations of the Company (Sodality) of Saint Aloysius

Archbishop Fransoni approved the St. Aloysius Sodality with a Rescript dated April 12, 1847, and granted indulgences. He also expressed the wish to be enrolled as the Company’s first member.

Basic Regulations

The basic regulations outlined a “rule of life” to be embraced after the example of St. Aloysius.⁵

1. St. Aloysius was a model of exemplary conduct; therefore, all who want to become members of his sodality must follow his example. They must behave in such a manner as not only to avoid giving any kind of scandal, but also to strive constantly to set a good example, especially by the faithful observance of their religious duties. St. Aloysius from early childhood was so exact in performing his duties, so fond of prayer and so devout that, when he went to church, people flocked to see his modest demeanor and his recollection.

2. Endeavor to go to confession and Communion every two weeks or even more frequently, especially on solemn feast days. These sacraments are the weapons by which we triumph over the devil. As a young boy, St. Aloysius received them every week, and as he grew older, more often. Any member unable to fulfill this obligation may substitute some other act of devotion, with his director’s advice. All are encouraged to frequent the sacraments and to attend church services in the oratory chapel so as to set a good example for their companions.

⁵ *EBM* III, 148-150 and 459.

3. Flee from bad companions as from a plague, and be very careful to avoid improper conversation. St. Aloysius not only shunned such talk, but showed such modesty that no one even dared to utter an unseemly word in his presence.

4. Practice the greatest charity toward your companions, readily forgiving any offense. St. Aloysius repaid insults with friendship.

5. Have the greatest respect for the house of God. Urge others to practice virtue and to join this sodality. Out of love for others St. Aloysius volunteered to nurse the victims of a plague, and thereby sacrificed his own life.

6. Be very diligent in your work and in the fulfillment of your other duties. Promptly obey your parents and superiors.

7. When a sodality member falls sick, all the others should pray for him and also give him material assistance according to their means.

Structural Additions to the Basic Regulations

To these basic regulations Don Bosco added a complement, mostly of a structural nature, that he included with the Regulations for the Boys Oratory discussed above.⁶

1. The members of the Company (Sodality) of St. Aloysius aim at imitating this saint as far as possible, and at obtaining his protection in life and death.

2. The approval of this sodality by the archbishop of Turin should further encourage us to join it.

3. For the peace of mind of all concerned, it must be noted that the regulations of the St. Aloysius Sodality do not bind under sin, even venial. Therefore, by neglecting any of them, one does not commit any sin whatever, although he deprives himself of a spiritual benefit. The pledge made before St. Aloysius' altar is not a vow. Anyone, however, who is not determined to keep it should not join this sodality.

4. This sodality is under the care of a Spiritual Director, who must be a priest, and by a Prior, who must be a layman.

5. The Spiritual Director is appointed by the Superior of the Oratory. It is his duty to see to the observance of the rules, to admit new members, and to keep a roll of all, living and dead. It is also his duty to visit the sick belonging to the Mutual Aid Society. There is no limit to his tenure of office.

6. The Prior shall be elected by a relative majority of votes at a general as-

⁶ The additional regulations are given in Part II, Chapter 9 of the *Regulations for the Boys Oratory*, as in *Opere Edite* 29, 75-76.

sembly on Easter Sunday evening. His term of office shall be for a year, and he may be reelected.

The Pledge

I, pledge to do all I can to imitate St. Aloysius Gonzaga. Therefore, I resolve to flee from bad companions, to avoid bad talk, and to encourage others to virtue by word and example both in and out of church. I also pledge to observe all the other sodality rules. I hope to be faithful to this with the Lord's help and the protection of St. Aloysius. Daily I shall recite the following prayer:

“O glorious St. Aloysius Gonzaga, I humbly beseech you to receive me under your protection and to obtain for me from God the help to practice your virtues in life, so that I may die a holy death, and be one day partaker of your glory in heaven. Amen.”

Pater, Ave, Gloria, etc. – My Jesus, mercy!

2. Mutual Aid Association (*Società di Mutuo Soccorso*)

Don Bosco founded the Mutual Aid (Benefit) Society in 1849, but he wrote its regulations and inaugurated it officially on June 1, 1850.⁷ This Society was an association of working youngsters, established *within* the Company of St. Aloysius, as insurance against temporary unemployment or sickness. Members paid an enrollment fee of 1.50 lire and a membership fee of 5 *soldi* (1/4 lira) per week. These contributions were built up as a fund out of which members received benefits in time of sickness or unemployment. Don Bosco established this society to remove working youngsters from the moral and religious dangers that youngsters encountered in mutual aid societies or workers' unions in the city.

In view of the nature of this society, the nomenclature used was no longer that of traditional religious associations. As in other workers' societies the terms used are, “administrator,” “director,” etc. The Director of the oratory

⁷ Cf. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 261 (On p. 62f. he has 1848). The society and its purpose were described by Don Bosco in a booklet, *Società di mutuo soccorso di alcuni individui della Compagnia di san Luigi eretta nell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* [...]. (Torino: Tip. Speirani, 1850), in *Opere Edite* IV, 83-90. For details of the founding, activity and difficulties encountered, see *MO-En*, 387 and *EBM* IV, 52-56.

was *ex officio* Director of the Society. The Spiritual Director of the Company of St. Aloysius was Spiritual Director of the Society and Visitor of the sick, etc.

The devotional practices of the society were those of the Company of St. Aloysius. In 1857 the Mutual Aid Society joined the “Adjunct” Conference of St. Vincent de Paul established at the Oratory (see later discussion),⁸ but it did not cease to exist and to function. Perhaps the St. Vincent de Paul guaranteed its operation at a time when mutual aid societies were in trouble all over the city.

III. Don Bosco's Early Writings (1844-1849)

Two critical general repertoires of Don Bosco's writings are available: Pietro Stella, *Gli scritti a stampa di S. Giovanni Bosco* (Roma: LAS, 1977) and Francis Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888)* (Torino: SEI, 1996), 1369-1375. The text of Don Bosco's published works (reproduced in photocopy in original format, in some instances in various editions) is available in *Giovanni Bosco, Opere Edite* (Prima Serie: Libri e Opuscoli), ed. Centro Studi Don Bosco, UPS, 37 volumes (Roma: LAS, 1976-77). The text of some of Don Bosco's writings, with extensive introductory studies, is given in Alberto Caviglia, *San Giovanni Bosco, Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco*, 6 volumes (Torino: SEI, 1929ff.) The Salesian Historical Institute at the Generalate in Rome has published critical editions of a number of Don Bosco's important writings, to be found in various issues of *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane*, and in separate editions. P. Stella, *DB:LW*, 259-288 and *DBEc:Soc*, 327-351 (extensive studies of Don Bosco's activity as a writer and publisher). F. Desramaut *Don Bosco en son temps* (Torino: SEI, 1996), 1369-1381. This author analyzes and comments on various writings (for which see Index s. v.).

Note: Data on the writings discussed below are chiefly based on Stella and Desramaut listed above. These two authors are specifically cited only in particular cases.

⁸ The Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, introduced from Lyons, were very active in Turin and supported Don Bosco's work. Count Carlo Cays (later a Salesian) was the first Director of the Conferences. Don Bosco chose a group of lads and formed a conference at the Oratory. Although the St. Vincent de Paul did not enroll young people as members, they met Don Bosco halfway, and the oratory group was affiliated as “Adjunct.”

1. Don Bosco's Early Writings and the Apostolate of the Press

Writing may not have been Don Bosco's most important activity, but it was a notable one, in terms both of the time involved and of results achieved. In his Letter of 1885 (On the Apostolate of the Press) Don Bosco wrote: "This is one of the most important apostolates entrusted to me by Divine Providence; and you know how hard and untiringly I worked at it, even when engaged in a thousand other tasks."⁹ This means that he came to regard this activity (both as an author and as a publisher) as a part of his very vocation.

Don Bosco's activity in this field is globally referred to as apostolate of the press. However, this designation is best reserved for his later writing and publishing activity (especially of an apologetic nature). The year 1850 marks the beginning of this engagement, which solidified through the publication of the Catholic Readings (from 1853). Don Bosco's commitment to the Apostolate of the Press was his response to the call of the Piedmontese bishops for writings in defense of the faith and of the Church.

On the other hand, Don Bosco's earlier writings (now under consideration) are largely *ad hoc* writings produced to fill an immediate need arising from ministerial situations.

2. Don Bosco's Output and Success as a Writer

Even only partial lists of Don Bosco's published works testify to his commitment in this field. His output as a writer comprises some 170 "major" works (as listed in Stella's and Desramaut's repertories cited above). By mid-1856 he had already quite a list to his credit. In the last will and testament of July 26, 1856, Don Bosco claims authorship of 26 works.¹⁰ This section of the testament is worth quoting. He writes:

⁹ A printed copy of this letter bearing Don Bosco's authentic [P] signature exists in *ASC* A175 Lettere circolari ai Salesiani, *FDB* 1368 C12-D3. The text is given in *Ceria-Epistolario* IV, 318-321, and in *Lettere circolari di Don Bosco e di Don Rua* (Torino: Tip. dell'Orat. SFdS, 1896) 24-29. It is not found in the *Biographical Memoirs*. The text of this circular letter is given (in translation) in connection with later writings of Don Bosco.

¹⁰ Amadei, *IBM* X, 1331-1333, from archival Ms. in *ASC* A223 Testamenti, *FDBM* 73 A8-9 (omitted in *EBM*).

11° – Lest someone attempt to attribute to me writings of which I am not the author, I wish to submit herewith a list of writings composed or compiled by me, that are my literary property. It is my will to bequeath them also to my heirs, to be used for the greater glory of God and for the good of souls.

1. Short Biography of Young Louis Comollo (2nd Ed.)
2. The Devotee of the Guardian Angel (Anonymous)
3. Meditations on the Seven Sorrows of Mary (Anonymous)
4. Exercises in Devotion to the Mercy of God (Anonymous)
5. Bible History for Use in Schools (2nd Ed.)
6. History of the Church for Use in Schools (2nd Ed.)
7. The Companion of Youth, (3rd Ed.)
8. Virtue and Christian Refinement (Anonymous)
9. A Simple Explanation of the Metric System (5th Ed.)
10. The Catholic Instructed in his Religion (2nd Ed.)
11. Current Incidents Presented in Dialogue Form
12. Dramatic Debate between a Lawyer and a Protestant Minister
13. A Collection of Interesting Current Events
14. Six Sundays in Honor of St. Aloysius
15. Historical Account of the Miracle of the Blessed Sacrament
16. Friendly Discussion on Confession between a Lawyer and a Country Pastor
17. The Recent Conversion of a Waldensian Man
18. Learning Bible History the Easy Way (2nd Ed.)
19. The Power of a Good Education: A Recent Episode
20. The Life of St. Pancratius Martyr
21. The History of Italy for Young People
22. The Key to Paradise Made Available to Catholics
23. The Life of St. Peter, Apostle; *idem*, of St. Paul
24. Two Conferences on Purgatory and on Prayer for the Holy Souls
25. The Lives of the Popes up to the Year 221

Some of Don Bosco's writings went through many editions and enjoyed exceptional popularity and a wide circulation. Within his lifetime, the *Companion of Youth* (*Il Giovane Provveduto*, 1847) went through 118 editions, and he lived to see it translated into French, Spanish and Portuguese. Likewise, the *Key to Heaven* (*La Chiave del Paradiso*, 1856) saw 44 editions. The *Companion of the Christian Young Woman* (*La figlia Cristiana Provveduta*, 1878) went through 28 editions. His *Bible History* (*Storia Sacra*, 1847) went through 20 editions, as did his *History of Italy* (*Storia d'Italia*, 1855), which was in addition translated into

English. The *History of the Church* (*Storia Ecclesiastica*, 1845) saw 10 editions, and of the biographies the *Life of Dominic Savio* (1859) and the *Life of Louis Comollo* (1844) saw 6 and 4 editions respectively.

How explain Don Bosco's success? After all he was no scholar, and indeed with a few exceptions his writings contain nothing original. He may not have been an original thinker in a critical sense. However, he was an avid reader, endowed with a phenomenal memory, and a careful and selective compiler of material derived from a limited number of available books.

Don Bosco was a special kind of writer. His style and language evolved over the years so that there is a big difference in this respect between his earlier and his mature writings. But at any period, his writing style as a whole differs from that of his literary contemporaries. Spontaneity, immediacy, concrete presentation, linear simplicity, and a conscious effort to avoid the florid rhetoric of nineteenth-century writers, made him popular then, and rank him now as among the best stylists of his generation. In many ways in his writing, as well as in his speeches, he achieves poetic directness through the use of metaphor, story and characterization. He was a great communicator.

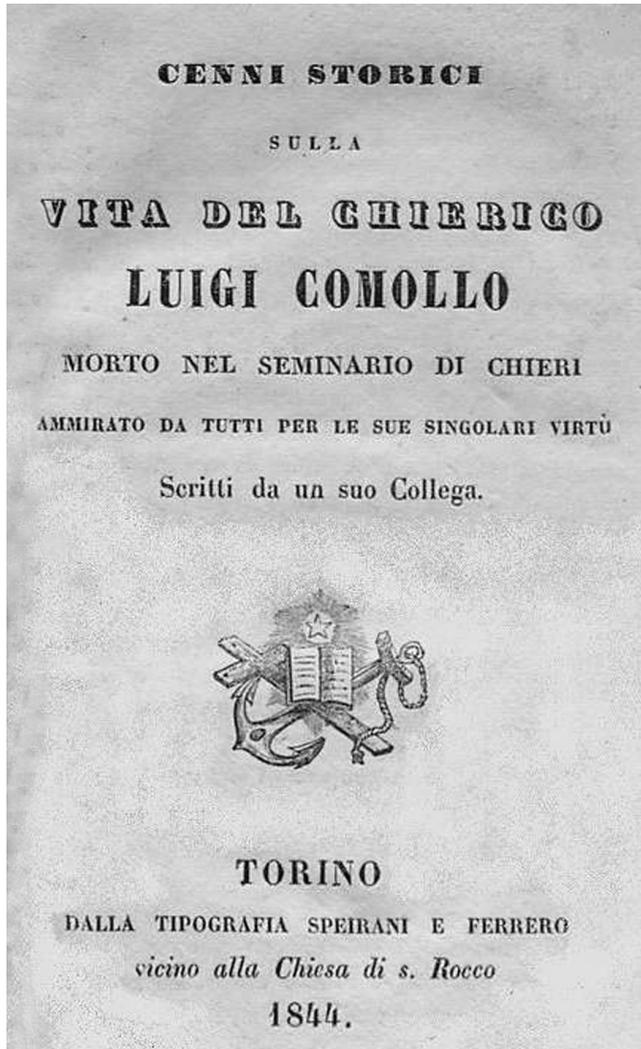
Don Bosco's writings may be classified on the basis of the perceived need and of the concerns driving him at various periods during his life. His earliest writings published between 1844 and 1849 chiefly with the oratory in view, have a devotional and educational purpose. In the paragraphs that follow we give a brief description of writings Nos. 1-2, 4-9 and 14, listed in the 1856 last will and testament.

3. Comollo Biography (1844)

Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel Seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù, scritti da un suo collega (Torino: Speirani e Ferrero, 1844, 84 pp.) (Further editions: 1854, 1867, 1884); in *Opere Edite* I, 1-84.

The biography was completed by Don Bosco at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*), and was based in part on a manuscript authored by him while still in the seminary entitled, *Illness and Death of the Young Seminarian Louis Comollo* [...].¹¹

¹¹ *Infermità e morte del giovane Chierico Luigi Comollo scritta dal suo collega C. Gio. Bosco. Nozione sulla nostra amicizia e sulla sua vita.* This is a manuscript of 23 pages in *FDBM* 305 C11-E10.



2 – Frontispiece of Don Bosco's "Life" of Louis Comollo (1844)

The biography, addressed to the seminarians, was a tribute to an exemplary seminarian and a dear friend. As such it had little to say to his oratory boys, but it will have much to say to his good boys of the Home, to the members of the Immaculate Conception Sodality in particular, whom he was cultivating for the priesthood. (The Comollo biography was discussed and excerpted in Vol. 1, Ch. 14.)

4. The Devotee of the Guardian Angel (1845)

Il Divoto dell'Angelo Custode. (Torino: Paravia e Co., 1845), 72 pp. (never re-edited);¹² in *Opere Edite* I, 87-158.

Essentially the work was a novena in preparation to the feast of the Guardian Angels (October 2), with an added exercise for the feast day itself. It gave for each day a fairly extended meditation, a brief practice or nosegay, and a “story or edifying anecdote” (*esempio*). The booklet may have been at first intended for the Sodality of the Guardian Angel, attached to the church of St. Francis of Assisi.

The devotion to the personal Guardian Angel was very important in the nineteenth century. As Don Bosco writes in the Introduction, this devotion is a sign of predestination: “Among the signs of one’s predestination theologians [...] list a tender devotion to the saints and to the guardian angels.”

5. History of the Church (1845)

Storia ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole utile per ogni ceto di persone dedicata all'onorat.mo signore F. [H]ervé de la Croix provinciale dei Fratelli d[etti] i[gnorantelli] d[elle] s[cuole] c[ristiane] compilata dal sacerdote B.G. (Torino: tipografia Speirani e Ferrero) 398 pp. (Further editions 1848, 1870, 1871, completely revised, 1879, 1888) in *Opere Edite* I, 160-556. Studies: Alberto Caviglia, *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco* [...]. (Torino: SEI, Vol. I/2, 1929), xxiv-572 pp. (Caviglia studies chiefly its form and composition.) P. Stella, *Don Bosco: Life and Work* (New Rochelle, NY, 1985), esp. 260-261 (text and n. 7); *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality* (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996), 47-50. F. Molinari, “Church and World in Don Bosco’s *Storia Ecclesiastica*,” in *Don Bosco’s Place in History*, 149-162; “La *Storia ecclesiastica* di Don Bosco,” in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell’umanità. Studi e testimonianze*, ed. P. Braido (Roma: LAS, 1987), 203-237. F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 204-213.¹³

Don Bosco’s *History of the Church* was essentially a didactic work intended (as its title clearly stated) for use by young people in schools as well as by

¹² A manuscript with Don Bosco’s corrections is in *ASC* 133: *Divoto*, FDBM 315 B7-E7.

¹³ In the paragraphs that follow I am guided especially by Desramaut’s detailed study and Stella’s illuminating remarks.

common people at large. But since it embodies Don Bosco's ecclesiology in its totally ultramontane form and his view of non-Catholic religions, it may be regarded as the precursor of his activity as the anti-Waldensian apologist of the fifties. Hence in a later chapter we will give some attention to this aspect of Don Bosco's *History of the Church*.

Origin and Publication of Don Bosco's History of the Church

The idea of writing a history of the Church may have occurred to Don Bosco at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*), when he was engaged in catechizing his young people on Sundays, and would naturally turn to Bible and Church history for story and moral lessons. For, Don Bosco's catechesis was always historical rather than dogmatic, as were his readings during seminary days.

In the seminary Don Bosco had heard the long *History of the Church* by the ex-Jesuit Bérault-Bercastel read during meals. On his own he read the 27-volume *History of the Church* by Abbé Claude Fleury ("not knowing that it was to be avoided") probably in the Italian translation by Gaspare Gozzi (Venice, 1767-71; or Genoa, 1769-73), according to Stella (*DB:LW*, listed above). He also read "the whole *History of the Church* by Henrion:" This is the Universal History of the Church by baron Matthieu-Richard-Auguste Henrion, probably read in a 14-volume Italian translation published between 1839 and 1843 (hence, in part, when Don Bosco was already at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*)).

These works may have provided inspiration, but because of his purpose in writing the *History* (as he indicates in the Preface) he began to look for books in this genre that were suitable for children.¹⁴ Whereas he could find books of that sort in the field of Bible history, he met with disappointment in the field of Church history. Some Church histories were too voluminous. Others left the field of Church history proper and digressed endlessly into secular history. Others expounded without restraint and with exaggerated polemical rhetoric only on what the Church had done. Yet others, translated from a foreign language, seemed to be ashamed to speak of the popes and of the great events that were the glory of Catholicism.

With the encouragement of persons in authority (so he claimed) he him-

¹⁴ *History of the Church* (1845), 7, in *Opere Edite* I, 165.

self undertook to “compile” a précis of Church history suitable for the young. What little spare time he enjoyed as chaplain in Barolo’s institutions he devoted to completing the project between 1844 and 1845. That same year (1844) Count Collegno had placed the municipal schools of Turin under the Christian Brothers’ direction. They received the royal *Exequatur* (judicial recognition). As the title shows, the *History* was dedicated “to the honorable sir, Brother Hervé de la Croix, provincial of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, [popularly] called [instructors] of the ignorant.” Don Bosco was a frequent visitor in their school. The dedication speaks of an existing good relationship, but perhaps also of pragmatic aims on Don Bosco’s part, seeking to insert his book into the school distribution system.

Three years later (1848) a second revised edition became necessary.

Structure, Sources, Contents and Concepts of the History of the Church

In question-and answer style (catechetical format), the *History* is divided into 6 epochs, with a preliminary section (*Nozioni preliminari*) or preamble. The second question of the Preamble defines the Church.

[The Church] is the congregation of all those who profess the faith and the doctrine of Jesus Christ and who are governed by a supreme Head who is the Vicar of Christ on earth. The Church is some times referred to as Greek or Latin or Gallican or Indian, but it is always the same Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church that is meant.¹⁵

This definition of the Church as a congregation bonded by faith in Christ and his teaching and by submission to the Pope (bishops are not reckoned with) sets parameters. In Don Bosco’s thinking the Church has an inner and an outer aspect, both clearly delineated. No allowance is made for a spiritual Church embracing dissidents and people of good will. The only people who belong to the Church are Christians who are governed by the Pope.

The first edition of the *History of the Church* (1845) features a few scattered engravings gradually eliminated in successive editions. The largest and most important of these images was retained on the page facing the frontispiece. It

¹⁵ *History of the Church* (1845), 14, in *Opere Edite* I, 172.

comprises two fields: the upper field contains the insignia of the papacy, tiara, triple cross, etc.; the lower field shows a scene with the figure of Christ handing the keys of the kingdom to Peter (Mt 16:19). The Church whose story is told in this work is the Church of the popes of Rome, the list of whom (stretching in uninterrupted succession, from St. Peter to Gregory XVI) is given as an Appendix.

In compiling the *History* Don Bosco kept things simple. He used only those authors who were orthodox in the ultramontane sense of the term and were suitable for young readers. He took the brief *History of the Church* by the Jesuit Jean-Nicolas Loriquez as a guide. Loriquez's concise presentation in dialogue format, organized in large epochs, with a conservative Roman and counter-revolutionary outlook must have appealed to Don Bosco.¹⁶ Loriquez's work was brief. So Don Bosco took additional material from an anonymous *History of the Church* recently published in Turin.¹⁷ The division here was by centuries, each century being allotted two chapters: One devoted to a survey of "the popes," the second to "other information on the Church."

With such models before him, Don Bosco constructed his *History* (1) in six epochs (preceded by a preliminary general section), (2) in dialogue form, (3) with emphasis on the popes.

He tells us, however, that he has read more widely, but that he has used only such material as was suitable for simple Italian-speaking young people. He has omitted or merely mentioned what seemed of purely secular (*profani*) or social (*civili*) value, dry or of scarce interest. On the other hand, he has retained and narrated in greater detail "tender and moving" passages apt not only to instruct the mind but also to educate the heart.¹⁸ The story of the martyrdom of St. Blaise, culled from Bérault-Bercastel's *History*, is a good example. To this story Don Bosco added two miracles performed by the

¹⁶ Jean-Nicolas Loriquez, *Histoire ecclésiastique A. M. D. G.* Italian translation by an anonymous (Turin: Marietti, 1844), 130 pp. A.M.D.G. (*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, to God's Greater Glory is part of the Jesuit device). The Jesuit Father Loriquez (1767-1845) was a well known teacher and writer who published a number of books for young readers, including a *History of France for use by the Young* (1814 and 1816...), paralleled by Don Bosco's *History of Italy narrated to the Young* (1856 and 1859...). Both came under fire from the liberals in both countries as Jesuitical and reactionary. [Cf. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 553-554.]

¹⁷ *Storia della Chiesa dalla sua fondazione fino al pontificato di Gregorio XVI* (Torino: Marietti, 1843), viii+360 pp.

¹⁸ *History of the Church* (1845), 9-10, Preface, in *Opere Edite I*, 167-168.

saint while he was being led to his death. One of them was the miracle of the fishbone.

A mother came forward all in tears and placed her only child at the saint's feet. The child was choking to death with a fishbone stuck in his throat. St. Blaise, moved with compassion at seeing the child in such a pitiable condition, offered a brief prayer, and immediately the child was cured.¹⁹

The other miracle was altogether extraordinary. Thrown to drown in the sea, St. Blaise made the sign of the cross and walked peacefully on the waves. There he sat and invited the infidels to come to him over the water. Some tried and were drowned. The saint was finally beheaded (315 A.D.).²⁰

Another episode, also drawn from Bérault-Bercastel, seems designed to play on the emotions of impressionable young people. The answer to the question, "To what atrocities were some fanatical Jews driven?" described the gruesome torture of young St. Werner, martyred by Jews in Trier in 1287 during Holy Week.²¹

The work has attractive features, as for example the mention of the role of religious congregations, especially those engaged in the work of charity, but as a whole the *History* is a prime document of Don Bosco's conservative ecclesiology.²²

6. The Six Sundays in Honor of St. Aloysius (1846)

Le sei domeniche e la novena di san Luigi Gonzaga con un cenno sulla vita del santo (Torino: Speirani e Ferrero, [(July?) 1846], 32 pp. (Further editions: 1854, 1864, 1878, 1886, 1888).

The *Six Sundays* conclude Part I of the *Companion of Youth* [see below], therefore this work does not appear separately in *Opere Edite*.

The pamphlet was written after settling at Pinardi's (April 1, 1846) when Don Bosco was already very ill.

¹⁹ *History of the Church* (1845), 110, in *Opere Edite* I, 268.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *History of the Church* (1845), 266-256, in *Opere Edite* I, 413-414, from Bérault-Bercastel, Zugno's Italian ed. [Desramaut, *DB en son temps*, 219, Note 123].

²² See studies listed above.

The one source of the work may have been a little book by the Jesuit P. De Mattei, *Il giovane angelico san Luigi Gonzaga proposto in esemplare di ben vivere [...] a celebrar con frutto le sei domeniche [...]*. published in Genoa in 1843, x-136 pp.²³

Don Bosco's booklet contained exercises for six Sundays, and the novena preparatory to the feast of St. Aloysius. For the feast day itself (June 21) it offered a meditation, a practice or nosegay, six Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory Bes, and a final prayer.

The meditation themes repeated the traditional pious statements about St. Aloysius and his virtues, such as that he never looked at his mother's face and (when he was a page at the Austrian court) at the empress' face. But giving oneself to God from one's youth (a pledge of predestination) is emphasized. This is one of Don Bosco's chief principles for a youthful spirituality.

7. Exercise of Devotion toward God's Mercy (late 1846)

Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio (Torino: Eredi Botta, [n. d.], 112 pp. no further editions). – *Opere Edite* II, 71-181.

This work is probably a systematic presentation of what was being done in the Barolo's institutions, for the Marchioness had introduced this exercise and had it approved and enriched with indulgences by Rome.

Its purpose was to offer to God during carnival week, reparation for the sins of "all the nations of the world, bearing in mind that we are all sinners."

Don Bosco's chief source was St. Alphonsus, *Preparation for Death*.

After an introductory reading, the exercise for each of the 6 days consisted of a meditation, a practice or nosegay, the singing of the *Miserere* or the *Benedictus*, and benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.

The meditations stressed the boundless mercy of God toward all. While the world enjoyed sinful pleasures (during carnival) the devotee meditated on death and on the soul's salvation, believing that God always forgives the penitent.

But Don Bosco went further. This exercise is the first dated witness of an important spiritual option made by Don Bosco: God is by his very nature

²³ Stella, *DB:ROe&S*, 115.

good and loving, the source of all good things, ready to embrace the sinner with “*amorevolezza*” (tender, loving care). This is in contrast to the image of God as a severe judge proposed in the traditional diocesan catechism.

8. The Companion of Youth (First Edition 1847)

Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri, degli esercizi di cristiana pietà, per la recita dell'Ufficio della Beata Vergine e de' principali vesperi dell'anno, coll'aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre, ecc. (Torino: Paravia e Co., MDCCCXLVII), 352 pp. (Many editions within Don Bosco's lifetime and thereafter);²⁴ in *Opere Edite* II, 183-532.

General Structure

The first edition (1847) contained the following sections:

- [i] Introductory Address “to young people” (5-8)
- [ii] [Part I] What a young person needs to know and to do in order to become virtuous—a series of chapters explaining the practice of “Christian duties” for the young (9-75)
- [iii] [Part II] A series of devotional exercises “of Christian piety” (76-143)
- [iv] [Part III] A “liturgical” section that comprised the vespers (psalms and hymns) for the Sundays of the year and the complete Little Office of the Blessed Virgin (144-320), with an added small collection of popular hymns (text only) (321-347).

Brief Description (with Stress on Introductory Address and Part I)

[i] The *Introductory Address* is Don Bosco's most personal statement of his love for young people. He writes (in summary): To discourage you from virtue the devil tries to deceive you in two ways. The first (referring to Jansenistic piety) is to make you believe that the Christian life is a life of sadness. On the contrary, it is a life of joy: “Serve the Lord with gladness.” The second

²⁴ P. Stella, *Valori spirituali nel “Giovane Provveduto” di san Giovanni Bosco* (Roma: Scuola Grafica Ragazzi di Don Bosco, 1960); F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 245-249.

is to deceive you into putting off giving yourself to God to your old age. You would be taking a great risk. It is important that you make a decision for God when you are young. This book is meant to show you the way. He concludes:

My friends, I love you with all my heart, and your being young is reason enough for me to love you very much. You will certainly find books written by persons much more virtuous and much more learned than myself; but, I assure you, you would be hard put to find anyone who loves you more than I do in Jesus Christ, or who cares more about your true happiness than I do.

[ii] [Part I] The Address is followed by *four series of meditations* providing spiritual and ascetic guidelines for a young person's Christian life. They are indebted to St. Alphonsus' *Maxims for Eternity*, and *Preparation for Death*, to Charles Gobinet's (1614-1690) *Instruction de la jeunesse*, and to others. Its chief structural concepts are:

God loves the young, and wants them all to go to heaven. A life of virtue is a life of joy, as the saints have shown us. Obedience, spiritual reading, and the word of God are the ways to virtue.

But there are things to guard against: idleness, bad companions, bad conversations, scandal, temptations and suggestions of the devil.

Seven important considerations follow (all except one derived literally from St. Alphonsus' *Maxims for Eternity*): end of man, sin, hell, etc. The last meditation, on Heaven, is derived from St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life*. There is an additional short reflection on Mary.

The Six Sundays in preparation to the feast of St. Aloysius (already published separately, see above) concludes Part I.²⁵

[iii] [Part II] The devotional section contained morning and evening prayers (from the diocesan abridged catechism), suggestions and prayers for "assisting" at Mass, Confession, Communion, and Visit to the Blessed Sacrament (from St. Alphonsus), Marian devotions, Way of the Cross and (concluding Part II) the Exercise for a Happy Death (Monthly Day of Recollection).

[iv] [Part III, see above] This "liturgical" section (less important) contained the Little Office of the BVM, Vespers for Sundays, Manner of serving Mass and Hymns.

²⁵ For excerpts from Introduction and Part I of the Companion of Youth see Appendix below.

[v] In 1851 Don Bosco published a second, enlarged edition of the *Companion of Youth*. The additional material consisted chiefly of an apologetic tract entitled *The Catholic-Apostolic-Roman Church is the only true Church of Jesus Christ: Warnings to Catholics. Our pastors unite us to the pope and the pope unites us to God*. This pamphlet of 24 pp. in small format had first been published separately in 1850 (to be discussed in a later chapter).

Comment

The *Companion of Youth* may appear overburdened with devotional practices. But in the Introduction and Part I, Don Bosco succeeded in setting forth a spiritual program perfectly adapted to young people. God's love for young people, and the joy of entering the path of virtue while young are the foundations, and many young people built their spiritual edifice on them.

9. Bible History (1847)

Storia sacra per uso delle scuole utile ad ogni stato di persone, arricchita di analoghe incisioni, compilata dal sacerdote Giovanni Bosco (Torino: dai tipografi-editori Speirani e Ferrero, 1847), 212 pp. (further editions in 1853, 1863, 1866, etc.);²⁶ in *Opere Edite* III, 2-212; Text and Introduction in Caviglia, *Scritti Editi* I, Part 1: *Storia Sacra* (Torino: SEI, 1929).

General Characteristics of the Work

Desramaut gives the following description.

As Don Bosco writes, the Bible is the “foundation of our holy religion, since it contains its dogmas and their proofs” [p. 7]. Another reason for writing it may have been that of putting into the hands of young people an “expurgated” Bible History, as the title states, for use in schools.

Don Bosco's Bible History, like his Church History, is in question-and-

²⁶ “Bible History for Use in Schools, useful to persons in any state of life, enriched with appropriate plates, compiled by the priest John Bosco,” cf. F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 249-254; N. Cerrato, *La Catechesi di don Bosco nella sua Storia Sacra* (Roma: UPS, 1979).



3 – Frontispiece of Don Bosco's *Storia Sacra* (Bible History) (1847)

answer form. It too is also clearly a compilation from current manuals. For the late Jewish period, Don Bosco refers to Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* [pp. 17. 137. 154. 163], but perhaps not used at first hand.

The booklet is illustrated with engravings of biblical episodes: 39 for the Old Testament and 28 for the New—all derived from French works, according to Caviglia.

In fundamentalist fashion, Don Bosco presents the Bible as literally true and historical in all its narrative sections, because it has God as its author and was written through the medium of the prophets, apostles, etc. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit guarantees that the Bible is free from the least error [p. 10]. "Moses wrote the history of the world from its origins up to the time of his own death. He is the earliest author whose writings have survived," and he is the only source for our knowledge of that history [p. 67].

For the Old Testament Don Bosco gives a detailed chronology that divides it into six epochs. For example, the first epoch goes from the creation of the

world (year 1) to the Flood (in the world's year 1656). Dates are also given for single events. For example, Abel was murdered in the world's year 129.

For the New Testament, however, he gives no detailed chronology, but merely notes that the seventh epoch goes "from the birth of Jesus Christ in the world's year 4,000 to his ascension in the year 33 A.D." [p. 157].

It should be noted that both the literal interpretation and the chronology are those of the current manuals.

Doctrinal and Moral Teaching

Don Bosco's chief doctrinal concern in the Bible History is soteriological. Man, though created good, has sinned. But God promised a Savior. When the world seemed lost, God raised the chosen people with Abraham, Moses and the Prophets. The prophecies were all fulfilled in Christ. He proved the truth of his teaching by his miracles, the greatest of which were his resurrection and ascension. He founded the Church on Peter, etc.

Don Bosco also singles out Biblical stories or episodes in order to convey, implicitly or explicitly, moral lessons to young people, sometimes in unexpected fashion. For example, the episode of the dead man who was raised to life when he was thrown into the prophet Elisha's sepulcher and came in contact with the prophet's bones is used to inculcate veneration for the relics of the saints.²⁷

The Bible History was tremendously successful, probably because of its very simplicity. It went through many editions. Statements on the cover of a 1956 edition (shortly before Vatican II!) recommend Don Bosco's Bible History to teachers about to take their certification exams (recommendation by the Italian school authority), and to teachers of religion (recommendation by the Sacred Congregation of the Council).

The writings described above were published before the Revolutionary Year (1848-1849) (discussed earlier). In that year Don Bosco was in the process of organizing the oratory at Pinardi's. He had already established (the previous year) a Home in the Pinardi house, and had started the oratory of St. Aloysius on the south side of the city.

²⁷ The episode is in 2 Kings 13:21.

Of the three publications of the period of the Liberal Revolution (1848-49) only one, the *Young People's Friend*, appears directly connected with the events of the Revolutionary Year. The second work from this period, on *St. Vincent de Paul*, in spite of its title and stated aim, was essentially a devotional work. The third work, the little *treatise on the metric system* was an educational booklet designed to initiate working young people into the mysteries of the metric system, which was being officially introduced at the time by law in the Kingdom of Sardinia.

10. The Young People's Friend (1848-49)

L'Amico della gioventù. Giornale religioso, morale e politico (This is the title on the masthead of the first number (the only number extant).²⁸ *Opere Edite* XXXVIII, 289-290 (transcription of first number); 327-330 (reproduction of first number).

This journal appeared twice a week and ran from Saturday, October 21, 1848 to Saturday, May 14, 1849 (8 months, 61 issues). Numbers 1-23 were printed by Marietti; numbers 24-61, by Speirani e Ferrero. Its circulation was small, to judge by the mailing invoices preserved in the Salesian Archive. It started with 137 mailed copies and reached a high of 700. In the end, the paper merged with *L'Istruttore del Popolo* (The People's Teacher).

L'Amico would be a good source for an understanding of Don Bosco's political feelings at this time, but only the first number of this journal has come down to us. *L'Istruttore* (the paper which took over *L'Amico*) during this period supported a constitutional monarchy with liberal institutions, and was patriotic with respect to the liberation and unification of Italy. But the conclusion that this was in fact Don Bosco's thinking would be unwarranted. The circular by which Don Bosco invited a select number of Catholic gentlemen to "invest" in the paper indicates that the reason for the merger was financial. The 24 "investors" who had bought stock were not able to save it.²⁹

The advanced publicity in the *Gazzetta Piemontese*, and Lemoyne himself, seem to emphasize the political nature of Don Bosco's paper, since he called it, "*Giornale religioso, morale e politico.*" But, as Stella notes, and as the first issue

²⁸ Stella, *DB:RO&S*, 67-69, *DBEcSoc*, 344-346; *EBM* III, 339-344. For a translation of the editorial policy statement (*Programma*) see Appendix below.

²⁹ Motto, *Epistolario* I, 83-84.

tends to prove, this was no political journal. In fact it proposed to keep aloof from political partisanship and debate, even while carrying political and other kinds of news. Its specific aim seems to have been that of counteracting attacks on the Church and on the Catholic religion by the liberal press, especially by the anticlerical daily, *La Gazzetta del Popolo*. The above-mentioned circular begins with the following statement: “Encouraged by freedom of the press, a number of newspapers have taken it upon themselves to disparage and ridicule Religion. Hence the need of fighting through religious periodicals those that would undermine the truth.”

11. Virtue and Christian Refinement According to the Spirit of St. Vincent de Paul (1848)

Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di san Vincenzo de' Paoli. Opera che puo' servire a consacrare il mese di luglio in onore del medesimo santo (Torino: Paravia e Co., 1848), 288 pp.

This work was listed as anonymous in the 1856 Testament); It was published anonymously in *Opere Edite* (III, 215-503) and likewise in 1848, but signed by Don Bosco in the editions of 1877 and 1887. English translation: *Virtue and Christian Refinement According to the Spirit of St. Vincent* by Blessed Don Bosco, tr. by a Sister of Charity (London: Alexander Ouseley Ltd.; St. Louis, MO: Herder Book Co., 1933).

As the title implies, and as the preface explains, the purpose of the book is to present a model of Christian virtue and at the same time of Christian refinement (education and good manners, *civiltà*) to guide especially the clergy in their dealings with educated people.

Don Bosco's source for this work was a similar larger work published in Genoa, itself a translation of an earlier French work on St. Vincent.

Don Bosco had already written devotional exercises in honor of the Guardian Angels, St. Aloysius, and God's Mercy. With this work he proposed a month (July) of devotions in honor of St. Vincent de Paul in imitation of St. Joseph's month (March) and of Mary's month (May).

Daily meditations and prayers are followed and concluded with a practice or nosegay reflecting Don Bosco's favorite maxims. The topics of the meditations (virtues) would certainly be helpful for Christian living, but it is hard to see how they could provide a guideline for social refinement (*civiltà*).

More importantly, the work indicates that, seven years after his ordination, Don Bosco was looking to St. Vincent de Paul as a model, at a time when Don Bosco's work of charity was already being compared to that of St. Vincent de Paul in the Catholic press.

12. Introduction to the Metric System (1849)

The hypothesis of a first edition dating from 1846 (based on inference from Don Bosco's *Memoirs*?)³⁰ is adopted by Stella in *DB:LW*, 263, note 13, but corrected by him to 1849 in *DBEcSoc*, 337.

In the Catholic newspaper *L'Armonia*, issue of June 1, 1849, the book is reviewed and praised. It bore the title, *Il Sistema metrico decimale ridotto a semplicità* (Torino: G.B. Paravia, 1849). No exemplar of the first edition of May (?) 1849 has survived. But as Stella points out,³¹ a few months later (still in 1849) a revised and enlarged edition was published. This is the edition photocopied in *Opere Edite* IV, 1-80. The title page reads: *Il Sistema Metrico Decimale ridotto a semplicità preceduto dalle quattro prime operazioni dell'aritmetica ad uso degli artigiani e della gente di campagna* per cura del sacerdote Bosco Gio. Edizione seconda migliorata ed accresciuta (Torino: Gio Battista Paravia & Comp. 1849).³²

The work must have been a success, for new editions appeared in 1851, 1855 and, under a different title, 1875).³³

The meter and its system had been introduced in France in 1791. In the Kingdom of Sardinia it was to be made mandatory by January 1, 1850. This would replace the old confusing measures in force from time immemorial in various regions. In view of this, Don Bosco wrote his little treatise in 1849.

Don Bosco derived the exposition of the system and the conversion data from existing larger works. But he himself phrased the problems with the double purpose of instructing and moralizing (in an indirect way). For exam-

³⁰ Cf. *MO-En*, 285, and editor's note 26.

³¹ Cf. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 337.

³² See also F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 289-292 and Notes 96 and 97.

³³ For *L'Armonia*'s review see *EBM* III, 466 (Appendix 11); Michael Ribotta, apparently quoting Don Bosco, gives the title of the work as, *Learning Arithmetic with the Metric System*, and the date 1846 for the first edition. ["Don Bosco's Battle Against Illiteracy," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 1:1 (1990), 6-15].

ple: “A young man spends 2 francs a week in drink and smoke. How much would he save in one year if he didn’t gratify those vices?”

As related by Bonetti (followed by Lemoyne), on Sunday, December 16, 1849, a public exercise on the metric system was held at the Oratory with great success before a distinguished audience, the educator Ferrante Aporti being in attendance.³⁴

³⁴ Bonetti, *Early Apostolate*, 161-162; *EBM* III, 420-424. For the skits written by Don Bosco for the occasion see *IBM* III, 623-652 (omitted in *EBM*).

APPENDICES

1. Excerpts from the Companion of Youth (*Giovane Provveduto*)

[Introduction:] Calling on the Young

Don Bosco explains that there are two special ways by which the devil tempts young people away from the practice of virtue.

The first is to convince them that the service of God consists in living a life of melancholy, devoid of all pleasure and enjoyment.

This is not the case, my dear friends, so I should like to teach you a kind of Christian life that will make you happy and contented. I want to show you what true enjoyment and pleasure is, so that you may follow the advice of the holy prophet David: "Serve the Lord with gladness." This, then, is the purpose of the present book: to teach you how to serve God and to be always happy.

The second snare is the hope of a long life, with the expectation of conversion in old age or when death threatens.

Be careful, my dear children, because many have been deceived in this manner. What assurance have we got that we shall ever reach old age? We cannot expect death to await our convenience at old age, since life and death are in God's hands, and he apportions them as he sees fit.

If God, however, grants you a long life, listen to the serious warning that he has uttered: "A young man according to his way—even when he is old, he will not depart from it." In other words, if we lead a good life when we are young, we shall be good when we are old, and our death will be happy, the beginning of eternal bliss. On the other hand, if vice takes hold of us in youth, it will gradually grow in the course of the different stages of our life until death, which will be the terrible herald of a most unhappy eternity. That this misfortune may not befall you, I have drawn up a scheme of life, brief and easy enough, which will enable you to be a joy to your parents, and a glory to your country, making you good citizens upon earth, and one day blessed inhabitants of heaven.

Then, addressing young people directly, Don Bosco closes the Introduction with the words:

My friends, I love you with all my heart, and your being young is reason enough for me to love you very much. You will certainly find books written by

persons much more virtuous and much more learned than myself; but, I assure you, you would be hard put to find anyone who loves you more than I do in Jesus Christ, or who care more about your true happiness than I do.

I am devoted to you, because you hold in your hearts the treasure of virtue. With its possession, you own everything; without it, you will be the most unhappy and the most unfortunate creatures in the world.

May God be always with you, and grant that by the practice of these few suggestions you may save your souls, and thereby increase His glory. That is the sole purpose of the writer of these pages.

May heaven grant you a long and joyful life. May your greatest treasure ever be a holy fear of God, Who will be your recompense in time and eternity.

Yours sincerely,
John Bosco, *Priest*

The book is divided into three parts. The first part deals with what young people should do or avoid so as to live as good Christians. The second part contains a collection of practical devotions for use in church and school. [Finally, an instruction in dialogue form on the fundamental truths of our holy Catholic religion is added by way of conclusion].³⁵

*[Part I:] To Live as Good Christians
Means Enabling the Young to Lead a Good Catholic Life*

Article 1: An understanding of God

Look around you, my dear children, and see the wonders in the heavens and upon earth. The sun, moon, stars, air, water and fire are things that at one time did not exist. They could not have come into existence of themselves. God in his omnipotence made them out of nothing; hence he is called the “Creator.”

When God, who always was and ever will be, had created what we see in this world of ours, he gave existence to man, who of all visible creation is the most perfect. Therefore our eyes, ears, tongue, hands, and feet, are all gifts of God.

Man is distinguished from all other animals in a special manner, for he is endowed with a soul that thinks and reasons, and desires what is good, and judges

³⁵ This final sentence refers to the tract, “Warnings to Catholics,” written against the Waldenses in 1850 and included in the Companion of Youth in the edition of 1851. The original title of the tract was, *La Chiesa Cattolica-Apostolica-Romana è la sola vera Chiesa di Gesù Cristo. I nostri Pastori ci uniscono al Papa, il Papa ci unisce con Dio* (Torino: Tip. Sperirani e Ferrero, 1850), 23 pp., in *Opere Edite* IV, 121-143.

what is good or what is evil. The soul, since it is a spirit, cannot die with the body; for when the body has been carried to the grave, the soul enters on another life that will never cease. If during its time on earth it has done good, it will be ever happy with God in Paradise, where it will enjoy happiness for all eternity. But if it has done evil, it will be punished with terrible pain in hell, where it will undergo the torments of fire and loss forever.

Bear in mind, my dear children, that we were created for heaven. God, who is our loving Father, will condemn to hell only those who deserve it on account of their sins. Oh, how much God loves us! How much God desires that we perform good works, so that we may share in that great joy which he has prepared for all of us in the eternity of heaven.

Article 2: God loves the young exceedingly

Since we are persuaded, my dear children, that we are created for heaven, we should direct all our actions to this great end. The reward that God promises, and the punishment with which He threatens us, should move us to act accordingly. But besides this, what ought to excite us to love and serve God is the great love that He has for us. Though He loves all people, since they are the work of His hands, still He has a particular love for the young, and tells us that He finds pleasure in their company: "My delights were to be with the children of men." God loves you, and He expects many good works of you; He loves you, because you are natural, humble and innocent; in a word, because you have not yet fallen a victim to the snares of the devil.

Our Divine Savior also shows a special kindness towards you. He assures us that he considers all favors done to you as done to him, and he threatens terribly those who give you scandal. Here are his own words: "But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea." He wished children to follow him: he called them to himself, he embraced them and gave them his blessing. "Suffer the little children to come to me," he said. He did these things to make us understand that you, my dear children, are the delight of his heart.

Since Our Lord loves you so much, you should form the sincere resolution to correspond with his love by doing whatever pleases him, and by avoiding whatever might offend him.

Article 3: The salvation of the soul depends greatly upon the time of our youth

Two places have been prepared in our future life: hell for the wicked where they suffer every evil, and heaven for the good where they have every enjoyment. Our Lord also desires you to know that if you practice virtue in your youth, you will be

confirmed in it for the remainder of your days, which will be followed by an eternity of glory. On the other hand, if you begin badly in your youth, you will surely continue so until death, and inevitably secure hell for yourself.

Therefore, when you see people addicted to the vices of drunkenness, or gambling, or swearing, you can be sure that these vices began in their youth. “A young man according to his way—even when he is old, he will not depart from it.” “Remember your Creator,” we are admonished, “in the days of your youth.” Indeed, Holy Scripture says: “It is good for a man, when he has borne the yoke from his youth.”

This truth was well known to the saints, especially to St. Rose of Lima and St. Aloysius Gonzaga, who very early began to serve the Lord fervently, and later found no satisfaction save in what pertained to him, and thereby became great saints. The same can be said of the son of Tobias, who from the earliest days of his childhood was always obedient and submissive to his parents. When they died, he continued to live most virtuously until his death.

But some of you may object: if we begin to serve God now, we shall become sad and depressed. I answer that this is not true. He who serves the devil is miserable, even if he pretends to be happy, because in his heart he never ceases to hear the reproach, “You are unhappy because you are the enemy of God.” Who was more affable or more cheerful than St. Aloysius Gonzaga? Who was more happy and joyful than St. Philip Neri and St. Vincent de Paul? And yet we know that their lives were entirely spent in the practice of every virtue.

Courage then, my dear friends; employ your time virtuously, and I assure you that your heart will always be happy and contented. You will experience as a consequence how sweet and pleasing it is to serve the Lord.

Article 4: The first virtue of youth is obedience to parents and superiors

A tender plant, although placed in good soil, will take root weakly, and finally wither away unless cultivated carefully up to certain growth. So you, my dear children, will surely yield to evil if you do not allow yourselves to be guided by those who have charge of your education and the welfare of your soul. This guidance is the responsibility of your parents and of those who take their place; to them you owe willing obedience. “Honor your father and your mother,” says Our Lord, “that you may have long life upon the land.”

In what does this honoring consist? It consists in obeying, respecting, and assisting them. As to obedience, when they give a command, you should carry it out promptly, without any show of opposition. Do not act like those who murmur, shrug their shoulders, shake their heads, or worse still answer back insolently. Such children give great offence to their parents and to God himself, for in the commands of our parents is to be found expressed the Will of God. Our Savior, although all-powerful, submitted himself to the Blessed Virgin and to St Joseph, the humble carpenter: “And He was subject to them.” As an act of obedience to his heavenly

Father, he willingly offered himself to die upon the cross: Becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross,” You should show, likewise, great respect to your father and mother, and never undertake anything without their permission. Never manifest impatience in their presence, and never reveal their faults. St. Aloysius Gonzaga always first sought his parents’ permission, or, if they were absent, he even asked leave of the servants. Young Louis Comollo was obliged one day to stay away from home longer than his parents had allowed, but when he returned he humbly and sorrowfully asked pardon for his involuntary disobedience.

Finally, you must be ready to wait on your parents, and assist them when they are in need in such ways as are open to you. Furthermore, help them with whatever you earn, and follow their suggestions. Again, it is the duty of the young to pray every morning and evening for their parents, that God may grant them every spiritual and temporal blessing.

What I have said to you about obedience and respect for parents, you should practice also towards your superiors, whether ecclesiastical or secular. Likewise you should obey your teachers, from whom with respectful humility you should willingly receive instruction, counsel and correction. Be assured that whatever they do is for your advancement. Be convinced also that obedience shown to your superiors is, as if it were, shown to Jesus Christ himself and to Mary most holy.

[...]

Means of Perseverance: What Should Be the Chief Concern of the Young

Article 1: How to act during temptation

Even at your tender age, my dear children, the devil sets snares to tempt you to sin, and thereby to enslave your soul and render you an enemy to God. You must then watch carefully lest you yield when you are tempted, or when the devil suggests evil to you. One way of keeping out of temptation is to avoid occasions of sin, such as evil conversations and immoral public shows, which are not good for you and are harmful to your soul. Keep yourself occupied with work, study, art and music. When you become tired of these, decorate your little altars with images or holy pictures, or spend some time in healthy amusement, if your parents allow you. “Make sure, above all,” says St. Jerome, “that the devil never finds you idle.”

When you are tempted, do not trifle with the temptation, and permit it to hold your attention. Rid yourself of it at once by work or prayer. If the temptation still remains make the Sign of the Cross, kiss some holy object and say: “Mary, Help of Christians, pray for me.” “St. Aloysius, obtain for me the grace not to offend God.”

I recommend St. Aloysius, because he is proposed by the Church as the special protector and model of young people. In order to conquer temptations he avoided

all occasions of sin; he fasted frequently on bread and water; he scourged himself so violently that his clothes, the walls, and the floor were stained with his innocent blood. Thus St. Aloysius mastered his temptations. In this manner you also will triumph, if you strive to imitate him at least in the mortification of the senses. Above all, in temptations against modesty have recourse to him, and you will keep free from sin.

Article 2: Remedies against certain deceits the devil employs to ensnare the young

The first snare whereby the devil seeks to ruin your soul is to represent to your mind how impossible it will be to walk the difficult path of virtue, without any pleasure, for all the long years of your life.

When the devil suggests the thought to you, let this be your answer: “Who can guarantee that I shall live to an old age? The length of my life is in the hands of God. Who knows but that this very day may be my last? How many people of my age, who were happy yesterday, and enjoyed life and health, were today carried to the grave? Even some of my friends or companions have perhaps been snatched from this world in the very flower of their youth. Cannot the same thing happen to me?”

Even though we should have to devote several years to the service of the Lord, will he not compensate us abundantly by eternal glory and happiness in heaven? Furthermore, we see that those who live in the state of grace are always happy and that, even when afflicted, their heart rejoices. On the contrary, those who yield to pleasure live unhappily. They are restless, and the more they search for peace in their amusements, the more miserable they become. “There is no peace for the wicked, says the Lord.”

“But,” someone might say, “We are young and, if we begin to think of eternity and hell, we shall become low-spirited and morbid.” I grant that the thought of an unhappy eternity or unending punishment is frightful and appalling; but answer me, if the mere thought unnerves you, what about actually experiencing it? It is better then to think about your eternal loss now than to endure it hereafter. To weigh the thought now will most certainly preserve you from such a fate in the future.

On the other hand, if the thought of hell is unpleasant, yet the expectation of every conceivable blessing in heaven should fill you with joy. Hence the saints, though they thought seriously of eternal loss, they lived most joyfully, confident that with God’s help they would avoid hell and possess one day the eternal reward that the Lord has prepared for those who serve Him.

Have courage then, my dear friends. Strive to follow Our Savior, and you will experience how sweet and delightful it is to serve him, and how great a measure of happiness will flood your soul now and always.

[...]

Article 6: Choice of a state in life

In His eternal decrees, God has destined each one of us to a state of life with its corresponding graces. Accordingly, as in every other case, so also in this all-important matter, the good Catholic should seek to discover the will of God, following the example of Jesus Christ. He said in fact that his sole purpose in coming down to us was to comply with the will of his eternal Father. It is then most important, dear children, that you choose your vocation wisely, so that you may enter upon the career for which the Lord has destined you.

Some souls, whom God wishes to favor particularly, receive a clear indication of the state to which he calls them. You cannot expect so much, but you have the consoling guarantee that God will direct you in the right way, provided you do not neglect the right means for making a prudent choice.

One of these means is to spend your childhood and youth without offending God, or else to atone by sincere penance for the time misspent in sin. Another means is humble and persevering prayer. Often repeat with St Paul, "Lord, what is it that you wish me to do?" Or with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening;" or with the Psalmist, "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God"—or use some other aspiration of love.

When the time has arrived for a decision, have recourse to God in frequent and very fervent prayer. Pray for guidance during the Holy Mass at which you assist, and offer up each Communion for the same purpose. You could also make a novena or a triduum, perform some act of mortification, or go on a pilgrimage to some noted shrine.

Pray to the Blessed Virgin, who is the Mother of Good Counsel; ask the help of St. Joseph, her spouse, who faithfully kept the divine commandments; pray to your Guardian Angel and to your Patron Saints. It would be well also to prepare for your decision in such an important matter by making a spiritual retreat.

Resolve to do God's will and persevere in it, no matter what may happen and despite the disapproval of those who judge according to the standards of the world.

Should your parents or other persons begin to oppose what you perceive to be the will of God in your regard, remember that this is the occasion to put into practice the important advice of St Peter: "We ought to obey God rather than human beings." Conduct yourselves towards your parents respectfully and honorably; answer and treat them submissively and humbly, but without putting at risk the supreme welfare of your soul. Seek good advice on what to do, and then confide in him who can do all things. Consult experienced and God-fearing persons, and especially your confessor, to whom you should confide your vocation and your dispositions.

When St. Francis of Sales revealed in his home that God was calling him to the priesthood, his parents objected and told him that, as he was their eldest son, he should be their help and support. They told him that his inclination to the ecclesiastical state was the result of an exaggerated piety, and that he could sanctify himself

just as well by living in the world. In order to get him to agree more willingly with their intentions, they proposed to him an honorable and advantageous marriage. But no amount of persuasion could move him from his determination. He consistently preferred God's will to that of his parents, yet he loved them tenderly and respected them greatly. He chose to give up all worldly benefits rather than lose the grace of his vocation. And his parents, who were good religious people, despite some of their distorted worldly ideas, were subsequently well satisfied with his resolution.

2. The Young People's Friend (*L'Amico della Gioventù*) - A Religious, Moral and Political Journal³⁶

*Editorial Statement (Programma)*³⁷

The burning desire of education, information and relaxation through reading, which has pervaded every level of society in varying degrees, is the earmark that sets apart the present generation. This search for cultivation of the mind extends over every rung of the social scale. The inability of published books to provide information on events that take place from day to day points up the need for newspapers and journals. This need has been felt with greater urgency since the promulgation of the liberal institutions, including freedom of the press, by our magnanimous sovereign, King Charles Albert.

The numerous newspapers that are being published among us claim to pursue the good of the people. None of them, however, as far as I know, has for its main purpose to preserve and promote our people's most valuable good: a deep and strong attachment to our Catholic Religion, and a genuine Christian education. We are speaking of a *genuine* Christian education, because in the present crisis (one must admit) our people, especially our young people, are subjected to a variety of prejudicial opinions that may draw them into serious errors. The editors of this newspaper, therefore, are committed to filling this vacuum and remedying this failure.

Its first priority and main purpose is to confirm our people in the Catholic faith, by showing its unassailable truth, its supernatural beauty and the great good that flows from it as from a perennial spring to the individual person and to the whole of society. A parallel purpose is to instruct and educate our people in virtue, which (as the Apostle teaches) is useful to all as it holds God's promise for the present and future life.

³⁶ *L'Amico della Gioventù*. Giornale Religioso, Morale e Politico, Year 1, No. 1 (Turin, Saturday, October 21, 1848).

³⁷ Translated from *Opere Edite* XXXVIII, 327.

Secondly, since the new conquests of the arts and sciences can contribute greatly to the moral education of the people, this paper will spare no effort and use every possible means to enlighten the mind and cultivate the heart of people.

Thirdly, we see that keeping abreast of daily events has become a need that is deeply felt by all classes of people. Accordingly, every issue, toward the end, will carry a summary of such news, relating both to civil society and to the Church, as may be of interest to our readers, or as may simply meet their desire for information.

The orientation of this journal and of its editors is away from party politics, from confrontation, from controversy and from contentious writing. Therefore, disputes and debates will have no place in the pages of this journal. We shall only try to provide guidance to young people by warning them against whatever may attack the truths of faith, corrupt morals or lead people astray.

The editors appeal to all priests in care of souls, to city and country pastors, to teachers, to heads of families and to all who have the religious promotion of people at heart to help us in any way possible. This is an undertaking that will (so we hope) benefit all classes of people, especially the young. They are the most precious component of society, for on them rest the country's hopes, the wellbeing of families and the honor of both Church and State.

The Editors

Chapter 2

THE DECADE 1850-1861 AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Marriott, *Makers of Modern Italy*, 90-139; Martin, *The Red Shirt and the Cross of Savoy*, passim from 379 to 653; Mack Smith, *Modern Italy*, 3-34; Bruun, *Revolution and Reaction*, 61-70; *Compact Storia d'Italia* (De Agostini), passim from 108 to 137; Stella, *DB:LW*, 133-144.

Summary

Introduction: The Decade 1850-1861 – Social and Political Developments

1. Progress of the Liberal Revolution and Its Social Reforms
 1. The Boncompagni School Reform (October 4, 1848)
 2. The Siccardi Laws Abolishing Church Privileges and the Rise of Cavour
 3. Rattazzi Bill Suppressing Religious Corporation (“Law of the Convents,” 1854-1855)
 4. “State Funerals at Court” in the time of the Rattazzi Bill
 5. The Casati School Reform (Nov. 13, 1859)
2. Progress of the Risorgimento, Second War of Italian Independence and Unification of Italy (1859-1861)
 1. The Setting
 2. Mazzini, Garibaldi and the Action Party (Partito d’Azione)
 3. Crimean War and Piedmont’s Participation (1854-1855)
 4. Alliance between Napoleon III and Cavour at Plombières (1858)
 5. Second War of Italian Independence and Annexation of Lombardy to Piedmont
 6. Annexation of Central Italian Regions to Piedmont
 7. Conquest of Southern Italy by Garibaldi, Invasion of the Papal States by Piedmont and the Unification of Italy (1860-1861)
 8. The Roman Question

Appendices: 1. Biographical Sketches of Count Camillo Cavour and Giuseppe Garibaldi; 2. Chronological Overview of Significant Events Relating to State, Church and Don Bosco’s Work.

In Volume 2 (*Birth and Early Development of Don Bosco’s Oratory*), Chapter 5 and various other places we described, or referred to, the events connected with the granting of constitutions in the “year of revolutions” (1848). In the

years that follow, with respect to Italy (to Piedmont in particular) two parallel movements are clearly discernable:

(1) During the decade 1850-1861, the great transformation of society (secularization) called for by the program of the liberal revolution of 1848 takes place in the Kingdom of Sardinia. The various legal provisions by the State (to be described below) remove the Church from certain areas of society and greatly reduce its influence.

(2) The nationalist movement aiming at liberating and unifying Italy as a nation gathers momentum until Italy is united through political and military activity under the king of Savoy (King of Italy, 1861) and the parliamentary leadership of Prime Minister Count Camillo Benso of Cavour. (After the unification, the secularization process in effect in the kingdom of Sardinia is gradually extended to the whole of Italy).

The paragraphs that follow will give an overview of these two movements. We shall first describe the social reforms implemented during the decade.

I. The Progress of the Liberal Revolution and Its Systematic Social Reforms

1. The School Reform by Minister of Public Instruction Carlo Boncompagni (October 4, 1848)

The laws reforming the school system in the Kingdom of Sardinia were enacted during the First War of Italian Independence (1848-1849) some months after the expulsion of the Jesuits (March 2, 1848) who had control of education.¹ The new laws supplanted the ordinances enacted by King Charles Felix in 1822.

The Boncompagni legislation transferred to the State control of every aspect of instruction and school life. All education was placed under the general control of a Superior Council, under which operated a council for university studies, a committee for secondary education and a committee for primary education—all centrally established in Turin.

Religious instruction also came under the direct control of the State through the creation of the office of spiritual director, a priest appointed

¹ The Jesuits were widely regarded as the leaders of the reaction against liberal reforms.

by the Ministry of Public Instruction to supervise religious instruction in schools.

Characteristic of the Boncompagni reform (to be discussed in Volume 4 in connection with the Salesian school apostolate) was total central control of education, with little freedom allowed to local organization or initiative.

2. The Siccardi Laws against Church Privileges (March 9 and April 8, 1850) and the Rise of Count Camillo Cavour

The Privileged Position of the Church in Piedmont-Sardinia before the Constitution of 1848

Church-State relations in Piedmont operated in accordance with the Concordat of 1741 negotiated under Pope Benedict XIV. The House of Savoy had always been known for its piety and, on its return to power after Napoleon's downfall in 1814, it had lavished every sort of benefit on the Church. The Jesuits controlled secondary education and the bishops controlled the universities. Church censorship controlled the publication of books and papers as well as their importation. Church courts had jurisdiction of any suit involving its interest, and offenses against religion such as sacrilege or absence from church were part of the State's penal code. More recently the matter of "immunities" had been settled by the Convention of 1841 negotiated between Charles Albert and Pope Gregory XVI. True, this Convention abolished or modified a number of the older privileges, but the Church's position in the kingdom remained medieval in its numbers, splendor and power.

The Liberal Constitution of 1848 had changed the old absolutist regime into a constitutional monarchy flanked by a basically liberal parliament (chamber of deputies and senate). It was immediately apparent that the State's older legal system needed to be revised in accordance with the Constitution, and this revision would necessitate negotiating new agreements with the Church.

The accession of Victor Emmanuel II to the throne (1849) seemed a good time to get the process started. The king had already given the matter some thought and drawn up some guidelines for negotiations with the Holy See. After broaching the matter to Pius IX by letter, the king sent three different representatives, roughly at six months' intervals, to negotiate a new concordat. The first had seen the pope at Rome; the second, at Gaeta and the third,

at Naples; but none had been able to reach an agreement. The most important mission was that of Count Giuseppe Siccardi who had seen the Pope in exile at Gaeta (at the time of the Mazzinian Roman Republic). The Count had power to negotiate two separate issues: new episcopal appointments for the sees of Turin and Asti (whose bishops were not “acceptable” to the State) and a new concordat. Turin wanted the two issues negotiated jointly; Rome refused to negotiate on that basis. Thus the Siccardi mission failed, and Pius IX was blamed for its failure.

The Siccardi Laws

King Charles Albert’s constitution, based as it was on French models, declared that all citizens without distinction were to be equal before the law. The Church, however, had its own system of courts to try members of the clergy. The Church also claimed the right of asylum in its places of worship for persons, whether clerical or lay, fleeing from criminal prosecution.

It was inevitable that liberals (of various stripes) in both House and Senate should want to take action. They had a huge majority, since only about 2% of the male population (aristocrats and professional people) had the right to vote for representatives. Bishops, priests and conservative Catholic laymen represented the Church in both house and senate, but they were a minority.

Liberals pointed out that in France and even in Austria the Church had accepted such reforms many years earlier. Conservatives cited the Concordat negotiated between the Church and Charles Albert as recently as 1841, which maintained those privileges. They also argued that in Paris it was Gallicanism and revolution, and in Vienna it was Josephinism (Joseph II), that forced the Church to concede.

Be that as it may, the government thought it its duty to make the country’s laws conform to the constitution. The first important move in that direction had been the school reform by the Minister of Public Instruction, Carlo Boncompagni (see above). Toward the end of February 1850, Count Giuseppe Siccardi, Minister of Justice, introduced a bill to abolish the ecclesiastical courts. It was the first of a series of bills known collectively as the “Siccardi Laws.” Besides the bill on the courts, the ministry introduced bills to do away with the right of asylum, to limit the number of holy days of obligation, and to require approval by the State for acquisition of land by the Church.

The debates in the house and the Senate showed how divided opinion was on these subjects. Even some Liberals opposed the bills on grounds that such reforms while correct in principle were premature. Negotiations with the pope must continue with the aim of reaching a bilateral agreement.

On the first day of debate, Angelo Brofferio, a bitterly anticlerical criminal lawyer, spoke for the bills, showing the bad effect that a double system of law, of courts and punishments would have in society. He also proved that under international law a state had a right to abrogate a treaty harmful to its vital interests.

On the second day, Count Camillo Benso of Cavour spoke in support of the bills; it was his first major speech in Parliament. His parliamentary career until then had been intermittent and relatively unsuccessful.² Cavour spoke in a matter-of-fact style, and Italian was not familiar to him. His personality did not ingratiate him to many, but his clarity of thought and his capacity to diagnose an issue were extraordinary.

In speaking for the Siccardi Laws, Cavour had his first chance to address the House on a major and still undecided issue, and he immediately put the debate on the highest level. The issue, he argued, was not one of party or special interest but a national problem of the greatest difficulty. Pleading incompetence to deal with legal and ecclesiastical aspects, he made the point that major reforms are best carried out in a period of peace, and now was the time. He reviewed the history of the negotiations with the pope, and saw no hope of the Papacy, in its present mood of reaction, coming to an agreement. Then he drew a picture of what the kingdom would probably face if this first, major reform were postponed. Those liberals who had agitated for a constitution would feel that it had failed and would turn more and more to extremists; those conservatives who had opposed the constitution would work harder than ever to undermine it or have it abolished. Consequently, a far more revolutionary situation would develop—one in which the extremists, as in the French revolution, would crush the moderates. He asked the House which country in Europe had alone escaped the horrors of revolu-

² In the first election after Charles Albert had granted the constitution, Cavour had stood for the House in four districts and had been defeated in all of them. He was then successful in a supplementary election in one district, but was defeated in a general election. Finally, in July 1849, he was elected to Parliament. But he was still unpopular, even suspect. Brofferio, later described Cavour (invidiously to be sure) as an uncouth person totally devoid of refinement.

tion in the last one hundred years—not France, or Germany or Austria, but England. And that was because England had anticipated revolutionary crises by reform. Citing the Catholic Emancipation Act, the Reform Bill and the Corn Laws in Britain, he argued that those reforms strengthened the nation because they were made in time. He ended by urging the Chamber to follow the British example.

The speech raised a storm of applause, and in a single morning it established Cavour as one of the most important deputies in the House. It also decided the issue for many. The vote was in favor of the bill to abolish ecclesiastical courts, 130 to 27 in the House (March 9) and 58 to 29 in the Senate (April 8).³

Archbishop Fransoni's Reaction

Immediately after the passage of the Siccardi bill, Archbishop Fransoni issued a pastoral letter to the clergy forbidding them to obey the new laws. The government, after failing to persuade Fransoni to change his stand, had him arrested and tried, and the Court of Appeal sentenced him to a month in prison and to a fine. The archbishops of Cagliari and Sassari (in Sardinia) followed Fransoni's example and drew similar sentences. Pius IX also reacted strongly. He withdrew the Papal nuncio from Turin and demanded the release of the "persecuted" archbishops. Common Catholic people were divided on the issue.

Then the Santa Rosa case occurred to complicate the situation. Pietro de Rossi di Santa Rosa (Minister of Agriculture) on his deathbed asked for the Church's absolution. The parish priest, on the archbishop's order, refused to absolve him, unless he repented of having voted for the Siccardi Bill and made a public retraction. He protested that he had acted in good faith, but he died without absolution. He was also denied Christian burial.

When the fact became known, a sense of outrage swept the city. Angry

³ A bill on Civil Marriage was presented in the wake of the Siccardi Laws. It was hotly debated and approved by the Chamber of Deputies (July 5, 1852), but King Victor Emmanuel signified his opposition (October 21, 1852), so that the bill was defeated in the Senate (December 20, 1852). Prime Minister Massimo d'Azeglio resigned. Civil marriage, defined as the fully legal status of a couple expressing consent before the civil authority, without benefit of clergy, was passed into law in 1866.



4 – Turin’s archbishop, Louis Fransoni, exiled in Lyons, in a caricature from the anticlerical satirical journal, *Il Fischiotto* (The Whistle) (Turin, 1854)

crowds took to the streets. The government quickly sent the Servite Order, to which the parish priest belonged, out of the city. (The archbishop had already fled). Two cabinet ministers visited him in his country retreat and, after some argument, persuaded him to allow Christian burial. The funeral turned into an impressive demonstration of support for Santa Rosa. (See Archbishop Fransoni’ biographical sketch in Appendix below.)

The incidents surrounding Santa Rosa's death greatly embittered the struggle between the liberal establishment and the Church; and, to the distress of many moderates, made any agreement with the pope even less likely.

The incident also led directly to Cavour's appointment to the Ministry. Santa Rosa died in August and within the month the Minister of War, Alfonso La Marmora, was urging Prime Minister d'Azeglio to appoint Cavour to Santa Rosa's post. But d'Azeglio was reluctant. La Marmora, however, persisted, and d'Azeglio finally agreed to propose Cavour to the king. Victor Emmanuel II had doubts. Perhaps he did not know him; perhaps, like his father, he did not trust a man who had left the army, made lots of money and was a highly articulate liberal. But again La Marmora persisted, and plainly Cavour's power in the House was growing too great to ignore, the king and ministers had either to accept him or to face an opposition led by him. In the end the king agreed. In October 1850 Cavour became Minister of Commerce and Agriculture, and his presence in the ministry guaranteed the movement for reforms would continue.

When D'Azeglio resigned over the bill on civil marriage in 1852, King Victor Emmanuel II called on Cavour to form a new Cabinet as Prime Minister.

3. The Rattazzi Bill for the Suppression of Religious Corporations ("Law of the Convents" 1854-1855)⁴

The (Cavour-)Rattazzi Bill for the suppression of religious corporations was another, even more significant, action of the Piedmontese government against the Church, in line with the reform program of the liberal revolution.

Cavour had been serving as Prime Minister since November 1852. Although both he and the king agreed in their support of Piedmontese participation in the Crimean War (to be discussed below), they were at odds with regard to the Rattazzi bill. The issue was whether the State, through the Parliament, could reform its corporation and property laws to the detriment of the

⁴ Based on Martin, *The red Shirt and the Cross of Savoy*, 433-445. Urbano Rattazzi (1808-1873), though of different political beliefs, joined Cavour in 1851, served as president of the Chamber of Deputies (1852-1853), and later as minister of justice (1853-1854) and of the Interior (1854-1860) in Cavour's cabinets. He authored the bill against religious corporations that bears his name.

Church. To this effect the Cavour ministry had introduced into Parliament a bill known, from its author, as the Rattazzi bill (or “Law on the Convents”). It contained a number of provisions dealing with religious corporations.

Provisions of the Rattazzi Bill

The bill provided for abolishing all the religious orders except those devoted to preaching, nursing or teaching. It forbade the establishment of any new order except by special permission of the State. It called for the suppression, with certain exceptions, of chapters of collegiate churches and simple benefices. It proposed to use the revenues of these suppressed religious corporations to pay pensions to the ecclesiastics whose orders and chapters had been suppressed. It also proposed to restrict the salaries of bishops and to use the money thereby saved to raise the salaries of the most poorly paid priests.

But there were less publicized considerations of a fiscal or financial nature. The war of 1848-1849 had seriously depleted the treasury, and the national debt had become unmanageable. The State’s Ecclesiastical Fund (*Cassa Ecclesiastica*) could no longer subsidize the lower clergy and poor parishes. In May 1854 the Cavour-Rattazzi government had notified the Holy See of the situation, insinuating that some appropriate action was being considered.

Committee’s Report on the State of the Church in the Kingdom of Sardinia

The bill was drafted in the wake of a report by a commission appointed by Parliament to take a census of the clergy and an inventory of the Church’s resources throughout the kingdom. Even though some two hundred cloisters had not responded to the questions, the report showed that simply as a percentage of the population the number of priests, monks and nuns in the kingdom was extraordinary. In a country of some 5,000,000 people there were 23,000 ecclesiastics of every kind, a much higher percentage than, for example, in Belgium, Austria and the United States. In 1854 the kingdom of Sardinia had 41 bishops and archbishops (one for some 121,000 people). By comparison, Belgium with a comparable population of 4,500,000 had 6 (one for some 750,000 people).

Many people felt that such high ratios were a social evil, allowing too many people to escape the duties of citizenship, particularly taxation and conscription. The anticlerical press singled out contemplative and mendicant orders for particularly harsh criticism.

The wealth of the Church was even more extraordinary. Its estimated income from lands and endowments (not counting fees, collections, or subsidies) was about one-thirteenth of the kingdom's revenue.

The individual income (or salaries) of the hierarchy was much higher than that of comparable professional lay people.

As quoted by Martin, a study by A.J. Whyte gives the following figures. The archbishop of Turin received a salary of 100,000 lire, twice that of the archbishop of Paris and almost as large as that of all Belgian bishops combined. On the average the bishops had a salary of 30,000 lire, while cabinet ministers received 15,000, the Chief Justice on the highest court 12,000, the Director of the National Bank 10,000, a vice-admiral 8,000 and so forth. Parish priests were paid almost nothing by comparison with their bishop.⁵

Attempts at Negotiations

Meanwhile Cavour, true to his promise to the king, had reopened negotiations with the Holy See in the hope of reaching an agreement. But, as before, negotiations failed. The king, however, who was most anxious to end the religious quarrel, immediately thereafter sent a personal delegation of three bishops to see the pope, but he did so without the ministry's approval, a dangerous unconstitutional act that (fortunately) failed. The three bishops in their report to the king stated the position of the Holy See.

“The law is based on principles that the Church can never admit and has always rejected. It presupposes that the State can suppress religious communities at will, and that it is master of the possessions of the Church. No compromise is possible on such terms.”⁶

Victor Emmanuel was mortified at the rebuff and angry with Cavour for exposing him to it. The religious issue gave the king no peace; neither did

⁵ In Martin, *The Red Shirt* [...], 434-435.

⁶ In Martin, *The Red Shirt* [...], 435.

the women in his own family. He wrote to his Minister of War and personal friend Alfonso La Marmora: “My mother and wife do nothing but tell me that they are dying of shame for me; you can understand what pleasure that gives me.”⁷

The bill was introduced in the House on November 28, 1854, and Cavour insisted that it be presented as a financial issue. He had hoped, by talking finance, to keep religious emotions out of the public and parliamentary debates. However, everyone immediately recognized that the bill in reality was an attempt by the State to diminish the Church’s political and social status.⁸ The pope promptly protested against this new “horrible and incredible assault.” Controversy raged in the press and among the public. Petitions pro and con and protests were circulated. The whole Kingdom of Sardinia, in fact the whole of Italy, found itself divided over the issue.

Debate in the House and Deaths in the King’s Family

When the debate in the House began on January 9, 1855, the first speaker against it, symbolic of the division in the country, was Cavour’s elder brother, Marquis Gustavo (a fairly conservative Catholic). The rabid leftist anticlerical lawyer, Angelo Brofferio, spoke for the bill, volubly inveighing against the Church. Mazzini’s and Garibaldi’s position would be the same. On January 12, Count Solaro della Margarita, a former minister under Charles Albert and a rigidly conservative Catholic, countered by asking simply, Were they Catholic or were they not? To endorse a policy against the Church was to cease to be a Catholic, to provoke the anger of Heaven!

Early next morning, January 13, the Queen Mother Maria Teresa (of Austria), Charles Albert’s widow, died. The House adjourned for ten days of mourning.

But the debate went on in the press and on the streets, and before the House reconvened, the Queen Consort, Maria Adelaide (of Austria) died on January 20. She had given birth earlier in the month to a son, her sixth child and the king’s namesake, and had contracted puerperal fever.

⁷ In Martin, *The Red Shirt* [...], 435.

⁸ Minister Rattazzi’s explanation of bill’s legal status is carefully discussed in Stella, *DB: LW*, 141-144.

On February 11, 1855, a third death struck the royal family: Fernando Maria Alberto, Duke of Genoa and the king's only brother, died in Turin.

Pius IX's Allocution, Position of the Holy See and the King's Response

Meanwhile, as the public and parliamentary debates on the religious issue heated up, and members of the royal family were dying and were mourned, Pius IX on January 22 (1855) delivered an Allocution in the consistory of cardinals condemning the proposed bill as “repugnant to national, divine and social law” and “absolutely null and void.” Documents circulated to the cardinals and published set forth the Church's position. The following statements are worthy of note.

The Church is a superior order to Civil Society. A State cannot be given or receive a Constitution that has the effect of subjecting the persons and goods of the Church to all the laws of the State. Equality under the Law cannot be applied to ecclesiastical persons and property.

The State cannot permit the public exercise of non-Catholic religions. The permit issued in Turin and Genoa for the building of Protestant churches was an outrage against the Catholic Church.

A State cannot pass a law to regulate the civil status of the Church's members without first consulting the Holy See.

Freedom of the press is irreconcilable with the Catholic religion in a Catholic State.

The State has no right to require that actions taken by the Holy See, even though not in matters of faith, be subjected to royal approval before becoming effective.

Bishops and clergy refusing obedience, or urging resistance, to a civil law such as the law to abolish ecclesiastical courts, are only doing their duty.⁹

Such premises precluded any compromise, so that deputies, senators and people at large had no alternative but to choose sides. The king, too, faced the dilemma of having to choose between his duty to the State and his Catholic conscience. His anguish transpires in a letter he wrote to the Pope. Pius IX had written him a personal letter of condolence on the queen's death, in which he assured the king that there was nothing personal in the Allocution.

⁹ In Martin, *The Red Shirt* [...], 438-439.

Victor Emmanuel replied, in his forthright way, that the Allocution had been a mistake. It had only inflamed anticlerical passions in the kingdom. Then on a separate sheet he added:

Your Holiness should know that it is I who prevented the Civil Marriage Bill from reaching a vote in the Senate, that it is I who will now do what is possible to prevent a vote on the Law of the Convents. Perhaps within a few days this Ministry of Cavour will collapse, and I shall nominate one from the Right, and make it a condition *sine qua non* that he shall bring me as soon as possible to a complete adjustment with the Holy See. (Do me the kindness of helping me.) I for my part have always done what I could. (Those words [of the Allocution] against Piedmont have not helped us in this, and I am afraid they have ruined everything for me). I shall take care that the law does not pass, but help me, as well, Holy Father.

Please burn this piece of paper.¹⁰

Bill's Passage in the House, Its Introduction in the Senate and the "Calabiana Crisis"

In the House speeches by Cavour and D'Azeglio won the day. On March 2, 1855 the House passed the bill, 116 votes to 36, and Cavour promptly brought it up for debate in the Senate. But such a majority in the House did not necessarily insure an easy passage in the Senate where the Church was stronger, since a number of bishops were senators by royal appointment.

In April, the bishops took action. In an effort to forestall the passage of the bill they wrote the king a letter with a proposal worked out by Bishop Luigi Nazari di Calabiana of Casale. The stated main purpose of the Rattazzi bill was financial, namely, that of recovering the nearly 1,000,000 lire that the Government was spending for the support of poor parishes and their priests. Now the bishops, with the consent of the Holy See, would guarantee that sum of money, if the bill were withdrawn. The trouble that followed is referred to as the "Calabiana Crisis."

The king, in the mistaken belief that a solution had been found, informed Cavour, indicating that he was inclined to accept the proposal. Cavour, regretting his having presented the bill as a financial measure, tried to persuade the king that such a solution was unacceptable, but he declared his willing-

¹⁰ In Martin, *The Red Shirt* [...], 439.



5 – “How friars are kept usefully busy,” in a caricature from the anticlerical satirical journal, *Il Fischietto* (The Whistle) (Turin, 1854)

ness to have the bishop’s proposal brought on to the Senate floor. Bishop Calabiana presented the proposal in the Senate on April 26. Then the cabinet met, and Cavour and his ministers after studying the proposal handed in their resignation as a body in protest.

The king now was in a real predicament, for he could not persuade anyone to form a new ministry. He was under the greatest pressure from all sides, including the royal court, which was very conservative. Days passed, and the government crisis remained unresolved. Massimo d'Azeglio, an influential politician close to the king, unable to obtain an audience, wrote the king an emotional letter in which he pleaded with him not to deviate from the path of liberal reforms.

The letter had its effect. As the crisis entered its seventh day (on May 2), Victor Emmanuel saw that he was courting disaster both for himself and the country by prolonging it. He sent a message to the clerical party giving them until three in the afternoon to form a ministry, or he would recall "the bugbear" (*bestia nera*), that is, Cavour. By May 4 Cavour had reassembled his cabinet.

Death of the King's Youngest Son, Passage and Signing of the Bill

Meanwhile the Senate resumed its debate on the bill. Before cloture and the vote, the king suffered another personal tragedy. On May 17 his five-month-old son, Victor Emmanuel, died. On May 23, 1855 the Senate passed the bill on the suppression of religious corporations and confiscation of Church property (53 votes to 42). An amendment or "rider" to the bill exempted from suppression and confiscation an order of nuns that had been the favorite of the king's mother. Cavour had been against even this concession and was persuaded to it by Rattazzi. One wonders if Cavour, for all his great qualities, understood what the king had suffered over this religious issue.¹¹

Victor Emmanuel II signed the bill into law on May 29, 1855.¹² On July

¹¹ It was in this context that Don Bosco had the dream of "Funerals at Court," and wrote warning letters to the king (see below). One wonders if Don Bosco realized the king's predicament and agonizing decision.

¹² The orders of men immediately affected were the following: Augustinians (discalced or not), Lateran Canons Regular of St. Egidius, Carmelites (discalced or not), Carthusians, Benedictines of Monte Cassino, Cistercians, Olivetans, Franciscan Minims, Minor Conventuals, of the Observance and Reformed, Capuchins, Oblates of Saint Mary, Passionists, Dominicans, Mercedarians, Servants of Mary and Oratorians of St. Philip. The Orders of Women affected were as follows: Poor Clares, Benedictines of Monte Cassino, Lady Canons of the Lateran, Capuchin Nuns, Carmelite Nuns (discalced or not), Cistercian Nuns, Benedictine Nuns of the Crucifixion, Dominican Nuns, Tertiary Dominican Nuns, Franciscan Nuns, Celestine Nuns, and Baptistine Nuns.

26, 1855, Pius IX excommunicated all those who were responsible for the measure: king, ministers, members of Parliament who had voted for the bill, and “all its originators, collaborators, advisors, supporters, and executors.”

Comment

The “Law on the Convents” was more important in the history of the liberal revolution than all other social reforms together (including the Siccardi bill of 1850). By it the Kingdom of Sardinia, over its king’s signature, undertook to become a secular state.

It should be borne in mind that the law did not deny a person the right to live a life of contemplation and prayer, to wear distinctive clothing or to associate with others in the same pursuit. It did, however, deny such persons the right to receive special privileges for doing it, unless they were engaged in teaching, nursing or preaching. Outside those socially useful categories, they would not have the right to exist in a separate privileged legal and social system. Hence, for example, they would not have the right to hold land in perpetuity, to hold it free of taxation, to be free of taxation personally or to be exempt from conscription, without the permission of the State.

This is in conformity with the basic principles of Liberal jurisprudence, namely, that whereas all private right is from nature (God), and no one can infringe upon such right, on the other hand, all corporate right is from the State. The State is the sole source of corporate right and the sole judge of whether a corporation is or is not advantageous to society. The Church, on the contrary, had always claimed to be a parallel source of corporate right, because it claimed to be a separate society parallel to the State, in fact, superior to the State. Canon Law stated that the Church was a perfect society, in fact, the highest society (*Ecclesia est societas perfecta, immo summa*).

This is why Don Bosco wanted the Salesian Society to be an association of private citizens and not a corporation either under State law or under Church law. Rome, however, approved the Society as a religious corporation under Canon Law, for the church rejected the principles of Liberal jurisprudence. This situation made the Society liable to suppression. Don Bosco, however, always clung to the fiction that the Society was an association of people exercising their civil right as private citizens, and not a corporation of any kind.

4. The Casati School Reform of November 13, 1859

*General Description and Provisions*¹³

Some ten years after the Boncompagni school reform, the Law that completely reorganized public education in the Kingdom of Sardinia was elaborated by a special commission working over a period of four months under the Minister of Public Instruction, Count Gabrio Casati.¹⁴ It reflected the educational experience of both Piedmont and Lombardy. The Decree was issued on November 13, 1859 by virtue of the special powers voted at the beginning of the Second War of Italian Independence (see below). The Casati Law marked the birth of the school in modern Italy and provided a framework for public education that endured until the Gentile Reform of 1923.

The provisions of the Casati Law affected primary, “technical,” secondary-classical and higher education.

The four years of primary school were divided into lower and higher sections of two years apiece. The lower section was compulsory and free. Towns with at least 50 children were bound to open and finance such a school. Teachers were to be provided by the town on submission of attestations of ability and of good moral life. Classes could not enroll more than 70 pupils.

The “technical” school also had two different levels: a “technical” (vocational) school of three years’ duration, for which the four years of primary education were required, and a three-year “technical” institute with various fields of study (accountants, surveyors, etc).

Secondary-classical education, based on the classics and on philosophy, comprised a lower five-year course (*ginnasio*, USA high school ±) and a higher three-year course (*liceo*, USA college ±). A successful comprehensive examination at the end of each section awarded a diploma.

¹³ Stella, *DBEcSoc*, pp.235-237; *Compact Storia d'Italia* (De Agostini), 131 and 133.

¹⁴ Gabrio Casati was a liberal patriot expatriate from Milan. He was born in Milan on August 2, 1798. He served as Mayor of Milan in the late 1830s under the Austrian Emperor Ferdinand I. At the time of the First War of Italian Independence (1848-1849) he was president of the provisional government of Lombardy after the Five Days of Milan and the temporary expulsion of the Austrians. He was also thereby Prime Minister of the constitutional cabinet in Turin. After Charles Albert’s defeat and the Austrian re-occupation of Milan he remained in Turin and was active in politics. His name is tied to the School Reform that he enacted as Minister of Public Instruction (1859) in the Cavour ministry. He died in Milan on November 16, 1873.

Only a *liceo* diploma could give access to university and graduate study. The university had five schools each with its own faculty: theology, law, medicine, physics and mathematics, and literature and philosophy.

Comment

While the Casati Law (to be revisited in Volume 4 in connection with the Salesian school apostolate) represented for Italy a substantial improvement in education, it also suffered from serious drawbacks. The two-year obligation at primary level was too limited to allow sizable upward mobility. This situation was made worse by chronic lack of funds in small towns with no financial help available from the State. The Law gave preferential treatment to humanistic education, and neglected “technical” education. It made no provision for professional education and for teacher certification for the lower levels. Finally, the system was too centralized and administered by royal appointees residing in Turin.

It should be noted that Don Bosco’s school at the Home attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales began under the Boncompagni system and in 1859 had to convert to the Casati system. Likewise all his schools (established from 1863 on) ideally, though not always in reality, operated in accordance with the Casati Law.

II. Don Bosco’s Double Dream on the Death of Royal Family Members

1. Historical Context and Time Frame

The context of the dream was the process of debate and approval of the Rattazzi Bill and its being signed into law by the king. On the basis of the foregoing discussion we may establish the following basic time frame.

The Bill was in gestation through 1854.

It was introduced in parliament on November 28, 1854.

Debate began on January 8, 1855.

Queen Mother Maria Teresa died on January 13.

Queen Consort Maria Adelaide died on January 20.

The king's brother, Fernando Maria Alberto, Duke of Genoa died on February 11.

The Bill was approved by the House on March 2.

It was approved by the Senate on May 2.

Five-month old Prince Victor Emmanuel, the king's son, died on May 17.

The Bill was signed into law by King Victor Emmanuel II on May 29, 1855.

From the start Don Bosco kept abreast of developments through reports in the press and through friends who were insiders, such as Marquis Domenico Fassati and Count Carlo Cays.

It was in this context, during the early phase of the bill's progress, that Don Bosco had his precognitive dreams. He had the premonition that certain members of the royal family would die if the king signed that bill into law.

2. Dream's Occurrence and Date

In Volume V of the *Biographical Memoirs*,¹⁵ Lemoyne gives considerable play to this double dream and to the events surrounding it. He mentions that Don Bosco told the (first) dream to a large group of Salesians and names eleven in particular. Among them are (Seminarist) Angelo Savio (acting as an intermediary and secretary) and (later, Brother) Peter Enria, who will be cited below.

Lemoyne himself was not present, as he joined Don Bosco some ten years later, in 1864.

Occurrence

That the "dream" took place pretty much as narrated in the biographical tradition seems beyond doubt. The many witnesses mentioned by Lemoyne should be enough to guarantee the occurrence. There is also the testimony left by Brother Peter Enria in his late *Memoir* (to be discussed below). As far as Don Bosco himself is concerned, none of the letters written by him to warn the king has come down to us. But a letter dated June 7, 1855, written by Don

¹⁵ *EBM* V, 111-118.

Bosco to a priest benefactor and recently published, is the most authoritative testimony in our possession. After referring to the disconcerting situation produced in Turin by the passage of the Rattazzi bill, Don Bosco adds:

A person acting under divine inspiration and driven by uncommon courage wrote several letters to the king warning him that misfortune after misfortune would come upon him if he did not withdraw the deadly law. This person warned the king in detail (*descriisse*) of the death of the two queens twenty days before the event, of the death of the Duke of Genoa one month in advance, and likewise one month in advance of the death of the king's son. Before the king signed the bill into law, he was warned in the following terms: "Your Majesty's signature to this bill will spell the end of the House of Savoy. Your own health will deteriorate, and you shall have to mourn new losses from among the members of your family, disastrous failures in your crops this very year, and widespread death among your people." We are now waiting to see if and how these predictions will come true. This may be through a new cholera epidemic, or through typhus, of which there have been outbreaks throughout Piedmont.¹⁶

This letter, as it lies, reveals a number of things: (1) The person spoken of, in the Salesian interpretation, has been identified as Don Bosco himself, though the style of the letter could point to a third person. Don Bosco, however, served as the bearer of the prophecy to the court. (2) The words "acting under divine inspiration" must refer to the dream or "vision" experience. (3) Don Bosco wrote more than two letters to the king. (4) These letters warned the king not just of "funerals at court," but of the death of specific people in detail. (5) A final (?) letter, written as the king prepared to sign the bill, predicted more widespread catastrophes. (6) Having "done his duty," Don Bosco's adopts the "detached" attitude of waiting to see how it will all end.

Date

Lemoyné dates the first occurrence of the dream to "toward the end of November 1854," and the second "five days later."¹⁷

The letter cited above, however, tells us that the first warning was given

¹⁶ Don Bosco to Daniel Rademacher, June 7, 1855, in F. Motto, *Epistolario* I, 257. Rademacher was a Portuguese priest who had helped Don Bosco.

¹⁷ *EBM* V, 115 and 116.

“twenty days” before the death of the two queens. Now, the queen mother died on January 13, and the queen consort on January 20, 1855. This would date the dream[s] between December 1854 and January 1855. In any case, the *terminus ad quem* is January 13 (first death).

3. Text and Source of the Dream Narrative

Text

The dream character of the experience is assumed in the tradition. But “vision” (visual hallucination) or simply “reverie” could do as well. In the *Biographical Memoirs* the two experiences are given as dreams, and the two narratives are very short.

First Narrative [EBM V, 115]	Second Narrative [EBM V, 116]
<p><i>Toward the end of November 1854 he had a dream in which he seemed to be standing by the pump near the wall of the Pinardi house—where now the main portico, then only half built, is located. He was surrounded by priests and clerics. Suddenly a red-coated court valet appeared, rushed to Don Bosco, and said aloud, “News! News!” “What news?” Don Bosco asked. “Make this announcement: A state funeral at court!” Don Bosco was shocked by the sudden apparition and the cry. The valet repeated: “A state funeral at court!” Don Bosco wanted more information, but the valet vanished. Don Bosco awoke in distress. Grasping the significance of this dream, he instantly drafted a letter for the king, revealing this dream.</i></p>	<p><i>Five days later, Don Bosco had another dream. He seemed to be writing at his desk when he heard a horse’s hoof beats in the playground. Suddenly the door flew open and again the red-coated valet appeared. He strode into the middle of the room and exclaimed: “Make this announcement: Not one state funeral at court, but state funerals at court! He repeated these words twice before withdrawing. Anxious to know more, Don Bosco rushed out to the balcony. The valet was already in the playground, mounting his horse. Don Bosco called out to him, but the valet, once again shouting “State funerals at court!” vanished into the night. At dawn Don Bosco personally wrote to the king. He informed him of his second dream and begged him to oppose that bill at all costs and save himself from the threatened punishments.</i></p>

Source

As for the source of the narrative, Lemoyne himself was not an eyewitness of the events. However, he could easily ascertain the story from the witnesses that he names. The narrative as shaped is probably derived from

Brother Peter Enria's *Memoir*.¹⁸ Speaking of dreams or rather "visions with which Don Bosco was favored by God," he writes:

I recall that one evening, in 1854 or 1855, if I am not mistaken, Don Bosco related a dream he had while in his room. A red-liveried individual, a valet of the royal household, appeared to him and said, "Don Bosco, funerals are being held at court." Don Bosco awoke in shock. But (he thought) it's just a dream. The following night, the same person appeared to him [in a dream] and said, "Don Bosco, great funerals at court." And in reality, some time later, the two queens, Maria Teresa and Maria Adelaide died, as did Prince Ferdinand, Duke of Genoa and another young prince whose name I don't remember.¹⁹

4. Predictions Verified

The queen mother, Maria Teresa, died on January 13, 1855, at the age of 54, after a "short illness."²⁰ A week later, on January 20, the queen Maria Adelaide (King Victor Emmanuel's wife), died at the age of 32 after giving birth. (She had fallen ill of puerperal fever, and a triduum of prayer for her recovery had been ordered on January 19). A few weeks later, on February 10 or 11, the king's brother, Duke Ferdinand of Genoa, died of a pulmonary disease, the Rattazzi bill was still being debated at the time. Then, on May 17, 1855, shortly before the King signed the bill into law (May 29), young Prince Victor Emmanuel Leopold, also died.

5. Retribution Theology

It should be noted that from the start the king was not in favor of the bill (see above). Although the king, according to the *Statuto*, was in fact the chief executive with power to veto any bill, one of Cavour's great political victories

¹⁸ Peter Enria, orphaned at the age of 14 by the cholera epidemic of 1854 was given a home by Don Bosco at the Oratory. He later became a Salesian brother and served as Don Bosco's sick room attendant till the latter's death in 1888. Besides chronicles of Don Bosco's illnesses, at Lemoyne's suggestion in 1892 he produced an autobiographical memoir in which he also speaks of the dream under consideration.

¹⁹ P. Enria, *Autobiographical Memoir*, 13, in *ASC* A013, Cronachette, Enria, *FDBM* 932 E12.

²⁰ Catholic daily, *L'Armonia*, January 13, 1855, in Desramaut, *DB en son temps*, 427, 459.

had been in practice to make the executive responsible to parliament rather than to the king. Victor Emmanuel's Catholic scruples (and those of his wife and family) prompted him to oppose this "anticlerical" measure. He had been in touch with Pius IX through letters, and as the bill was being debated he "conspired" with the bishops in the Senate to block the bill.²¹ Cavour discovered "the plot," and, as discussed above, that very night (April 26, 1855) he and all his cabinet handed in their resignations. The king was unable to find a conservative substitute and was forced to reappoint Cavour and to see the bill passed. He signed the bill "under duress" on May 29.

The three earlier deaths, therefore, appear unwarranted according to the terms of the dream, unless we are to understand that they were inflicted merely to give the king a warning! Even the death of the king's young son (Prince Vittorio Emanuele) occurred before the king signed the bill. The larger catastrophes predicted by Don Bosco in the above-cited letter to Father Rademacher (end of the dynasty, pestilence, illness of the king) did not materialize. (The cholera epidemic was practically spent as 1854 drew to a close).

This raises the question of divine retribution. The idea was current among conservative Catholics in the nineteenth century. The Catholic historian Tommaso Chiuso saw the avenging hand of God in so many deaths in such a short time within the royal family, in connection with the Cavour-Rattazzi bill. Father Chiuso wrote:

Never, even during the course of the most deadly pestilence, is it recorded that in less than a month three graves were opened to receive the mortal remains of persons so close to the king. Not only Catholics, but liberals as well, saw in this a sign from heaven warning the king not to walk any farther down the path to which he had committed himself.²²

Divine chastisements in connection with the state's punitive laws against the Church were feared at the royal court itself. The queen mother expressed her fears in a letter to her son, King Victor Emmanuel. This letter, first pub-

²¹ As noted above, the king subscribed to a proposal by Bishop Luigi Nazari di Calabiana of Casale whereby an annual sum of money (nearly one million lire) would be paid for parish support (the purported object of the bill) if the bill were withdrawn. This is referred to as the Calabiana Crisis.

²² Tommaso Chiuso, *La Chiesa in Piemonte dal 1797 ai nostri giorni* (Turin, 1887ff). [5 vols.], IV, 197, in Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 428, 459.

lished in 1936 and quoted by Ceria, was written in 1850 as the Siccardi bill (abolishing ancient privileges of the Church) was being discussed in Parliament. Warning her son not to sign the bill, she wrote:

[If you will veto the bill] God will bless you and reward you. If you sign it, I fear that God's dire chastisements will be visited on you, on our family, on the whole country. Think of your grief, if the Lord were to take your *Adele* [Queen consort Marie Adelaide] whom you love so dearly, or your beloved *Chichina* [daughter, Princess Maria Clotilde] or your *Betto* [son, heir apparent, Prince Humbert]. If you could only look into my heart and see the pain, anguish and dread I have to live with! The prospect that you might sign this bill without prior consultation and agreement with the Holy Father fills me with terror, in the certainty of God's punishments.²³

The same kind of retribution theology is propounded in an issue of the *Catholic Readings* that appeared during the debate on the Rattazzi bill. The booklet, by a learned French author, cites many examples of divine retribution for attacks made on the Church.²⁴

Don Bosco echoed the same belief in the *Galantuomo* almanac for 1856, (issued toward the end of 1855 in the *Catholic Readings*. This was shortly after the signing of the Cavour-Rattazzi bill and the deaths in the royal family.

I am not saying that God has willed the death of these innocent persons because of this law. But this is what many people believed then and still do. In fact, it has been said that God willed to take these good persons to himself in order justly to punish the wicked people involved. [!]²⁵

It may be asked then whether such a strict (and dubious) doctrine of divine retribution was at work in conditioning Don Bosco's dream experience and consequent actions.

²³ Antonio Monti, in *Nuova Antologia*, January 1, 1936, 65, in [Ceria] *EBM XVII*, 855-856 (Appendix XXV).

²⁴ Jacques-Albin Collin de Plancy, baron de Nilinse, *I beni della Chiesa come si rubino* [...] (*Catholic Readings*, April, 1855) (The properties of the church—how they are stolen [...]).

²⁵ *Il Galantuomo* [...] per l'anno 1856 (Turin, 1855), 46, in Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 428, 459.

III. Evolution of Political Events up to the Unification of Italy (1861)²⁶

In the foregoing paragraphs we described social reforms in the context of the liberal revolution resulting in a new, secular social order. We shall now briefly survey the movement of the *Risorgimento* leading to the political order of unified Italy.

1. The Setting

The failure of the First War of Independence (1849) led to the abdication (and death in exile) of Charles Albert and the accession of Victor Emmanuel II to the throne of Piedmont-Sardinia. Austria reclaimed Lombardy and Veneto. In the other Italian regional states where revolutions or uprisings had forced the granting of constitutions, the absolute rulers were restored and the constitutions abolished. The Papal States (Rome) had gone through a succession of historic events. Pius IX had granted the constitution, but then had been forced into exile. The Roman Republic had been established by Roman Mazzinians (1849) and ended by French intervention, and Pius IX had been restored (March 12, 1850). Reaction and in many cases bloody repression followed in all Italian States.

Only in the Kingdom of Sardinia did constitutional government continue, and did liberal reforms and the program of the *Risorgimento* make progress—powered especially by Cavour.

In late 1851, an unlikely political alliance (referred to by historians as the *Connubio* (the [unholy] “Marriage”) was formed between the moderate Cavour group and the leftist party of Urbano Rattazzi. On October 21-22, 1852 Prime Minister D’Azeglio resigned, when the king refused to support the bill on civil marriage. On November 4, 1852 the king asked Cavour to assume the office of Prime Minister and form a new government, on condition that the bill on civil marriage should not be re-introduced. Cavour kept his word regarding civil marriage, but he could move through parliament important social reforms, such as the Rattazzi bill (discussed above).

Cavour’s adroit leadership would ultimately lead to the unification of Italy

²⁶ This historical survey is based on the works listed at the head of this chapter.

as a nation. But he understood only too well that Piedmont could not go at it single-handedly, and France was the only possible ally.

On December 2, 1851 a coup d'état had ended the Second Republic in France and installed President Louis-Napoleon as Emperor Napoleon III. Cavour (with an eye to French support against Austria) declared that the coup should not affect Piedmont's foreign policy.

Meanwhile, on the other hand, Mazzini and his Republican followers, who had been active fomenting uprisings, were waiting in the wings.

2. Mazzini, Garibaldi and the Action Party (*Partito d'Azione*)

On February 23, 1853, Mazzini in a message from Geneva informed all the republican cells that the Italian National Association was being replaced by a new organization, the Action Party (*Partito d'Azione*). The message re-emphasized the validity and the necessity of revolutionary activity, and the Action Party was to be an association of patriots actively dedicated to conspiracy and revolution for the liberation of Italy from foreign powers and the establishment of a united democratic republic.

Giuseppe Garibaldi, as mentioned above, had fought the French in defense of the Roman Republic and had narrowly escaped. He had then been exiled by Piedmont on July 30, 1850, and eventually he had found his way to New York, where he lived with a political friend and worked in a candle factory. Mazzini's call offered him the opportunity to return and regroup his volunteers.

The Action Party became the home not only of Mazzinian republicans like Garibaldi but also of radical "democrats" and socialists like Carlo Cattaneo, Giuseppe Ferrari and Carlo Pisacane. It stood behind all conspiracies, uprisings and revolutionary movements up to the unification of Italy (and beyond). But the initiative taken by Piedmont and Cavour's political adroitness would ultimately frustrate its attempts.

3. The Crimean War and Piedmont's Participation (1854-1855)

The so-called "Eastern Question" dominated European politics in 1854-1855. France and England joined Turkey in an alliance to prevent Rus-

sia from taking over parts of the collapsing Ottoman Empire. Piedmont was invited to join the coalition. Cavour, Victor Emanuel and a group of liberals saw this as an opportunity for their little kingdom to gain recognition by the great powers and to get their support against Austria.

On April 18, 1854 Cavour laid before his cabinet a proposal to accept the invitation by England and France. Piedmont was to contribute 15,000 soldiers. Most ministers opposed the proposal. But Cavour assumed also the ministry of Foreign Affairs (January 8, 1855), and the House approved the alliance treaty on February 8. Following the declaration of war against Russia, General Alfonso La Marmora led a contingent of 18,000 Piedmontese soldiers to the war front, the Crimean peninsula.²⁷

While participation in the Crimean War was being debated, a cholera epidemic ravaged Italy and parts of Europe, reaching its peak in the summer of 1854. In Crimea the cholera spread through the armies, and the Piedmontese suffered some 1,500 casualties from the disease, among whom General La Marmora himself. In spite of the raging of the disease, the French and the Piedmontese repulsed the offensive by the Russian army on the Tchernaiia River for the possession of the key city of Sebastopol. The Piedmontese corps of *bersaglieri* fought with distinction in this, their only engagement of the war, and the French occupied Sebastopol, thus ending the war with the defeat of the Russians.

Toward the end of November 1855, Victor Emmanuel II, Cavour and d'Azeglio met with Emperor Napoleon III in Paris and with Queen Victoria in London. At the Peace Congress of Paris (from February 25 to April 16, 1856) Cavour sat with the great powers (allowed only after laborious negotiations), and with Lord Clarendon's advice addressed the representatives on the Italian question. Other questions addressed were the French occupation of Rome, Austria's occupation of the Papal Legations (Romagna), and the misgovernment of the Papal States and of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Cavour hoped for territorial compensations (such as Parma and Modena) and for an immediate withdrawal of French and Austrian troops from Italy. He did not achieve these objectives, but his active participation showed that Piedmont offered the only alternative to a Mazzinian republican revolution.

In August 1856 the *Italian National Society* (to be distinguished from Maz-

²⁷ Crimea is a peninsula of the Ukraine jutting out into the Black Sea. The war was fought there to stymie the advance of the Russians into the territory of the Ottoman Empire.

zini's [Republican] Italian National Association and from the Action Party) was founded at Genoa, headed by Giuseppe La Farina, for the purpose of uniting all patriotic forces. La Farina proposed that the liberation of Italy should be its immediate goal without a decision as to Italy's ultimate political arrangement. Cavour gave it his support, Garibaldi (back from New York and temporarily dissatisfied with Mazzini's idealism) also joined. Meanwhile a failed plot by Mazzini for uprisings in Genoa and Leghorn (Livorno) and the disastrous expedition of Carlo Pisacane (a radical republican) to the South of Italy marked the demise of Mazzini's revolutionary doctrine, though not of his schemes.²⁸

4. Alliance between Napoleon III and Cavour at Plombières (1858)

A failed attempt to assassinate Napoleon III on January 14, 1858 threatened to wreck Cavour's plans. The culprits were a small group of radical Mazzinian republicans, led by Felice Orsini, who were agitating for a general European revolution. They, as well as other Mazzinian revolutionaries, were condemned to death.

In spite of this contretemps, in May Napoleon III invited Cavour to a secret meeting at Plombières, a little resort in the Vosges (Western France). It took place on July 20-21, 1858 with the object of strategizing the expulsion of Austria and the unification of Northern Italy under the monarchy of Savoy. This would be in exchange for the transfer of Nice and Savoy to France. It was agreed that a trumped-up revolt should provide a pretext for a declaration of war, and the marriage of Victor Emmanuel's 15-year-old daughter, Princess Maria Clotilde, to Napoleon's cousin should seal the alliance.

Preparations proceeded apace. The Italian National Society summoned Garibaldi to Turin and empowered him to raise a special corps of volunteers to be known as the Mountain Hunters (*Cacciatori delle Alpi*), while Cavour approved a plan whereby an insurrection at Massa Carrara would invite Piedmontese intervention, and Austria's reaction.

On February 4, 1859, a pamphlet appeared in Paris with the title "*Napoleon III and Italy*." Written by the journalist Louis-Étienne de la Guéronnière, but

²⁸ *Compact Storia d'Italia* (De Agostini), 124-126.



6 – Prime Minister Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour (1810-1861)

inspired by the Emperor himself, it recognized the right of Italy to be united and the right of France to respond appropriately to Italian aspirations.

While military preparations in Piedmont intensified, European nations, England in particular, were scrambling for a political solution of the Italian question, in an effort to head off a war. But at this point Austria decided to serve an ultimatum on Piedmont demanding the immediate cessation of military preparations.

5. The Second War of Italian Independence and the Annexation of Lombardy to Piedmont

The ultimatum was rejected, and an Austrian army crossed into Piedmont, under the command of General Ferencz Gyulai. The Second War of Independence began on April 27, 1859. The French and the Piedmontese armies beat back the Austrian army in the battles of Montebello (May 20) and Magenta (June 4) and occupied Milan. At the same time Garibaldi and his volunteer “Mountain Hunters” occupied Lombard cities in the North. Emperor Francis Joseph dismissed General Gyulai, taking personal command, but he was totally defeated in the battles of Solferino and San Martino (June 24). The Austrians lost 16,000 men, the French 12,000. The Piedmontese, in spite of heavy loss of life, occupied the cities of the Quadrilateral, while the allied fleet prepared to attack the Austrians at Venice from the Adriatic Sea.²⁹

No sooner had the war begun than uprisings broke out in Florence, Massa-Carrara, Parma, Modena and Bologna (Romagna), setting up provisional governments in view of annexation to Piedmont. Revolts in cities of the Marches and Umbria (Papal States) were put down, and Pius IX excommunicated all revolutionaries (June 20).

When a French-Piedmontese military victory seemed certain, Napoleon III contacted Francis Joseph by letter and proposed a temporary armistice (July 5) that was subscribed to by all participants, including Victor Emmanuel II. But, on July 11, contrary to the Plombières agreement and without Piedmontese participation, the two Emperors met at Villafranca and agreed on terms of peace. (These would be finalized in Zürich between August 8 and November 10, 1859) According to this agreement, Lombardy would be ceded to France to be then annexed to Piedmont; the sovereigns of the cities that revolted would be restored to their respective domains. With time Italian regional states could then join in a federation under the honorary presidency of the Pope! Venice would be part of the federation, but under Austria!

On receiving news of the armistice, Cavour hastened to the front and, after a stormy confrontation with Victor Emmanuel, handed in his resignation and a new government was formed.

²⁹ The Quadrilateral, comprising the fortified cities of Verona, Peschiera, Mantua and Legnago, commanded the valleys of the Mincio and Adige Rivers and the road into Austria.

While the peace conference was meeting at Zürich, Mazzini found his way secretly into Florence to stir up a revolution. Pursued and nearly arrested, he reached Switzerland from where he wrote his famous *Letter to Victor Emmanuel II* (September 20, 1859). He would accept a constitutional monarchy (so he wrote) if the king parted company with the moderates and the French, and so lead the “Italian people” to unity! The letter has a desperate ring, but historians doubt its sincerity.

6. Annexation of the Central Italian Regions to Piedmont

On December 22, 1859 a pamphlet published in Paris (and simultaneously in London, Frankfurt, Turin and Florence) with the title *The Pope and the Congress* (*Le pape et le Congrès*) shocked the international community. Authored by the above-mentioned de la Guéronnières (but inspired again by Napoleon III), the pamphlet represented a turn-about in French policy with regard to Italian unification and the Papal States. The temporal power of the Pope (so it stated) must be guaranteed, but the smaller the territory over which it is exercised the more effective it will be.

Napoleon III was committed to defending Rome for domestic political reasons and to forestall Austria’s interference; but the pamphlet allowed quite a bit of latitude.³⁰

The government formed after Cavour’s resignation was sort-lived. Victor Emmanuel was forced reluctantly to return Cavour to power, and a new government with a liberal parliamentary majority was in session by January 21, 1860.

Lombardy had been annexed to Piedmont by the peace treaty of Zürich (November 10, 1859). The central-Italian regions that had risen at the beginning of the war, Parma, Modena, Romagna and Tuscany, had also been asking for annexation, but King Victor Emmanuel had proceeded cautiously, with promises, because of France. Now, however the path was clear and their annexation was accomplished by huge majority votes (March 11-12, 1860).

³⁰ The daily, *Il Giornale di Roma*, branded the idea as surrender to the revolution and as a collection of warmed-over errors and insults against the Holy See often refuted in the past. Pius IX in his address to the French military corps in Rome (January 1, 1860) described the pamphlet as ignoble and contradictory, adding that he had written assurances that the Emperor’s views in the matter were diametrically opposed to the proposals made in the pamphlet.

But France exacted a price: Nice and Savoy. Negotiations took place on March 12-14 and on April 15 and 22 Nice and Savoy respectively voted (again by huge majorities) for France, the transfer being ratified by the Piedmontese parliament on May 29 and June 10, 1860. It was a painful loss, and Cavour's action was much resented, for Savoy was Victor Emmanuel's dynastic fief and Nice was Garibaldi's birthplace.

7. Conquest of Southern Italy by Garibaldi, Invasion of the Papal States by Piedmont and the Unification of Italy (1860-61)³¹

On April 4, 1860, an insurrection broke out at Palermo (Sicily) planned as a signal for an armed democratic revolution to liberate Sicily, but it failed. Garibaldi was asked by democratic elements of the Action Party to lead an expedition of volunteers to aid the insurgents, and he accepted. In spite of Cavour's and Victor Emmanuel's efforts to break up the expedition, two ships were commandeered, and Garibaldi sailed from Genoa with his *One Thousand* volunteers on May 6. After some misadventures, the expedition landed at Marsala (Sicily) on May 11 and, reinforced by insurgents from all parts of the island, Garibaldi routed the Bourbon army, took possession of Palermo and had the whole of Sicily by June 6. The constitution of 1848 was reinstated. Meanwhile Cavour had dispatched Giuseppe La Farina (of the Italian National Society) to negotiate the annexation of Sicily. But Garibaldi had him arrested. Cavour also attempted to organize a revolution at Naples for the purpose of cutting off Garibaldi's advance toward Rome but failed.

Garibaldi with his greatly enlarged volunteer army crossed the Straits of Messina (August 18) and by September 7 he had command of Naples, while the Bourbon army took up a position at the Volturno River for a last stand. Garibaldi then wrote to Victor Emanuel asking him to dismiss Cavour, who had done nothing but interfere with the campaign, and to "come to Rome" to be crowned king of Italy!

Meanwhile the Piedmontese government delivered an ultimatum to the Holy See demanding the dismissal of the Papal mercenary army. On receiving a flat refusal, the Piedmontese invaded the Marches from Romagna and on September 18 in the battle of Castelfidardo they routed the papal troops.

³¹ Related in detail (with maps) in Martin, *The Red Shirt and the Cross of Savoy*, 532-626.

A little later (October 1-2) Garibaldi defeated the Bourbon army at the Volturno River, thus bringing the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to an end. King Francis II fled for refuge to the fortress of Gaeta.

With the Marches and Umbria under Piedmontese control, Victor Emmanuel crossed into Neapolitan territory and hastened to meet Garibaldi, at the same time preventing him from attacking Rome, which would provoke an international incident. The two met at Teano, where they exchanged the famous “handshake,” and Garibaldi greeted Victor Emmanuel as king of Italy. And well he might, since Cavour had the Piedmontese Parliament approve the annexation of the Marches, Umbria and the Two Sicilies, even before the popular vote of October 21 and November 4.

On November 7, Victor Emmanuel made his triumphant entry into Naples, while Garibaldi dismissed his volunteers and retired to his island retreat of Caprera.

On February 15, 1861, after enduring a siege of 102 days, Francis II surrendered Gaeta and on a French vessel obtained passage to Rome, where he lived as a guest of Pope Pius IX.

The newly elected Italian Parliament, meeting in Turin on March 14, officially approved the law that bestowed on Victor Emmanuel and his descendants the title “King of Italy.”

The (partial) unification of Italy was thus achieved. But Austria still retained Venice and the Veneto. The Pope retained Rome and a sizable surrounding region (Lazio). The Veneto would be annexed to Piedmont by the Third War of Independence in 1866, and Rome and surrounding territory in 1870.

9. Aftermath: The Roman Question

After the (partial) unification of Italy through annexation of the regional states to the constitutional monarchy of Piedmont-Sardinia in 1861, the Roman Question came glaringly to the fore. The Pope still retained Rome and surrounding territory, and the Roman Question had to do with whether the Pope would surrender his sovereignty or be dispossessed, and Rome become the capital of united Italy. This had always been implicit in all political thinking seeking Italian unification. But how could that be achieved peaceably or without attacking the papacy again? It became “the issue” after the declara-

tion of the Kingdom of Italy under Victor Emmanuel II and the House of Savoy.

On March 25 and 27, 1861 in two speeches delivered in Parliament, Cavour presented the government's position and strategy: (1) The unification of Italy could be regarded as complete only when Rome became its capital; (2) This must be accomplished with the support (or acquiescence) of France's Napoleon III; (3) It must be accomplished without infringing upon the Pope's spiritual freedom and independence, which Italy must guarantee before the world; (4) An annual revenue comparable to the revenue obtained from the Papal States must be guaranteed to the Pope. (5) The Roman question must be resolved by negotiation and not by the force of arms, with the hope that the pope would freely surrender his temporal power; (6) This would exemplify for all to see the liberal principle of "a free Church in a free state."³²

One can only speculate about how things would have turned out, had Cavour not died unexpectedly on June 6, 1861, after a brief illness (see Cavour's biographical sketch below).

As things turned out, Rome became the capital of Italy by force of arms, with the "taking of Rome" by the Italian army, when Napoleon III recalled the French garrison from Rome and was involved in the disastrous Franco-German War in 1870-1871 (to be discussed in a later chapter).

³² The aftermath of the unification and the Roman Question are discussed in detail in Martin, *The Red Shirt and the Cross of Savoy*, 629-653 (637-639: Cavour's speeches).

APPENDICES

1. Count Camillo Benso of Cavour (1810-1861)

Denis Mack Smith, *Cavour* (New York: Knopf, 1985); M.L. Shay, "Cavour, Camillo Benso di," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967) III, 558-559; Francesco Lemmi, "Cavour, Camillo Benso," *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1931, Treccani) IX, 381-385; Frank J. Coppa, *Camillo di Cavour* (NY, 1973); Martin, *The Red Shirt and the Cross of Savoy*, 763-764 (Index: detailed survey, with references to text).

Three persons bearing the name "Benso of Cavour" figure in the Restoration and the revolutionary period in Italy (and in Don Bosco's story). The first is the well-known Count Camillo Benso of Cavour (1810-1861), the statesman and Prime Minister whose policies led to the unification of Italy (1861). The second is Camillo's elder brother, Marquis Gustavo Benso of Cavour (1806-1864), a Representative in Parliament, who was active in Catholic circles. The third is their father Marquis Michele Benso of Cavour (1781-1850), who (as mentioned in an earlier chapter) was the Vicar of King Charles Albert and Superintendent of Police for the city of Turin in the 1840s. Here we are dealing with Count Camillo Benso of Cavour, statesman and Prime Minister, usually simply referred to as Cavour in the context of the *Risorgimento* and the unification of Italy.

Cavour's Early Years and Rise to Power

Born in Turin on August 10, 1810, Count Camillo Benso of Cavour, was the younger son of Marquis Michele Benso of Cavour, Vicar of Turin, and of Adèle de Sellon Benso, a devout convert from Calvinism. Camillo's elder brother Gustavo inherited the Marquis' title.

In 1826 Camillo enrolled in a military academy to be educated for a military career, but he excelled in the humanities rather than the sciences. He served nonetheless in the army engineers' corps, but resigned his commission in 1831. During this period he openly espoused Mazzinian republican ideals, thus risking compromising his career and future as a member of the leading nobility, which was conservatively or moderately monarchical. But the July Revolution of 1830 in France that put on the throne Louis-Philippe of Orléans influenced Cavour's political outlook in the direction of constitutional monarchy.

The next 15 years or so (1831-1847) were spent in his native place, where he de-

voted himself to the successful management of his family's property, to agricultural projects and to land investments. He also traveled extensively, to France and England in particular. He became a great admirer of the English political, social and economic systems. Early on, Cavour developed a rationalistic attitude toward religion, perhaps influenced by visits to his mother's family in Geneva (Switzerland). His extensive travels to France and England may also have contributed to this effect.

In 1847 he founded in Turin the newspaper *Il Risorgimento* in which he urged King Charles Albert to grant a liberal constitution and to undertake war with Austria. By this time Cavour had transcended his earlier republican sympathies and opted for national unity based on dynastic, political, administrative, social and economic institutions. The fact that Italian unity was achieved that way vindicated Cavour's grasp of current forces and historical realities. He was therefore a major independent influence behind the liberal revolution of 1848, the constitution by King Charles Albert and the first War of Independence against Austria.

After some failed attempts, Cavour was elected to the Chamber of Deputies (lower house of Parliament) in June 1848 as a moderate favoring reforms. His support of the Siccardi Laws in 1850 was a major step in this direction, for the laws introduced significant social reforms by eliminating some of the ancient privileges of the Church (as discussed above). This also established him as a power and a leader in parliament. Prime Minister Marquis Massimo d'Azeglio supported Cavour's candidacy for the ministry, and between 1850 and 1852 Cavour held successive cabinet posts as Minister of Industry and Commerce, and Agriculture. During this period he entered into trade agreements with France, Belgium and England with anti-Austrian objectives.

In February 1852, Cavour and the moderates formed an alliance with Urbano Rattazzi and the liberals of the moderate left. Together they succeeded in bringing down the d'Azeglio conservative government. In November 1852, Cavour was installed as Prime Minister, a post he held continuously (except for two brief intervals) until his death in 1861. From 1852 to 1861 he guided the destiny of Piedmont and was the chief architect of Italian unification.

*Cavour and Piedmontese Ecclesiastical Policy in the 1850s*³³

Like most liberals, Cavour believed in a secularized society. As mentioned above, in 1850 he joined the more radical deputies and supported the Siccardi Laws abolishing ancient privileges of the Church in violation of the terms of the concordat of 1841. At this time also a bill to establish civil marriage was introduced and passed in the House, but defeated in the Senate.

³³ For some details of Cavour's ecclesiastical policy see above.

As Prime Minister he supported the Rattazzi bill of 1855 that provided for the suppression of all religious communities except those dedicated to preaching, teaching, and the care of the sick. Cavour believed that religious orders were no longer “useful” in a modern secularized society. The bishops offered a compromise; King Victor Emmanuel II (successor to King Charles Albert after the latter’s abdication in 1849) expressed his opposition to the bill, and the cabinet hesitated. Cavour resigned in protest, but was quickly returned to power, and the bill was passed. Cavour and all those who had promoted the bill were excommunicated by Pope Pius IX.

Cavour and the Unification of Italy (discussed above)

In 1854 Cavour joined France and England against Russia in the Crimean War, at the end of which he succeeded in raising the Italian question at the Congress of Paris in 1856. In 1858 Cavour met with Napoleon III at Plombières (France); they agreed to undertake war against Austria and free northern Italy (1859). Napoleon III’s premature armistice with Austria, drew a new angry resignation from Cavour. The war did, however, liberate Lombardy, and set in motion plebiscites in Romagna and the duchies for annexation to Piedmont. Cavour was again excommunicated for his action in Romagna.³⁴ In 1860 the Piedmontese army, under Victor Emmanuel invaded the Marches and Umbria to meet Garibaldi who with his volunteers had conquered Sicily and Naples (1860).³⁵ This prevented an advance on Rome by Garibaldi, but led to annexation of the Papal States to Piedmont, though Pius IX still retained Rome and surrounding territory under the protection of a French garrison.

In 1861 the new Kingdom of Italy was officially proclaimed, with Victor Emmanuel II as king. Immediately Cavour tried to negotiate the surrender of Rome with Pius IX, offering full guarantees, but he had no success. He died shortly thereafter, on June 6, 1861, leaving the Roman question unresolved.

Cavour’s Character and Statesmanship

Outwardly Cavour was an unprepossessing man. For instance, unlike the typical Italian parliamentarian of his day, he was no orator. He spoke monotonously, had no great mastery of language, and was more at home with French than with Italian. Yet because of his clear mind and acute reasoning powers, he was always heard with great attention.

³⁴ Romagna, the northernmost region of the Papal States, comprised the so-called Legations of Bologna, Ferrara and Ravenna.

³⁵ Marches and Umbria were the middle regions of the Papal States.

In appearance he was a caricaturist's dream: squat, pot-bellied, with a thick neck, thin hair, sharp gray eyes with spectacles, careless clothes with a snuff-stained vest. This unassuming exterior, however, could not hide the statesman gifted with high intelligence, great daring, much personal charm and, when necessary, complete unscrupulousness. He was a true patriot. The deceit for which he has often been criticized can be excused, though not justified, by the high aims for which he was working. He rates as the one world-class Italian statesman in the nineteenth century.

Though Cavour dominated both ministry and parliament throughout his years in office, he was in no way a dictator. He governed by law, not by edict; he did not try to suppress opposition; he upheld both the authority of parliament and the prestige of the monarchy; and he gave full liberty to the press.

The most notable achievement in the life of Cavour was to preside over the unification of Italy, a peninsula for centuries divided into many regional states. The joining together of these independent republics, duchies, and kingdoms was something that very few people thought possible until it actually took place. Nationhood had to be imposed by a small minority of patriots on a population that was barely ready for such a major change. This made the success of the national movement all the more remarkable. And even though Cavour did not live to see Rome established as the capital of Italy, by his political action he set the stage for this last (and perhaps the most considerable) achievement of Italy's *Risorgimento*—to end the temporal sovereignty of the Pope, which had survived intact over many centuries.

These victories were won against all odds, and were the more astonishing in that Cavour's own region of Piedmont (which led the national movement) was small and possessed little natural leverage in the Italian peninsula. Not only had Cavour to overcome opposition inside Piedmont, but also that from all the other Italian states. For despite the fact that a minority of their populations was favorable or supportive, many within the states strongly opposed what he was doing. As a result the *Risorgimento* had to be not merely a struggle against foreign oppression but a series of civil wars. This inevitably opened wounds that were not easily healed. Cavour was very successful in rallying support, but some internal divisions remained intractable—not merely the division between conservatives and political radicals, but between Church and State, between rich landowners and poor peasants, between the wealthier northern regions and the impoverished south.

But the unification of Italy was in the end a great success. It is to be regretted that he did not live long enough to apply his skill and intelligence to the initial problems of the state that he did so much to create.

Cavour's Final Religious Attitude

Cavour never shared the extreme anticlericalism of the radical left, nor the more tempered kind of the moderate left. He seemed rather to be motivated by political expediency in his ecclesiastical policy.

His religious sentiments on his deathbed are shrouded in mystery. It was stated officially that he received the last rites of the Church administered by Father Giacomo da Poirino summoned from the local parish church. Pius IX questioned the priest, but the latter never revealed the details of his ministrations—whether Cavour confessed and received absolution, or was given conditional absolution while unconscious from the stroke that he had suffered and caused his death.

2. Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882)

Christopher Hibbert, *Garibaldi and His Enemies* [...] (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1965); Peter de Polnay, *Garibaldi. The Legend and the Man* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1960); E. A. Carrillo, "Garibaldi," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6, 289-290; Martin, *The Red Shirt and the Cross of Savoy*, 773-769 (Index: detailed survey, with references to text).

Giuseppe Garibaldi was born in Nice (Kingdom of Sardinia) on July 4, 1807 into a family of sailors. On the sea from boyhood, he became acquainted with every part of the Mediterranean, acquired outstanding navigation skills, and won promotion as captain.

At first he took no part in politics, but in 1833 he became acquainted with the Christian socialist doctrine of the utopian political philosopher, Henri de Saint-Simon. More significantly at Marseilles he met the Mazzinians and joined Mazzini's Young Italy Association and its republican ideology.

In December 1833 he joined the navy of the Kingdom of Sardinia for the express purpose of spreading revolutionary doctrine and of organizing an uprising among the sailors set to break out on February 4, 1834, in coordination with Mazzini's plot to invade Savoy (which failed). The military and the police got wind of the scheme, and Garibaldi narrowly escaped arrest. He was condemned to death *in absentia*.

He sought refuge in South America, where he fought for the Rio Grande Republic against the Empire of Brazil, and against Argentina for the independence of Uruguay, where he lived from 1836 to 1848.

He returned to Italy in 1848 and joined Piedmont in the First War of Independence (1848-1849), and after the defeat and abdication of Charles Albert, he went on to serve as commander in the army of the Mazzinian Roman Republic. When the French intervened to end the Roman Republic (1849) Garibaldi eluded the French

with a contingent and marched north in defense of Venice, which had risen against Austria under Daniele Manin. Intercepted by the Austrians, he escaped to Genoa. From there he found his way to New York (where he stayed with friends and worked in a candle factory). From New York he went to Peru to fight for its independence.

In 1854 he returned to Italy and, though never deviating personally from his Mazzinian Republicanism, around 1856 he joined forces with King Victor Emmanuel II for the Unification of Italy (1859-1861), in which he played a major role.

In 1859 he joined the Piedmontese army and took command of a corps known as the Hunters of the Alps to fight the Austrians in the Second War of Independence. Recalled by the king after the armistice of Villafranca, in May 1860 with his "One Thousand" (Red Shirt volunteers) he mounted the expedition against the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which he conquered and ceded to Piedmont.

After the unification of Italy (1861), Garibaldi (already a popular mythical hero) clashed repeatedly with the Italian government over the taking of Rome. As a rabidly anticlerical Republican he wanted the papacy removed, whereas the government aimed at solving the "Roman question" with guarantees for the papacy. Although in retirement in his Island of Caprera, in 1862 Garibaldi rallied his volunteers and marched against Rome. Defeated at Aspromonte by the Italian army, he was wounded, arrested and returned to Caprera. In 1866 he was again stopped by the king's order in his attempt to liberate Trent, still under Austria. In 1867 he and his volunteers again marched on Rome in spite of a prohibition from the Italian government, but the French garrison sent to defend the Pope defeated him and foiled the attempt.³⁶ In 1870 he held a command in the French army during the Franco-Prussian War.

In his latter years, Garibaldi's republican and anticlerical attitude, with socialist leanings, became increasingly more pronounced. Under the governments of the Radical Left (in power from 1876), he was repeatedly elected to the legislature, but seldom attended or participated in the political process, disappointed as he was with its corruption and compromises.

He died on June 2, 1882, the last to die of the important *dramatis personae* of the *Risorgimento*.³⁷

³⁶ Garibaldi's past services and his popularity in Italy and abroad prevented the government from proceeding against him.

³⁷ Cavour died in 1861; Mazzini died in 1872; King Victor Emmanuel II and Pope Pius IX both died in 1878.



7 – General Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882)

3. Chronology of Significant Events Relating to State and Church and to Don Bosco's Work (1850-1861)

In the 1840s

Various proposals for a united Italy and formation of political blocks.

Various reforms under King Charles Albert ending with the Constitution (*Statuto*) for the Kingdom of Sardinia (March 1848). “Emancipation” of Protestants (Waldenses) and Jews with full civil and religious rights, freedom of the press, etc.

School Reform by Minister Carlo Boncompagni placing education under State control (1848).

First War of Italian Independence by Charles Albert against Austria for the liberation of Lombardy and Veneto (Venice); Charles Albert's defeat, abdication, voluntary exile and death (1848-49).

Victor Emmanuel II's succession (1849).

Pius IX, elected pope in 1846 institutes liberal reforms in the Papal States, but declares neutrality in the war (1848); Insurrection in Rome: Mazzini and the Roman Republic (1849); Pius IX's Flight, exile at Gaeta and return through French intervention (1849-50).

–1846-49: Don Bosco settles at Pinardi's; Don Bosco's illness; Home Attached; Oratories of St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel.

–1849, July; Don Bosco cultivates four young men (Gastini, Buzzetti, Bellia and Reviglio) as possible future helpers.

1850

1850, March 9: The *Siccardi Laws*, abolishing the special privileges of the clergy, chiefly ecclesiastical courts and right of sanctuary, providing for reduction in the number of liturgical feasts, and prohibiting religious corporation from acquiring property or accepting bequests and gifts without state's permit. (Civil marriage discussed.)

1850, April 10: Papal nuncio leaves Turin in protest.

1850, April 12: Pius IX returns to Rome with French intervention after exile at Gaeta.

1850, May 4 & 23: Archbishop Louis Frasoni's arrest and imprisonment (one month).

1850, August 5: Pietro De Rossi di Santarosa denied the sacraments on his deathbed. Archbishop Frasoni is arrested and exiled (August 25).

–1850 Beginning of Don Bosco's "Apostolate of the Press": anti-Waldensian polemic with the tract "The Catholic Church..." or "Warnings to Catholics."

1851

1851, April 19: Count Camillo Benso of Cavour, minister of finance.

1851, December 2: In France President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte's coup ends the Second Republic (*Napoleon III*).

1851: Political alliance ("*Connubio*") between moderate Cavour and leftist Rattazzi.

–1851-1852: Early drafts of the Regulations of the Boys' Oratory.

1852

1852, January 7: Italian replaces Latin as official language in university teaching in the Kingdom of Sardinia.

–1852, March 31: Oratory crisis 1851-52 and emergence of Don Bosco as spiritual director-in-chief of three oratories by Decree of Archbishop Fransoni.

–1852, June 20: Blessing of the *Church of St. Francis de Sales*.

–1852, September 24: Rua comes to live with Don Bosco as a boarder; Rua and Rocchietti take the clerical habit (October 3).

1852, October 21-22: King Victor Emmanuel II vetoes Law on civil marriage passed by parliament; Prime Minister Massimo d’Azeglio resigns; *Camillo Cavour* is asked to form new cabinet as *Prime Minister* (Nov. 4).

1853

1853, November 15: The new Waldensian church (*tempio*) is opened for worship in Turin near the Oratory of St. Aloysius.

–1853, February: Don Bosco begins publication of *Catholic Readings*, planned in 1852 with Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea (Apostolate of the Press).

–1853, October: Don Bosco establishes shoemakers’ and tailors’ workshops.

1853, October 27: Urbano Rattazzi (of the anticlerical Left) is appointed Minister of Justice.

–1853 The first section of a new building to serve as the Home (Don Bosco’s House) collapses, but is rebuilt and put in use in Spring 1854.

1854

–1854, January 26: *The Group of Four* (Rocchietti, Artiglia, Rua, Cagliari), later referred to by Rua as Salesians (?), is formed to engage in the “exercise of charity.”

1854, March 3: Urbano Rattazzi, Minister of Interior (besides Justice).

1854, March 10: The seminary property is confiscated, and soldiers are quartered there.

1854, April 19: The “Eastern Question” arises (disposal of the crumbling Ottoman empire by Western powers). In parliament Cavour proposes participation by Piedmont in the *Crimean War* against Russia.

–1854, April: Rattazzi visits the Oratory and engages Don Bosco in a conversation on education; the *Generala* episode follows [in Bonetti’s *Storia*].

1854, July-November. Outbreak of cholera epidemic in Turin and elsewhere.

–1854, August: Fr. Vittorio Alasonatti joins Don Bosco at the Oratory.

–1854, October 29: Dominic Savio (1842-1857) enrolls at the Oratory.

–1854: The bookbinders’ workshop is established.

1854, November 28: The (*Cavour*-)*Rattazzi* Bill for suppression of religious corporations is presented in the Lower House.

1854, December 8: Proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

1855

–1854-1855: Don Bosco’s double “dream” of funerals at Court and warning letters to the king.

1855, January 12: Death of Queen Mother, Maria Teresa (54 years of age).

1855, January 20: Death of Queen Consort, Maria Adelaide (33 years of age).

1855, January 26: Cavour presents in parliament treaty with France and England for participation in the Crimean War; Approval is given Feb. 10; March 4, declaration of war against Russia is published.

1855, February 11: Death of Duke of Genoa Ferdinand (King’s brother).

1855, March 2: The *Rattazzi-Cavour Law of suppression* passes in the Lower House.

1855, April 26: Compromise proposal by Bishop Calabiana of Casale presented in the senate to ward off approval of the Law of suppression. It would provide for payment of 1,000,000 lire by the Church for parish priests’ salaries. King favors the plan (accused of collusion). Cavour cabinet resigns (Calabiana Crisis).

1855, May 17: Death of Prince Victor Emmanuel Leopold (king’s youngest son).

1855, May 29: *Law of suppression*, passed in Senate (May 23), is signed by the King, Suppression of 35 religious orders, with 334 houses and 5,456 members, throughout the kingdom.

1855, July 1: Death of Antonio Rosmini Serbati.

1855, August 16: Battle of Tchernaja (in the Crimean War), the only battle in which the Piedmontese (plagued by the cholera) with the French are involved: Russian army is beaten back.

1855, September 8: Fall of Sebastopol to the French.

–1855: Don Bosco publishes his History of Italy.

–1855, October 4: J.B. Francesia dons the clerical habit.

–1855, October: Don Bosco starts *ginnasio* (high school) at the Home with third year and with Francesia (17 years old) as teacher and moderator.

–1855, November 24: John Cagliero dons the clerical habit.

1856

1856, January: The Christian Brothers are dismissed from the Turin schools.

1856, February 15–April 16: *Congress of Paris* (at the conclusion of Crimean War).

Cavour pleads for the solution of the “Italian problem.”

–1856: Construction of a new building for the Home (floors collapse) replacing the Pinardi House.

–1856: Don Bosco starts the carpenters’ workshop.

–1856: First and second years of *ginnasio* (high school) are established at the Oratory (Third year established earlier in 1885).

–1856: The Company of the Immaculate Conception is founded.

–1856 May 11: The “adjunct” Conference of St. Vincent de Paul at the Oratory is approved.

–1856, November 25: Death of Don Bosco’s mother Margaret, of pneumonia, at the age of 68.

1857

1857, March 22: Austria and Piedmont break diplomatic relations over the visit of Emperor Joseph II to Lombardo-Veneto.

–1857, March 9: Death of Dominic Savio at his home in Mondonio.

–1857, May: *Conversation between Rattazzi and Don Bosco* on a society to continue the work of the oratory.

–1857, June 6: The first priest from the boarders at the Home Attached to the Oratory (Felix Reviglio) is ordained for the diocese.

1857, June 20: The *Lanza School Reform*. Confirms the Boncompagni system, but expands ‘freedom in education’ at local level; specifies freedom for the private schools; places all schools and all educational institutes under the Ministry of Public Instruction.

1857, August 1: The Italian National Society (first planned in August 1856) is officially established, under Giuseppe La Farina, with the purpose of furthering the cause of Italian unity (led by Cavour and the monarchy of Savoy).

1857: A clerical-conservative coalition is formed to run in the political elections and is defeated; Cavour’s party retains control of both houses.

1857: The Catholic daily, *L’Armonia*, calls for abstention by Catholics from political life.

–1857, December: The Company of the Blessed Sacraments is established at the Oratory.

1858

1858, January 14: A failed attempt on Napoleon III’s life by extremist Felice Orsini and co-conspirators jeopardizes relationships between Piedmont and France, and the cause of Italian unity. But Cavour argues that Italian unity is the only way to

put a stop to extremists. This opens the way for the meeting of Plombières.

1858, February: Apparitions at Lourdes, known far and wide.

–1858, February 18 – Apr 16: *Don Bosco's first journey to Rome* with seminarian Rua as secretary. After consulting with the Rosminian General (Fr. Pagani), in audience of March 9 Don Bosco discusses with Pius IX the founding and “shape” of the projected Society. After second audience (Apr 6) and departure from Rome, *first draft of the Salesian Constitutions*.

–1858, March 13: While in Rome Don Bosco is asked by Marquis Gustavo Cavour (brother of the Prime Minister) to inquire about a possible appointment of a new bishop for Turin; is thus drawn into acting as intermediary in the “Frasoni Case.”

1858, July 20-21: *Plombières Agreements* between Napoleon III and Cavour for French support in the project of the unification of Italy.

1858, from October to April 1859: French Piedmontese alliance and preparations for war against Austria.

1859

1859, January 10: King Victor Emmanuel II's address to Parliament (“Cry of Sorrow”).

1859, January 26-29: French-Piedmontese military treaty.

–1859, January: Don Bosco publishes the *Life of Dominic Savio*.

1859, March 6: First section of piped drinking water system is inaugurated in Turin.

–1859, March 20 (traditional date): The *Company of St. Joseph* is established among the “artisans.”

1859, April 23: Ultimatum of Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria to Piedmont to disarm.

1859, April 26: Declaration of war on Austria by France and Piedmont (Franco-Austrian War, *Second War of Italian Independence*).

1859, April-May: Uprisings in Tuscany, Parma, Modena and Romagna (Papal Legations); rulers flee.

1859, June 24: Decisive battles of the war (at Solferino and S. Martino), while Garibaldi beats the Austrians back in the Alps.

1859, July 11: Sudden armistice of Villafranca between Napoleon III and Francis Joseph, construed as betrayal. Angry Cavour resigns. (Alfonso La Marmora and Rattazzi form a new cabinet).

–1859, July: Second, enlarged edition of Don Bosco's *History of Italy* (attacked in the anticlerical liberal press).

1859, August 8 - November 10: *Peace Congress of Zurich*. Annexation of Lombardy.

1859, August-September: Tuscany, Parma, Modena and Romagna request annexation to Piedmont.

–1859, September 11: Don Bosco’s letter to Pius IX assuring him of total rejection (his and of many other priests and laity) of the Piedmontese government’s policy.

–1859, October: Five-year *ginnasio* (high school) is established at the Oratory.

1859, November 13: *The Casati Law* reorders the whole school system; strengthening the “secularization” of the public school, but allowing private schools to operate under State control as to program and standards.

–1859, December 18: Official founding of the Salesian Society.

1859, December 22: Publication of the pamphlet *Le pape e le congrès* unofficially representing the position of the French government with respect to the annexation of Papal Legations; the Roman Question.

1860

–1860, January 7: Pius IX’s Brief in response to Don Bosco’s letter of November 9, 1859, regretting and condemning recent political developments, and praising Don Bosco and his work.

1860, January 21: Cavour forms a new cabinet; new elections.

1860, March 11-12: Plebiscites in Emilia (Papal Legations in part) and Tuscany finalize annexation to Piedmont. Pius IX excommunicates the “invaders and usurpers” (March 26).

1860, March 12-14: French-Piedmontese agreement regarding *Nice and Savoy* (ceded to France by plebiscite, April 15 and 22).

1860, April 5-6: Departure of the One Thousand Expedition led by Garibaldi and conquest of Sicily and Naples (May 6 to Oct 26).

–1860, April 13: Letter of Don Bosco to Pius IX expressing full support of papal politics and giving information on plots to occupy papal territories.

–1860, May 26: House search of the Oratory by state police (and later of the Convitto, June 6 or 7).

–1860, June 9: Malevolent inspection by school authorities and Don Bosco’s protest to the Ministers of Interior and of Education (Letters of June 12).

–1860, June 23: Death of Fr. Joseph Cafasso. Two commemorations by Don Bosco (July 10 and August 30), later published as a short biography in the *Catholic Readings* (November-December, 1860).

–1860, July 29: Michael Rua’s priestly ordination.

1860, August: Cavour orders Piedmontese troops, massed in Romagna, to move south through the Papal States. After an ultimatum to Secretary of State Card. Antonelli, they defeat the papal forces and by late September take the Marches and Umbria (provinces of the Papal States).

–1860, Sept: Chevalier Federico Oreglia di Santo Stefano comes to “live with Don Bosco.” *First lay members* [Brothers] join the Society.



8 – Victor Emmanuel II, king of Italy (1820-1878)

1860, September 7: Garibaldi's triumphal entry into Naples.

1860, October 3: King Victor Emmanuel II takes personal command of the Piedmontese troops and enters the kingdom of Naples, thus forestalling Garibaldi. (The Bourbons of Naples flee to the fortress of Gaeta, November 4.)

1860, October 11: The Piedmontese Parliament approves Cavour's bill for immediate annexation of Central and Southern Italy, where plebiscites vote for annexation (October 21).

1860, October 26: Garibaldi meets King Victor Emmanuel II at Teano and perhaps reluctantly acknowledges him King of Italy.

1861

1861, January 27: First general elections for an Italian parliament; victory of Cavour and moderate liberal right.

1861, February 18: First parliamentary session inaugurates the Kingdom of Italy and proclaims *Victor Emmanuel II King of Italy* (February 26).

1861, March 25-27: In parliamentary speeches Cavour defines the position of the Italian government on the *Roman question*.

1861, June 6: Cavour's sudden death after a brief illness. Bettino Ricasoli forms a new government.

1861, September 10: Ricasoli presents to Napoleon III and to Pius IX a project for the solution of the Roman question, in line with Cavour's stated program, including voluntary renunciation of temporal power by the Pope and guarantees for the pope's personal freedom and sovereignty—proposal angrily rejected.

–1861/62: Don Bosco establishes the print shop and blacksmiths' workshops.

Chapter 3

DEVELOPMENTS AT THE “HOME ATTACHED” TO THE ORATORY (1852-1862)

MO-En, 392-400; *EBM IV*, 458-463 (first workshops), 542-559 (regulation for the Home-Hospice), 574 (first regulations for the workshops); Stella, *DB:LW*, 113-123; *DBeSoc*, 86-100.

Summary

1. Introduction: Character and Importance of the Decade 1852-1862
2. Establishment of Workshops
 1. Introductory Comments
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 3. Organization and Management of the Workshops in the 1850s
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 5. New Regulations and Management of the Workshops
 6. The workshops in the 1860s and 1870s
 7. Development in the 1880s: Toward Vocational Training and Vocational (Arts and Trades) School

Appendices: 1. Earliest Regulations (1854); 2. Regulations of the Workshops (ca. 1861-1862)

I. Character and Importance of the Decade 1852-1862

1. Establishing a Framework

The years 1844-1846 constitute the period of Don Bosco's vocational maturity and of the establishment of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales on the Pinardi property in Valdocco.

The years 1846-1849 constitute the period of the early development of Don Bosco's work: the Home Attached (hospice, hostel) and two additional oratories.

The years 1850-1852 constitute the first period of consolidation of Don Bosco's work. This consolidation took place on two fronts.

First, the gradual sub-leasing and buying of the Pinardi property (February 19, 1851) and the building of the Church of St. Francis de Sales (July 20, 1851-June 20, 1852) constitute the definitive establishment of a base of operation.

Secondly, after crisis, challenges and confrontation over the years 1850-1852, Don Bosco's oratories gain pre-eminence and recognition, with Archbishop Fransoni's decree of March 31, 1852.

The whole period, therefore, runs from the dedication of the chapel of St. Francis de Sales in Barolo's Little Hospital (1844) to the dedication of the Church of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco (1852). From the above it appears that the year 1852 is an important *point of arrival*. It is also a *point of departure*.

2. The Year 1852 a Point of Departure

The certainty won by Don Bosco through the events mentioned above put him in a position to strengthen and expand his apostolate through a decade of decision and accomplishments. With a vision and a plan, but always in response to actual historical circumstances and needs, his apostolate developed on many fronts.

While pursuing the original work of the oratory on Sundays and holy days with undiminished commitment, he concentrated his efforts on the Home Attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales at Valdocco (begun in 1847) greatly developing its physical facilities and its institutions.

A building plan is put into effect that beginning with the Church of St. Francis de Sales (1851-52) gradually expands the physical plant to house some 600 boarders by the end of the decade.

3. Developments in the Physical Plant: Chronology

No sooner was Don Bosco in possession in 1851 than he began to plan an expansion. His first concern was to build a larger church to replace the Pinardi chapel, and next to put up a proper building to replace the Pinardi house. In summary, the following developments through the decade should be noted, some of which were mentioned in a preceding chapter.



9 – “Don Bosco’s House” (1853-1856)

1850: Don Bosco buys the southern field (later to be known as “Field of Dreams”) from the Seminary.

1851-52: Building of the Church of St. Francis de Sales.

1852-53: Building of “Don Bosco’s House,” a first, L-shape section of the larger building that would also replace the original Pinardi structures; (Don Bosco’s rooms were relocated in this new building).

1854: Don Bosco sells the southern field (“Field of Dreams”) to the Rosminians.

1856: The Pinardi house and chapel are demolished and “Don Bosco’s House” extended in their place.

1856: Two classrooms for the day elementary school and a small Porter’s lodge built along the Giardiniera Street.

1859: A shed with three classrooms for the *ginnasio* (high school) is built in the north playground.

1859-60: Entrance and porter’s lodge are enlarged.

1860: Purchase of the Filippi house and property.

1860: New sacristy is built for the church of Saint Francis de Sales.

- 1861: Filippi house is restored, adapted and enlarged.
- 1861: First enlargement of the wing with Don Bosco's rooms: an outer part added.
- 1862: Second enlargement of the wing with Don Bosco's rooms: porch and terrace are added in front.
- 1862: a two-story building was erected along the Giardiniera Street for the print shop, dormitories, and a new entrance with porter's lodge.
- 1863: Don Bosco buys back the southern field ("Field of Dreams") from the Rosminians in view of the building of the church of Mary Help of Christians (1863-1868).

4. Highlights of the Decade 1852-1862—Decisions and Achievements

Through the decade a number of workshops are put into operation for the training of poor apprentices, and a school at secondary level (*ginnasio*, with a five-year curriculum) is established at the Home.

Don Bosco takes on the role of *educator* at the Home, with the student community especially in view. This decade is the golden period of Don Bosco's personal involvement in direct educational activity. Even though his commitment to education through the school (outside Turin) for historical reasons would be in the next decade, the secondary-school program at Valdocco was the first (successful) experiment. Even though Don Bosco was for the most part not personally involved in *teaching*, he was by far the most important educational force at Valdocco. This educational influence was exerted through personal contact with the youngsters outside the classroom or workshop, in one-to-one encounters, in the confessional, through the "Good Nights," through a network of collaborators old and young and above all through his role as "father" of the large family.

In his dual role as educator and spiritual master, particularly in the student community, Don Bosco fashioned masterpieces of holiness (such as Savio, Magone, Besucco and others).

He also formed his closest and most trusted collaborators (such as Rua, Cagliero, Bonetti, Barberis, Berto, Cerruti, and others). From this core group *the Salesian Society* came into being. For although he never abandoned the concept of a wider collaboration in the work of the oratory, he saw the need of establishing an inner group of priests and lay brothers completely committed to the work.

Nor was his activity limited to the Home. During this decade, Don Bosco as writer and publisher undertook the *apostolate of the press* in a major way. He had already authored a number of books of a devotional and educational nature. But now, in response to need, he made an all-out commitment to this apostolate, especially in defense of the Catholic religion through the *Catholic Readings*.

During this period *dreaming* and *predictions* by Don Bosco regarding the youngsters, civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and events in Church and State begin to acquire significance. Don Bosco is gradually endowed with the *aura of the "extraordinary" or "supernatural"* that is thereafter permanently associated with his name in and outside the Salesian tradition. The protection of the dog "Grigio," extraordinary "graces" received (reported, even outside Piedmont) feed people's belief that Don Bosco and the Oratory are the object of particular divine favor. These reports are scoffed at in anticlerical publications. The "legend" takes shape through a natural process of interpretation. Don Bosco's early collaborators are so stirred by the events they are witnessing that they resolve not to let them fall into oblivion.

II. Workshops for the Community of Working Boys (Artisans, Apprentices)

Luciano Pazzaglia, "Apprendistato e istruzione degli artigiani a Valdocco (1846-1886)," in *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare*, ed. by Francesco Traniello (Torino: SEI, 1987), 13-80 [Pazzaglia, *Apprendistato*]; also Silvio Tramontin, "Don Bosco and the Field of work," in *Don Bosco's Place in History*, ed. by P. Egan and M. Midali. (Roma: LAS, 1993), 252-257; also José Manuel Pallezo, "Don Bosco and Professional Schools (1870-1887)," *Ibid.* 343-345; P. Stella in *DBEcSoc*, 243-249.

One of the reasons why Don Bosco engaged in the ambitious building projects described above, apart from his desire to provide better living conditions for a greater number of boarders, was to develop more systematically the two communities that were forming at the Home; students and "artisans." The student community was discussed briefly in an earlier chapter and more will be said about it later. Here we will address the subject of workshops for apprentices at the Home, and their rationale and function.

1. The Workshops in Don Bosco's Practical Educational Purpose

Models

During the period of the Restoration, Piedmont, and Turin in particular, experienced a resurgence of endeavors and works dedicated to the material and moral advancement of the common people at large. This concern might be understood to have arisen as part of a general educational effort. In reality, however, this was to a good extent the charitable expression of a strategy by which Church and State aimed at restoring to religion young people put at risk by revolutionary and social upheavals.

In this context Don Bosco and other priests, sensitized to the need of “poor and abandoned” youth, responded (with various emphases) to the material, cultural, and intellectual needs of the young. Don Bosco immediately saw the necessity of helping young people find stable employment. Together with religious and moral guidance, this would ensure the formation of good citizens.

From the start Don Bosco's charitable endeavors had a true, if limited, educational thrust. The educational activities were no adventitious developments; they were part of the original thrust or plan. Thus, for example, the evening classes were begun in 1845, and later expanded, as part of the oratory program.

The establishment of the Home (*Casa Annessa*), and a little later of the workshops at the home, was another step in the same direction. It expressed Don Bosco's developing educational concern.

The formula—providing shelter, education and work for needy boys in the same house where they lived was not new. Father Ludovico Pavoni had established his *Scuola d'arti* (Trades' School) at Brescia in the 1820s. Don Bosco most probably was acquainted with that work. According to Lemoyne, Don Bosco in late 1849 sent Father Pietro Ponte, director of the St. Aloysius Oratory at the time, to see and report on what was being done in Brescia and other cities of Lombardy. He was to inquire about “the organization of the vocational programs in use in certain shelters for poor young people, as well as about the religious, disciplinary and financial practices established in them.”¹

¹ *EBM* III, 403-404 (translation mine). Actually this trip may have taken place under

Models for the formula "boarding-education-workshops" were available also in Turin. The *Reale albergo della virtù* (Royal Hostel for [the education of young people to] virtue), with which Don Bosco was familiar for having on occasion exercised the priestly ministry there, was a case in point. The youngsters lived at the Home and learned a trade in its workshops—trades connected with the textile industry, cabinet making, household utensils and tailoring.²

The imitation of models such as the above, however, was not Don Bosco's prime motivation in setting up workshops at the home. He did so pursuant to a fundamental educational strategy—placing the boy who found himself at risk in a protective environment.

Protective Strategy

Don Bosco resorted to protective measures in every way possible. For example, by demanding working contracts and by visiting the boy at his work place, Don Bosco stood as protector and guarantor of the young man in place of the parents. The *Mutual Aid Society* within the *Company of St. Aloysius* guaranteed the youngsters' basic security in time of unemployment and kept "our boys from enrolling in the so-called Workers' Societies."³

The workshops that Don Bosco set up in the Home were a further development of the educational thrust of the oratory, and were at the same time instances of Don Bosco's protective concern in view of education.

His main purpose was to give his boys the best possible protection by removing them from dangers encountered in workshops in the city. It was an educational-protective purpose. There is a large body of literature on

other auspices than those supposed by Lemoyne. In the year 1849 dissension had already arisen among oratory priests in Turin. Father Ponte, even though director of the St. Aloysius Oratory, was of the opposition and closer to Father Cocchi's ideas. It does not seem likely that Don Bosco could or would use his services. Father Ponte may have undertaken the trip on his own or for Father Cocchi, who (in association with Father Roberto Murialdo) was at the time organizing a Charitable Society with the purpose of founding the *Collegio degli Artigianelli*. However, the dissension may not have been such as to prevent Don Bosco from using Father Ponte's services.

² Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 170-171.

³ *MO-En*, 387; Statutes in *EBM IV*, 518-520.

the moral situation prevailing in workshops and factories in which children worked. It corroborates Lemoyne's statement:

To send the boys to work into the city every day was morally dangerous, and perhaps actually harmful to discipline and character formation, even after a careful selection and supervision of the shops. Unfortunately, unbelief and immorality were on the rise. Don Bosco was aware that on many occasions his boys had been targets for ridicule, and that this could undermine their moral and religious education.⁴

Pietro Enria's testimony from personal experience may be cited in corroboration. Enria, orphaned by the cholera of 1854, was picked up by Don Bosco at the temporary shelter and brought to the Oratory. While living there he went out to work as an apprentice blacksmith in a workshop in the city. He writes:

In those workshops in the city one heard the worst kind of talk. If it hadn't been for the moral strength received every evening from [Don Bosco's] words and good advice, we could not have withstood so many assaults. I myself can recall the many times I had to run out of the workshop in order not to listen to obscene talk. I was only 14 years old, but some of the workers were grown men. Two of them were particularly evil. They would shamelessly engage in irreligious and immoral talk. They were like animals.⁵

Don Bosco's Practical Aims in Establishing Workshops

The establishment of workshops in the Home was motivated not only by an educational-protective purpose as described above but also by practical considerations. Some lads could do nothing else. Their education, if any, had not gone beyond literacy. They were poor and in dire need. The boys learned a trade in the workshop that would enable them to earn a livelihood. Immediately they supplied such items as shoes and clothes to all in the house. The student community at Valdocco, and later at other Salesian schools, as

⁴ *EBM IV*, 459.

⁵ Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 250. Stella transcribes the first section of Enria's touching memoir on pp. 494-506). See also *EBM IV*, 459-461 (Lemoyne's remarks quoting Don Bosco in *Catholic Readings*).

also the people in the neighborhood were the workshops' clients and beneficiaries. Surely the articles produced were sub-standard, nor could they be otherwise, given the primitive nature of the equipment and the lack of professional masters, but they were cheap.⁶

In establishing workshops Don Bosco had a general educational-protective as well as practical aims in view. On the other hand, at the beginning and for a long time thereafter, it seems that Don Bosco's workshops did not provide a vocational education and training to parallel the liberal arts program of the students. He was certainly concerned with improving the boy's skills in his trade and making it easier for him to earn a livelihood, but that type of workshop went no further.

Workshops, Liberal Arts Education, and Vocational Education

Workshops at the time were closed medieval-style shops with a very limited scope. They did not "graduate" skilled labor, so as to give access to a better kind of life. Such workshops perpetuated traditional class distinctions. In principle, Don Bosco would not place a young man in a workshop if the boy could "study" and have better opportunities. For the same reason he did for a long time shy away from establishing agricultural "colonies." Most of the people engaged in agriculture as peasants and in traditional trades as laborers and craftsmen, had no access to education beyond the elementary level, and were thus kept in a subordinate status. Those were closed tracks, and people so engaged had no upward social mobility. By this system, class distinction in society was set and rigidly preserved. This is why the education of the masses advocated by the liberal movement was perceived by the "upper classes" (and by the institutional Church as well) as an attempt to overthrow the established order. Such programs for the education of the working people as evening classes (begun in the 1840s for workers 16 years of age or older) clearly recognized the limits set for the working classes. Evening classes aimed only at basic literacy and had different schedules, programs and standards than classes in the liberal education curriculum.

⁶ Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 246. Stella's remarks with respect to the workshops at the *Reale albergo della virtù* and at the *Generala* juvenile detention facility are applicable to Don Bosco's workshops.

In the fifties Don Bosco recognized the practical need for workshops and met it. But the acquiring of working skills through a methodical vocational education that would open up avenues for upward social mobility would have to wait for a better day— 25 or 30 years later. Only then could the workshop system be developed into a vocational school.

Therefore, as he surveyed the possibilities in those early years, Don Bosco instinctively saw that the way to better a youngster's social condition was "through study." Since learning a trade in a workshop appeared to be just a way of making a living but nothing more, Don Bosco would not have kept a boy in a workshop if the boy could go a different route. This perception alone would account for Don Bosco's all-out commitment to education through schools at the time of the great forward movement for mass education promoted by the liberal State and, as a response, by the Church.

2. Workshops Established in the 1850s

Shoemakers and Tailors Workshops

In October 1853 the shoemakers' workshop was established in a small corridor of the Pinardi house, near the bell tower of the church of St. Francis de Sales. Its first master was one Domenico Goffi, who also served as Porter. In November 1853, the tailors' workshop was established in the old kitchen of the Pinardi house. Its first master was one Papino.⁷

In the Autumn of 1853, the new building of the Home (referred to as "Don Bosco's House") capable of housing some one hundred boys, was completed. The new kitchen was located there, and suitable rooms were set aside for both evening and day classes. The new space also made it possible for Don Bosco to relocate and expand the two workshops. Thus a number of lads who were lodged at the Oratory but worked as shoemakers' and tailors' apprentices in the city could now work in the house where they lived.

⁷ *EBM IV*, 458-463.

Bookbinders' Workshop

During 1854 Don Bosco established the third workshop, that of the Bookbinders.⁸ Lemoyne seems to imply that the shop was begun casually, when Don Bosco, assisted by his mother, Margaret, demonstrated how a book was bound. In reality, however, this workshop, like the first two, must have been established in order to remove a further group of boys from the dangers of the city; and also in order to respond to a specific need.

In 1853 Don Bosco had begun the *Catholic Readings*, published by the printer De Agostini. But it seems that Don Bosco had already been thinking of publishing these pamphlets at the Oratory. Father Rosmini in 1853 suggested that Don Bosco, like Father Pavoni in his *Scuola d'arti* of Brescia, set up a print shop at Valdocco. Don Bosco replied: "Such a project has been very much on my mind these past few years; lack of means and lack of suitable premises are the only reasons why I have thus far postponed its execution."⁹ Now, even though not yet equipped to do the printing, he could at least take care of one stage in the production of books in his own bookbindery, at a lower cost.

At the practical level also, for this (and for his future workshops) Don Bosco was already looking to a wider clientele. In the fall of 1854 he advertised in the Catholic newspaper *L'Armonia* soliciting business for his bookbindery. He was offering prospective customers reduced prices with the opportunity to help poor boys recently orphaned by the cholera and given shelter at the Home.

Gradually, out of the bookbindery, there grew a small bookstore. It was to become an important independent establishment 10 years later.

Carpenters' or Cabinetmakers' Workshop

The fourth workshop, that of the carpenters or cabinet-makers, was established in November 1856 in the east wing of the new building (opposite the Church of St. Francis de Sales). Its first master was a gentleman named Corio, who had a good tenor voice and was also studying music.¹⁰

⁸ Lemoyne dates it in May; Stella: in Autumn 1854; Wirth, in 1856.

⁹ Letter of Don Bosco to Father Rosmini, December 29, 1853, Motto, *Ep* I, #177, p. 211.

¹⁰ *EBM* V, 497-498.

Coupled with the purposes described above there was the further practical purpose of supplying new needs in the house. The projected expansion of house and classrooms called for a lot of carpentry work (window frames, doors, furniture, desks, etc.). As in the case of the preceding workshop, so also for this fourth one, Don Bosco was looking to outside customers. It seems that, by comparison with the first three, the carpentry workshop, though far from state-of-the-art, was considerably better-equipped and could turn out a respectable product. But Don Bosco's shops could not compete with similar establishments in the city, much less with industrial products then coming on to the market. Don Bosco sought to avoid even the semblance of competition with other workshops or firms, which would have created trouble and difficulties in public relations. At this stage of development, he was only trying to operate in the black. It was a time of economic recession, and workshops such as those at the *Albergo di Virtù* and the *Generalala* (the correctional facility for juveniles founded in 1845) were experiencing difficulties.

3. Organization and Management of the Workshops in the Fifties

First Regulations for the Workshops

In 1853 for an orderly operation of the workshops Don Bosco wrote a nine-point set of regulations for the craft masters, which he had printed and displayed in the shops, with the explicit provision that it should be read to the apprentices every fortnight.¹¹

It should be noted that these Regulations pertained to moral behavior rather than to administration.

Number of Apprentices in the workshops

Lemoynes, citing Don Bosco's registers, reports that in the year 1857-1858 the boarders at Valdocco numbered 199 (121 students and 78 apprentices), but he gives no indication of the distribution of the latter in the various

¹¹ In *EBM IV*, 549-550, these regulations appear as chapter 9 of the *First Plan for the Regulations of the House*. On p. 574 they appear separately (cf. p. 460). No original or old printed copy of these regulations is extant in *ASC*.

workshops.¹² No doubt this number included also some that were still employed in workshops in the city.

Management of the Workshop in the Fifties

We have little or no information on the life and inner working of the workshops. But Lemoyne reports that, from the standpoint of direction and general organization, the workshops went through four phases:

At first Don Bosco hired craft masters at a regular salary. The drawback with this arrangement was that these men were more concerned with their own work and salary than with instructing and watching the boys. Next, Don Bosco got craft masters to run the workshops as employers. They received orders, scheduled the work, paid the young apprentices a salary proportionate to their work, and pocketed the profits. The drawbacks of this solution were more serious; for the boys considered themselves hired by the craft master, responsible to him and subject to his work schedules. This eroded the authority of the educator and sometimes contrasted with the timetable of the house. Don Bosco then had recourse to an intermediate solution, dividing with the craft master responsibilities and profits. This also backfired insofar as the craft master would sometimes strike contracts and take profits under the counter. Don Bosco's final solution was that he himself stepped in as director and manager responsible for the entire sector.¹³

Lemoyne does not tell us at what intervals these phases followed one on the other. He merely tells us that the first three were tried and discarded quickly. It is probable then that by the time the carpenters' workshop was established (November 1856) Don Bosco himself had already taken charge, and the craft master's only duty was that of instructing the boys and guiding their work. But even this solution was not free of trouble. For instance, among other things, the craft master would sometimes neglect to push the brighter apprentices forward for fear of losing his job to them. Things were finally placed on a sound basis when Don Bosco could dispose of his own lay personnel (Salesian brothers) to direct and manage the workshops. This became a reality by the sixties.

¹² Cf. *EBM* VI, 21.

¹³ Cf. *EBM* V, 497-499.

The Apprentices' Day and Activities

The day of the working boys has been reconstructed on the basis of sparse testimonies.¹⁴ It should be emphasized that at this stage of shop evolution at Valdocco the working boy spent most of his day working, the only classroom instruction being that which he received at evening classes. This was of the most elementary kind (catechetical instruction, reading and writing and some arithmetic—since many had never had any schooling). It was not vocational classroom instruction designed to complement the skill acquired in the shop.

Don Bosco from his own peasant tradition and personal experience regarded work as having a fundamental educational and spiritual value. But he also stressed explicit religious education as well as recreational and cultural activities. The working boys, no less than the students, were encouraged to cultivate the Christian life. It was for this purpose that seminarian Giovanni Bonetti, at Don Bosco's suggestion, in 1859 founded the St. Joseph Sodality exclusively for the apprentices. Its regulations, corrected by Don Bosco, presented a simple but comprehensive program for Christian life.¹⁵

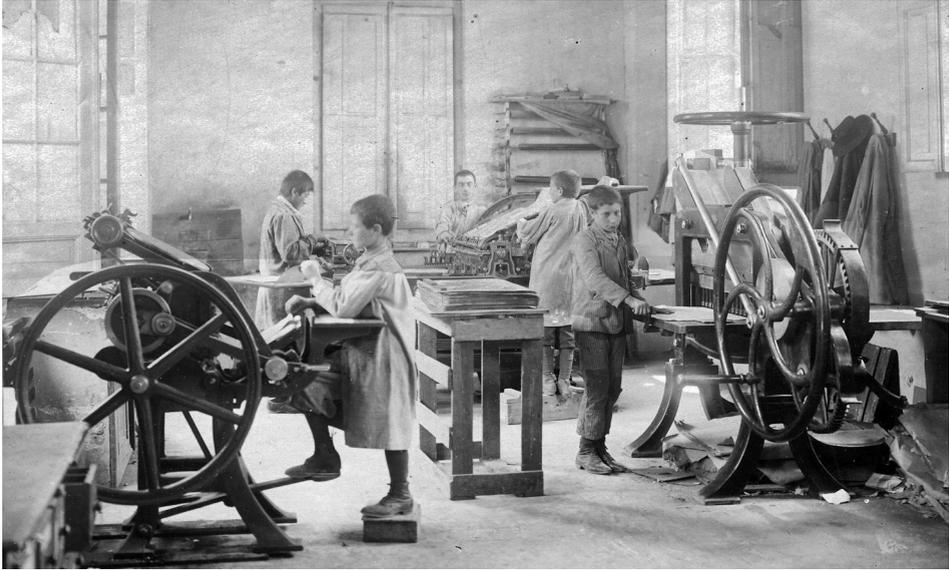
4. Workshops in the Sixties and the Advent of the Salesian Brother (Coadjutor)

The Print Shop

It was with an eye to future possibilities that Don Bosco toward the end of 1861 or in early 1862 established the print shop. It consisted of two used hand presses, a workbench, and some homemade type cases built in the cabinet shop. It was set up in one of the classrooms of the day school built in 1856 near the church of St. Francis de Sales. A little later the print shop was relocated for a short time on the first floor of "Don Bosco's House" beneath his rooms, and then transferred to its intended space in the house built along the Giardiniera Street. In the room just vacated a type foundry was established.

¹⁴ Cf. Wirth, *Don Bosco and the Salesians*, 34-35 and *Don Bosco [...] Histoire et nouveaux défis*, 71-72.

¹⁵ *EBM XVI*, 103-105 and 654-657 (regulations).



10 – The print shop of the Oratory at Valdocco in the 1870s

Don Bosco petitioned the Governor of the Province of Turin for a permit to operate the print shop. This was at first denied because of a provision of the law of November 13, 1859 (not the Casati school law, but a safety code of the same date). It required the craft master running the shop to have been previously certified through three years of training, and the shop to be in a place accessible to the public. When Don Bosco submitted appropriate documents of compliance, the permit was granted (December 31, 1861).¹⁶

The first master of the print shop was a layman by the name of Andrea Giardino. This shop was to experience the greatest development of any of the shops. In 1883, when machines of the latest model were installed, it was the best-equipped print shop in Turin.¹⁷ This was motivated by Don Bosco’s commitment to the “apostolate of the Press,” not to train printers for the industry.

¹⁶ Cf. *EBM* VII, 39-42. Stella stresses that Don Bosco had a “business,” not a school” in mind, and that is why he applied to the Governor of the Province for the permit to operate a business, and not to the School Superintendent for a permit to operate a vocational (“technical”) school (under the Casati School Law) [Stella, *BBeSoc*, 246]. Pazzaglia [*Apprendistato*, 30f.] denies Casati is relevant here, but agrees that in this case, in the early sixties, Don Bosco was not thinking of a vocational school.

¹⁷ Cf. *EBM* XVI, 402.

The Blacksmiths' or Ironworkers' Workshop

Later in 1862, Don Bosco established his sixth workshop, the Blacksmiths' or Ironworkers' workshop, in the classroom that had been the first location of the print shop. The two first craft masters were dismissed for disciplinary reasons (see footnote 20 below), and were replaced in 1863 by one G.B. Garando, an able craftsman of the old tradition. Iron working had become an important trade in the on-going industrial and building boom. But Don Bosco was motivated by more practical internal concerns—the expanded needs of the house, with its new buildings and with the Church of Mary Help of Christians on the drawing board. As a matter of fact this workshop produced wrought iron frames for the windows of the church.¹⁸

The Book Store

In December 1864 the bookstore was officially and separately established. (A small bookstore had been attached to the bookbinding shop). A leaflet inserted into that month's issue of the *Catholic Readings* brought it to the attention of the public. The "catalogue" comprised some Latin textbooks, some theological works, the back issues of the *Catholic Readings* (since 1853), Don Bosco's own works, Father Cagliari's musical compositions, etc.¹⁹ In conjunction with the print shop the bookstore was to acquire great importance and grow into a flourishing commercial undertaking. This development also was in line with Don Bosco's commitment to the apostolate of the Press.

¹⁸ Lemoyne also mentions Dyers' and Hatters' (1862?) [Cf. *EBM* VII, 72], but he may simply be referring to activities connected with the tailors' workshop, not to separate workshops. Moreover, in the *Summary of the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales as of February 23, 1874* (Document No. 15 of the *Positio* submitted for the approval of the Salesian Constitutions), Don Bosco writes: "In the workshops of this establishment, our artisans are trained in various trades as shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths, carpenters, cabinet makers, restorers, booksellers, bookbinders, typesetters, printers, hat makers, musicians, drafters, type smelters, stereo-typists, copper-plate engravers and lithographers" [*IBM* X, 946; omitted in *EBM*]. Obviously, most of these designations refer to separate skills, not to separate workshops.

¹⁹ Cf. *IBM* VII, 788, barely mentioned in *EBM* VII, 465 as a "religious book store."

5. The Lay Salesian

Lay membership (the Salesian Brother) was certainly part of Don Bosco's idea of the Society from the start, though we cannot say with certainty how he conceived their specific work or ministry. But it would be reductionist to think that Don Bosco decided to enlist lay members under the stress of practical organizational concerns, such as the need for reliable workshop managers, and not out of a profound spiritual understanding of the lay religious vocation. However, it is a fact that the workshops began to operate reliably only when lay Salesians took over their management.

In 1860 the Salesian Society (officially founded in 1859) acquired its first brothers. In the council meeting of February 2, 1860 Giuseppe Rossi (1835-1908) was admitted as a lay member to "the practice of the rule" (as an aspirant or novice). He was later admitted to first profession (1864) and to perpetual profession (1868) and was to fill important posts in the Society. Around the same time some adult Christian laymen were admitted as brothers, e.g., the Chevalier Federico Oreglia di Santo Stefano (1830-1912), admitted to first profession in 1862 and to perpetual profession in 1865, and Giuseppe Buzzetti (1832-1891). Oreglia was to be the driving force of the print shop and book production business.

6. New Regulations for the Workshops

Meanwhile, however, the number and development of the workshops still necessitated the employment of non-Salesian craft masters. Don Bosco had already developed and updated two earlier sets of regulations. However, in 1862 he drafted a new set in 20 articles for a more orderly direction of the workshops. Now a lay Salesian "Assistant," with the cooperation of the craft master, acted as Workshop Director. The lay Salesians mentioned above were the first to serve in this capacity.

With time, as the running of the workshops grew more complex and demanding, Don Bosco made new arrangements. a Salesian seminarian (clerical student) served as Assistant, charged with the moral-disciplinary supervision of the youngsters, while a Salesian Brother acted as Workshop Director, charged with the material running of the shop.

These new arrangements, and other considerations, made a new set of

regulations necessary—a fourth draft. Neither the original draft nor an early printed copy of these regulations has come down to us, but Lemoyne states that it was substantially the same as that included in the [General] Regulations of the Houses of the Society of St. Francis de Sales of 1877.²⁰

This latest arrangement was not meant to remove the lay Salesian from educational responsibility, but rather to free him for a more effective direction and management of increasingly larger and more complicated workshop programs.²¹

(For text of regulations see Appendix below.)

7. Manner of Apprenticeship

Regarding age and conditions for admission,²² up to 1860 or so the average age of the working boys was 14-15 years (about the same as for that of the students). In the sixties, however, according to the ledgers, the average age increased up to 18 or 19 years.²³ This was due to the fact that the term “worker” (“artisan”) designated also older craftsmen working in the shops.

No information is available on the length of the period of apprenticeship, programs of instruction, standards and tests, if any. It seems that these varied from one case to another. Serious as it was, the apprenticeship seems to have been conducted on a practical basis, and to have been tailored to personal needs. Some apprentices would stay on as (salaried) workers; others would strike out on their own.²⁴

²⁰ Cf. *IBM VII*, 116-118, with the text of the 1862 regulations (briefly in *EBM VII*, 72). In this connection Lemoyne gives considerable space to an incident that conceivably motivated Don Bosco’s fourth revision of the regulations. An article of the regulations forbade eating and drinking in the workshops. But the ironworkers and their two craft masters held a party in the shop on the feast of their patron saint in spite of the rule and Don Bosco’s prohibition, and had to suffer the consequences. The two craft masters, as noted above, were dismissed [*IBM VII*, 118-119; briefly in *EBM VII*, 73].

²¹ It should be noted that in relating the lay Salesian vocation to “work,” and in offering his lay Salesians an avenue of expression in “work,” Don Bosco was responding to concrete historical circumstances and trying to adapt to them. He was not defining the Salesian lay vocation as such in those terms.

²² Cf. *EBM IV*, 542 (Regulation for the *House Attached*, ch. 1).

²³ Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 183.

²⁴ As hinted in *EBM VII*, 42.

Nor is any information available on how an apprentice's work was evaluated or remunerated. From the registers it appears that up to the early sixties the workers were given credit for their work against their room and board.²⁵ After that the books no longer note this crediting—from which fact Stella argues that it is because by this time Don Bosco no longer regarded apprentices as workers but as pupils under instruction. Pazzaglia, however, doubts the validity of this conclusion, namely that by the early sixties Don Bosco's idea of the shop should have evolved to the extent of equating working boys with students.²⁶

8. Quantitative and Qualitative Progress of the Workshops in the Sixties and Seventies

Numbers

Of the increasing number of boys received as boarders at Valdocco from 1853 on (the new buildings made this possible) the working boys (at first in greater proportion) gradually lost out to the students. By 1868 the proportion was reversed. This may be derived from the records: 1853: A 66+%, S 26+%; 1854: A 53+%, S 33+%; 1855: A 37+%, S 49+%; 1856: A 36%, S 54+%; 1860: A 18+%, S 63+%; 1861: A 13+%, S 70+%; 1867: A 22+%~ S 68+%; 1868: A 23+%, S 66+%.²⁷ This is not accidental, but (as explained above) reflects Don Bosco's thinking with respect to the greater opportunities offered by a liberal education.

Crisis and Recovery

Some of the workshops went through a period of crisis in the sixties during the building of the Church of Mary Help of Christians and the financial upset it entailed. Don Bosco's letter of January 21, 1868 to [Brother] Chev. Frederick Oreglia di Santo Stefano, manager of the print and bookbinding

²⁵ Cf. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 374f.

²⁶ Pazzaglia, *Apprendistato*, 35.

²⁷ Cf. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 180.

shops states cryptically: “The printers are out of work.”²⁸ This may refer only to outside orders, which had greatly increased under Oreglia. However, the economic crisis that hit Turin with the transfer of the capital to Florence (1865) had repercussions on the printing trade.

The economic recovery of the seventies had favorable repercussions also on the life of the workshops at Valdocco, especially the print shop. This improvement permitted Don Bosco to re-launch the *Catholic Readings* (better paper, better format, better printing at 12,000 copies).

It may be significant that in 1870-1871 the students numbered 425 while the workers numbered 228, nearly 30% of the total number of boarders), distributed as follows: 36 printers, 73 bookbinders, 33 tailors, 39 shoemakers, 22 cabinet makers, 14 ironworkers, 6 typefounders, 5 hatmakers.²⁹ It may be noted that the number of working boys engaged in book production equals nearly half the total number.

In 1872 at a meeting of printers and booksellers in Turin a motion was carried to call for the closure of print shops run by institutes (Don Bosco’s Oratory and Fr. Murialdo’s *Artigianelli*, though not mentioned by name, being the chief targets). This would indicate that those gentlemen perceived these establishments as competitors. Don Bosco wrote a letter to the Printers’ Association in which he stated that, whereas the *Artigianelli* was a legally approved Pious Institute, the Oratory was only a private house, and the print shop was a private business like any other. The difference was that, whereas in other printing businesses the profits went to the proprietors, at the Oratory the benefit went the poor working boys themselves, paying for their food, clothes, and education. He was not underselling others; rather by training good printers he was contributing to the art and to the business.³⁰

9. Later Development: Toward Vocational Training and the Vocational School

Coming down to the seventies, the question may be asked, Was there a shift in Don Bosco’s thought and practice as to the purpose of the work-

²⁸ Motto, *Epistolario* II, 488.

²⁹ *IBM X*, vi, omitted in *EBM*.

³⁰ Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 247-248.

shops? This does not yet appear to be the case, in spite of the fact that the biographers emphasize Don Bosco's concern for a better instruction of the working boys. The decision was taken that starting with the year 1871-1872 prizes for achievement were to be awarded not only to the students, but also to the workers in primary school subjects and in French.³¹ Pazzaglia quotes Baricco (*Torino descritta*) to the effect that the working boys at the Oratory also took music and drawing.³² However, it should be borne in mind that this did not go beyond the basics imparted in evening classes at the time.

Ceria, on his part, notes that in 1875 the decision was taken to give the workers class instruction also in the morning. This, in his view, signals the beginning of the transformation of the workshops into "real vocational schools." But Pazzaglia points out that, apart from the fact that the biographer does not report what was taught in those morning classes, the very institution of the morning classes for apprentices was still being debated in 1880, at the Second General Chapter.³³

There is no doubt, however, that something was changing in the seventies. Fear of the mixture of the social classes was giving way to fear of conflict between the social classes. Reformers began to call for a softening of the sharp distinction between liberal and vocational education ("technical," as established in the Casati law) and for a more unified school system, one that did not drive the two categories apart. "Education [...] ought not to be imparted to adolescents through sharply opposed programs, as though the aim were to create separate castes, one consisting of the drones of aristocracy, and the other of the working bees of the lower classes."³⁴

Finally, apart from such social and political considerations, a need for vocational education of the worker, leading to trained workers and skilled labor, was being felt increasingly in the context of on-going industrial development and the waning of the closed medieval-style workshop. This opened up new opportunities for the working class, a chance for upward social mobility. This development was in all probability the reason why Don Bosco in the 1880s

³¹ *EBM X*, 110.

³² Pazzaglia, *Apprendistato*, 73, note 98, quoting Pietro Baricco, *Torino descritta* (Torino: Paravia, 1869), as reproduced by Edizioni L'Artistica Savigliano (Turin, 1988) vol. 2, p. 812: "Both students and apprentices are trained in vocal and instrumental music, are taught drawing, and practice gymnastics exercises."

³³ Pazzaglia, *Apprendistato*, 38.

³⁴ Parliamentary debate quoted in Stella, *DBEeSoc*, 244.

made a real commitment to vocational education in his schools. The workshops became definitively oriented toward the new world of work, gradually developing into a vocational school. General Chapter III (1883) drafted a comprehensive program of study, training and formation, which was expanded and finalized in General Chapter IV (1886).

APPENDICES

1. Earliest Regulations (1854)

EBM IV, 674 (Included in the *Regulations for the Home Attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, EBM IV, 549-550).

The Craft Masters

1. It is the craft masters' duty to teach the boys of the house the trade chosen for them by their superiors. The craft masters should be punctual in their duties and assign work to their pupils as soon as they come in.

2. Craft masters should show interest in the welfare of the house. They should bear in mind that their most important duty is to teach their apprentices and provide steady work for them. As far as possible, they should observe and demand silence during work hours, permitting no chattering, laughing, joking, or humming. They should never allow boys to go to town for errands. If it should be absolutely necessary to do so, they shall first ask the Prefect for permission.

3. They should never make private arrangements with the boys or accept any work on their own. They must keep an accurate record of all the orders filled by their shops.

4. They are gravely bound to prevent any kind of foul language. They should immediately report any offender to the superior.

5. Both craft masters and pupils should stay in their own shops; they should not wander into other shops except when absolutely necessary.

6. Smoking, playing, and drinking are forbidden; these places are for work only and not for recreation.

7. Work shall begin with the *Actiones* [Direct we beseech you, O Lord] and with the *Ave Maria*. At noon the *Angelus* shall be recited before leaving the shop.

8. Apprentices must be docile and submissive to their craft masters as to their superiors. They should be very attentive and diligent in all their duties.

9. The craft master or his substitute shall read these rules loudly and clearly every other week; a copy shall be prominently posted in the shop.

2. Regulations of the Workshops (ca. 1861-1862)

IBM VII, 116-118 (omitted in EBM).

1. The young apprentices in each workshop must be submissive and obedient to the Assistant and to the craft master, who are their immediate superiors.

2. Apprentices to one trade may not switch to another without permission from the Financial Administrator or from the Rector.

3. In the workshops it is absolutely forbidden to smoke, drink or play games of any kind. A rigorous silence must be maintained, as compatible with the art or trade in question.

4. Apprentices may not leave the workshop without the Assistant's permission. Should it be necessary to send an apprentice out on some job or errand, the Assistant must first seek the Financial Administrator's or the Prefect's permission.

5. No job from outside the House, or of any importance in the House, may be undertaken without a previous understanding with the Financial Administrator.

6. The Assistant must keep a record in the workshop's register of any job undertaken, and note date, price agreed upon, name and address of the client, and any other important information.

7. The Assistant must carefully supervise the apprentices and see to their good behavior and to their punctuality on the job.

8. It is the duty both of the Assistant and of the craft master to prevent foul talk of any kind, and to report immediately any offender.

9. The Assistant and the craft master should be at their post on time to supervise the apprentices as they enter their workshop, so as to prevent any misconduct from taking place at such a time. He then can assign each apprentice his work without loss of time.

10. Should the craft master have to leave the workshop to attend to some business or duty, he should inform the Assistant.

11. It is the special duty of the craft master to instruct the youngster in his particular trade, and to see that he does the work with care and without waste.

12. In the event that tools and materials need to be provided, the Assistant shall inform the Financial Administrator and follow his instruction in the case. Should he have to go out for purchases for which he is not sufficiently knowledgeable, he should get the craft master or someone else to help. Before leaving his post he should make provisions for the assistance of the youngsters.

13. Every Saturday the Assistant, after consulting the craft master, shall make a report to the Financial Administrator on the conduct of everyone in the workshop, with special attention to diligence in work and good moral behavior.

14. The Assistant shall also hand to the Financial Administrator a list of all the jobs completed during the week.



11 – A group of Salesian Brothers and young apprentices in 1870

15. Every month the Assistant, with help of the craft master, shall take an inventory of all the materials in stock, tools and instruments needed in the workshop.

16. Should anything be found to be damaged or missing through someone’s fault, let it be replaced at the offender’s expense. Should the culprit remain unknown, let the item be replaced at the expense of all the apprentices in the workshop equally.

17. The day’s work begins with the *Actiones* [Direct, we beseech you, O Lord] and the *Hail Mary*. The *Angelus* is always recited before the apprentices leave the workshop.

18. Let the Assistants and the craft masters keep in mind that by zeal and charity they will be able to do much good, and thus receive their reward from the Lord.

19. Let the apprentices keep in mind that human beings are born to work, and only those that labor with love and perseverance find the burden light and are able to learn the trade that will provide them with an honest livelihood.

20. These articles are to be read to the youngsters in a loud and clear voice every fortnight by the Assistant or by someone in his place. A copy of these articles is to remain posted in the workshop.

[Note – Similar regulatory provisions are found in the printed *Regulations for the Houses* of 1877: Part I, Ch. 7, 35-36 (Del Maestro d’Arte); Pt I, Ch. 9, 38-40 (Dell’Assistente dei Laboratori); Part II, Ch. 5, 68-69 (Del Lavoro); Pt II, Ch. 7, 73-75 (Contegno nei Laboratori) – in *Opere Edite*, 131-132; 134-136; 164-165; 169-171].

Chapter 4

DON BOSCO EDUCATOR AND SPIRITUAL MASTER

This present chapter draws on a number of books and articles, though they may not be directly quoted or referred to. Besides *Opere Edite*, *IBM* and *EBM*, note the following: Don Bosco's *Little Treatise on the Preventive System*; Don Bosco's *Letter from Rome of 1884*; *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, ed. P. Braido et al. (Roma: LAS, 1992); Pietro Braido, *Breve storia del "Sistema Preventivo"* (Roma: LAS, 1993), 98-105; P. Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco* (Zürich: PAS Verlag, 1964); P. Braido, "Pedagogia perseverante tra sfide e scommesse," *Orientamenti Pedagogici* 38 (1991) 899-914; P. Braido, "L'esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco nel suo divenire," *Orientamenti Pedagogici* 36 (1989) 32-35; Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)* (Roma: LAS, 1980), 259-269; P. Stella, *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality* (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996), esp. 453-487. [This is translated from *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica, Vol. II: Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*, 2nd ed. (Roma: LAS, 1981)] Luciano Pazzaglia, "Don Bosco's Option for Youth and His Educational Approach," in *Don Bosco's Place in History. Acts of the First International Congress of Don Bosco Studies. Rome 1989*. Ed. by Patrick Egan and Mario Midali (Roma: LAS, 1993), 267-296; Guy Avanzini, "Don Bosco's Pedagogy in the Context of the 19th Century," *Ibid.*, 297-305.

Summary

1. Don Bosco's Option and Love for the Young
2. Don Bosco's Educational Method and Style
 1. Don Bosco the Practical Educator
 2. Don Bosco's Educational Writings
 3. Don Bosco's Educational Method and Style Described
3. Don Bosco's "Educational Philosophy"
 1. The Family Model and the Family Spirit
 2. Don Bosco's Word and Example
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4. Strategies in Don Bosco's Educational Method
 1. Use of Religion as Strategy

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Appendices: 1. Religious Youth Associations for Borders at the Home; 2. Don Bosco's Conversation with Justice Minister Rattazzi on Education of the Young as Reported by Bonetti; 3. The *Generala* Episode

After establishing the *Home Attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales* in the Pinar di Strevi house (1847), and enlarging its premises by putting up new buildings for it (1853 and 1856), Don Bosco had an increasing group of resident working boys and students. He therefore had the opportunity of applying the educational principles that had guided his work with the oratory to a community living in a controlled environment. This was the great and successful experiment in education that produced the "Salesian educational method." For it should be noted that the Salesian Society was born out of this experiment and the "men" who founded the Society in 1859 were all (with the exception of Don Bosco and Father Vittorio Alasonatti) "boys" from the student community of the Home. The *student community of the Home* was the principal venue of this joint experiment in education and youth spirituality.

I. Don Bosco's Option and Love for the Young - Don Bosco's Personal Vocational Commitment

Don Bosco's personal experiences as a youth, as well as his ministerial experiences as a young priest in Turin, provided the basis for what he came to recognize as a divine call to devote his life to the service of disadvantaged young people. Don Bosco often spoke of his "inclination," an inner urge. He told Father Cafasso (in 1844): "I feel inclined to work for boys. [...] At this moment I seem to find myself in the midst of a crowd of boys asking me to help them."¹

Later (in 1846) he replied to the Marchioness Barolo's ultimatum with the

¹ EBM II, 177.

words: “My life is consecrated to the good of young people. I thank you for the offers you’re making me, but I can’t turn back from the path which Divine Providence has traced out for me.”² The “inclination” had solidified into an option by which the young became the absorbing concern of his ministry, the special inspiration of all his apostolic works, and of the various institutions which he initiated or which derived from his spirit—the whole Salesian family. Circumstances forced him on occasion to accept tasks of a different kind such as that of mediating between Church and State. But even then he would be thinking of his boys, writing to them and dreaming about them.

In the preface to the *Giovane Provveduto* (1847), Don Bosco writes about his love for young people:

My friends, I love you with all my heart, and your being young is reason enough for me to love you very much. You will certainly find books written by persons much more virtuous and much more learned than myself; but, I assure you, you would be hard put to find anyone who loves you more than I do in Jesus Christ, or who care more about your true happiness than I do.³

Father Rua wrote:

Don Bosco took no step, spoke no word, undertook no work that did not have the salvation of the young as their object. He left it to others to go after money, comforts and honors. As for himself, he never had anything truly at heart, except the salvation of souls. In word and above all in deed did he live by the motto, “Give me souls and take the rest.”⁴

Many episodes are related in the *Biographical Memoirs* about how Don Bosco sought and addressed young people.⁵

1. Don Bosco’s Social Valuation of the Young

Don Bosco love for the young went hand in hand with his *social valuation* of them. One might say that his complete dedication to them was motivated by a

² *MO-En*, 251.

³ English version of the *Giovane Provveduto: The Companion of Youth* by Saint John Bosco, edited by the Salesian Fathers (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1938), 3. Cf. also *EBM* III, 8.

⁴ Letter of August 24, 1894, in *Lettere circolari di Don Michele Rua ai Salesiani* (Torino: Tip S.A.I.D. “Buona Stampa,” 1910), 109.

⁵ For examples, see *EBM* III, 29-44.

desire not just to prevent social harm, not just to rehabilitate (where needed), but to *educate*. By *education* he meant helping the young person to develop and grow as a human being and a Christian, so that he could find his proper place in society. In fact, in the context of the liberal revolution and the complete secularization of society, he came to the conviction that only through the education of the young could a Christian society be restored. Moreover, he saw the young, so educated, not only as the “building blocks” of a renewed society in his day, but also as the vehicle for the renewal of society throughout the world at any time. Hence, each development of his work, from the original oratory to the school, to the missions, was for “education,” and at each stage he applied his method and style in a manner appropriate to that development, setting up an educative environment that suited that stage.

2. Don Bosco’s Way with the Young

Don Bosco’s love for young people found its expression not only in that he sought “to educate” but also in his style and method of education. Father Lemoyne, who comments often on Don Bosco’s way with young people, writes at one point, citing various testimonies:

Kindness was habitual with Don Bosco. This was the basis of his system, for he was firmly convinced that to educate boys one must find the way to their hearts [...]. Don Bosco was always kind, soft-spoken and paternal in his efforts to attract boys to the practice of virtue [...]. [Boys] were immediately won over by his noble, gentle manner, his cheerfulness and the timely graciousness of his words. This explains the irresistible attraction the boys felt for him. [...]. Don Bosco’s manner was so attractive, pleasing, loving [...] that [...] boys [...] were heard to exclaim [...]: “He looks just like Our Lord!”⁶

Such an approach was evident *in all situations* in which Don Bosco met the young people. But without any doubt Don Bosco’s style in dealing with them is best observed in the situation where he could be present to them in a sustained manner. This became possible with the establishment of the “Home Attached to the Oratory” (*Casa Annessa*), which provided resident lads with workshop training (for the poorest of the poor) and with schooling at sec-

⁶ EBM III, 77f.

ondary level (for others, also poor). The 'fifties and 'sixties were also the period of Don Bosco's direct, continuous involvement in education (though not normally in the classroom). Those were the years of Dominic Savio (1854-1857), Michael Magone (1857-1859), Francis Besucco (1862-1864) and others.

What kind of spiritual, educational environment did Don Bosco create—the educational style that subsequently became “normative” for Salesian education in any setting?

II. Don Bosco's Educational Method and Style

It bears repeating: Don Bosco had a comprehensive concept of education. It entailed the total development of the person, bringing out to the best possible effect the person's potentialities in view of the individual's functioning as a mature Christian adult in society—a good citizen and a good Christian, as he would say. Also, this concept was founded on his Christian social valuation of young people, and had a distinct social relevance. Likewise, although the boarding establishment (or school) turned out to be the privileged scene of his educational experiment, and although most of his educational writings reflect a boarding school setting, the educational principles he developed have much wider and more varied application. Don Bosco regarded every situation in which he came into contact with young people as an educational situation.

1. Don Bosco the Practical Educator

Don Bosco entered the field of education through the work of the oratory, the hostel and the school at a time of great awareness of the need for education. It was a time in which, together with public legislation, there was also quite a bit of theorizing in the field of education.

Don Bosco, however, became a force in education, and set up a great movement in education, not as a theorist but as one who was drawn into the field by a crying need. He was a practical educator who devoted himself to this apostolate with all his outstanding human gifts and resources, all his Christian understandings and love, and all his priestly zeal. He was actually engaged in the education of young people personally—totally involved for nearly a quarter of a century, and never quite disengaged.

2. Don Bosco's Educational Writings

Don Bosco, however, also wrote; and let no one be deceived by the practicality of his approach. The educational insights that emerge from his writings as well as from his practice, especially from those that deal expressly with the subject are numerous and innovative. All of Don Bosco's writings contain educational insights and suggestions, but the following deserve special mention.

Earlier important writings (often published in revised editions)

Biographies and Histories

The biographies of *Comollo*, (1844...), *Savio* (1859...), *Magone* (1861), *Besucco* (1864). The biographies have a specifically educational and spiritual aim. In this respect, the Savio, Magone, and Besucco biographies are especially important since, taken together, they give us a compendium of Don Bosco's style of education and spiritual direction of boys in the student community in the 'fifties and 'sixties. The different types (Savio, from a good Christian family; Magone, from a "broken" home, though not a juvenile delinquent in any way; Besucco, an unspoiled mountain shepherd lad) give us three aspects of Don Bosco's approach.

The *Giovane Provveduto* (Companion of Youth, 1847...) ⁷ – The Introduction and Part I (introductory instructions and meditations) make important statements.

The Histories: *History of the Church* (1845...), *History of Italy* (1855...), *Bible History* (1847...). – These histories were written to educate by inculcating moral and spiritual values. ⁸

⁷ For an English translation of the original text, cf. *The Companion of Youth* by Saint John Bosco, edited by the Salesian Fathers (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1938), 3-55. Later Don Bosco wrote a similar work for girls that did not have quite the same success: *La Figlia Cristiana Provveduta* (The Christian Girl's Companion, 1878).

⁸ Of special importance in this respect is Don Bosco's *History of the Church* in which he treats of the saints who distinguished themselves for their preventive charity, especially toward young people and the poor.

Regulations

The important Regulations for the (festive) Oratory, finalized in 1877 as *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*.

Regulations for the Home (Casa Annessa), finalized in 1877 as *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*.

These two sets of regulations from the early fifties were revised and augmented before appearing in print for the first time in 1877. They establish the environment in which the work of education, as Don Bosco understood it and practiced it, was to take place.⁹

Reflective and Systematic Writings

Memoirs of the Oratory (1873-1877). In this work, among Don Bosco's aims is also that of showing how the style and method in the education of young people originated and developed.

Confidential Advice (Keepsakes) to Directors (1863, 1871, 1875, 1876, and December 8, 1886).¹⁰ This set of pointers and directives was first sent by Don Bosco to Father Rua on the latter's appointment as director of the school at Mirabello in 1863.

Little Treatise on the Preventive System (March-April 1877).¹¹ It was first published by Don Bosco as an appendix to the address composed in 1875 on the occasion of the dedication of the Salesian orphanage in Nice (France). It sets forth concepts and principles that are fundamental in his educational praxis.

⁹ For the Regulations of the Oratory, cf. *EBM* III, 64-72, 441-453 (edition of 1883), 454-458, 463; IV, 534. For the Regulations for the Home, cf. *EBM* IV, 377-378, 542-559.

¹⁰ Critical edition: Francesco Motto, *I "Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori" di Don Bosco* (Piccola Biblioteca dell'Istituto Storico Salesiano, 1. Roma: LAS, 1984). Also in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 3 (1984).

¹¹ *Inauguration du Patronage de S. Pierre à Nice Maritime [...] avec appendice sur le système préventif pour l'éducation de la jeunesse. – Inaugurazione del Patronato S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare [...] con un'appendice sul sistema preventivo nell'educazione della gioventù.* – Critical edition: Pietro Braidò, Giovanni (s.) Bosco: *Il Sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù. Introduzione e testi critici* (Piccola Biblioteca dell'Istituto Storico Salesiano, 5. Roma: LAS, 1985). – Also in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 4 (1985) 171-321. Cf. Constitutions [...] of the Society of St. Francis de Sales (1984), 246-253.

In spite of the title “(preventive”), which Don Bosco probably chose in order to situate his method within a general educational category, this little work embodies some (not all, by any means) of the insights gained over many years of experience in education.

Letter on Punishments (Feast of St. Francis de Sales, 1883. Copies were to be distributed by Father Rua to the directors).¹² This letter is attributed to Don Bosco. Someone else may have served as literary editor. In any case, it reflects Don Bosco’s ideas in the matter. It addresses the problems of discipline and punishments in the education of young people.

Letter from Rome (May 10, 1884).¹³ Don Bosco is certainly the author of this important educational statement, although Father Lemoyne served as the writer of both the longer and the shorter text. The letter restates, in dream form, basic principles and norms experienced as valid and viable in the education of young people. It particularly describes the educational relationship that Don Bosco saw as all-important.

Letter on Books and Readings in Salesian Houses and Schools (November 1, 1885).¹⁴ This circular letter expresses Don Bosco’s preventive-protectionist ideas in education, although someone else served as literary editor.

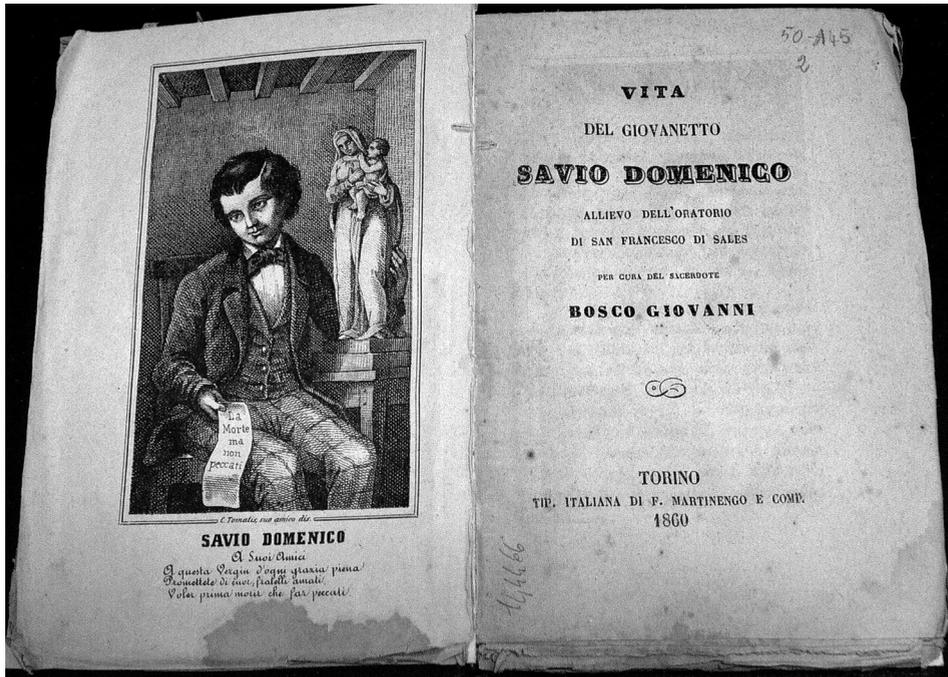
Spiritual Testament (Memoirs from 1841 to 1884-5-6).¹⁵ It was written at intervals between January-February 1884 and the end of 1886; with final additional notes between Apr. 8 and Dec. 24, 1887 (38 days before his death). This is the date when Don Bosco entrusted it to Carlo Maria Viglietti for Father Giovanni Bonetti, spiritual director general. This important last writing of Don Bosco contains a number of his educational ideas.

¹² Ceria, *Epistolario* IV, 201-209. – Critical edition: José Manuel Prellezo, “Dei castighi da infliggersi nelle case salesiane. Una lettera circolare attribuita a Don Bosco,” *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 5 (1986) 263-308. – Id., “Fonti letterarie della circolare ‘Dei castighi da infliggersi nelle case salesiane,’” *Orientamenti Pedagogici* 27 (1980) 625-642.

¹³ Critical edition: Pietro Braido, *La Lettera di Don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884* (Piccola Biblioteca dell’Istituto Storico Salesiano, 3. Roma: LAS, 1884). – Also in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 3 (1884) 296-374. Cf. Constitutions [...] of the Society of St. Francis de Sales (1984), 254-264.

¹⁴ *EBM* XVII, 173-177.

¹⁵ Francesco Motto, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel sac. Gio. Bosco a’ suoi figliuoli Salesiani [Testamento spirituale]* (Piccola Biblioteca dell’Istituto Storico Salesiano, 4. Roma: LAS, 1985). – Also in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 4 (1985) 73-130. Cf. J. Aubry, *The Spiritual Writings of Saint John Bosco* (J. Caselli), 347-364.



12 – Frontispiece of the second edition of *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico* (Life of Young Dominic Savio) (1860)

Personal Letters. A number of Don Bosco’s letters from various periods evidence educational and spiritual concerns.¹⁶

3. Don Bosco’s Educational Method and Style Described

The method might be said to operate at distinct but related levels.

At the level of *educational “philosophy,”* the method acquired its true character from an original, personal synthesis of humanism and Christian faith that Don Bosco achieved out of select educational traditions, out of his cultural experience, and out of his own personal experience with young people over many years.

¹⁶ For Don Bosco’s collected letters see the older *Epistolario*, vol. I-IV, edited by Eugenio Ceria, and the recent (still incomplete) *Epistolario* critically edited by Francesco Motto (4 volumes up to 1875).

At the next level, this educational philosophy was based on a cluster of principles embodied in the trinomial *Reason, Religion and Loving-Kindness*. On these foundations he set up a *spiritual, educational environment* characterized by familiarity, spontaneity, trust and joy.

At the level of *strategies*, importance was placed on *protection-prevention* and on *assistance* through the sustained, helping presence of the educator.

At the level of *means-tools*, a skillful use was made of such educational reinforcements and formative instruments, as work and study, religious practice, moral rigor, and a great variety of play activities (games, sports, outings, theater, music, celebrations).

All these elements, taken together, also defined Don Bosco's educational *style*.

III. Don Bosco's "Educational Philosophy"

If asked to give a brief practical description of the task of the educator, Don Bosco would have compared it to the task of good Christian parents with respect to the education of their children. For at the philosophical and consequent environmental levels, Don Bosco based his educational method on such an *affective relationship* between educator and pupil as may be found in a *good family*. This tersely describes Don Bosco's way with young people, no matter in what situation he found them. In effect, the key "operative" words of the method were *familiarity, affection and trust*.

1. The Family Model and the Family Spirit

Familiarity for Don Bosco meant family-style relationships and a home-like way of living and working together. Its result is the *family spirit*. Its opposite is the superior-inferior relationship and the official, institutional way of living and working together. Don Bosco placed great importance on this approach because he believed that only through it would the educator be able to establish a personal relationship with the youngster. Without familiarity there is no affection, without affection there is no mutual trust, and without mutual trust there is no personal contact, and therefore no education.

In 1883 a correspondent from the Parisian periodical *Le Pèlerin* wrote

about the familiarity he had observed at the Oratory of Valdocco: “We have seen it in action. The Oratory in Turin is a large boarding school where students are not forced to line up; rather they move in groups, pretty much like a family, each group clustered about a teacher; there is no shouting, pushing or squabbling. We admired the serenity of the lads’ faces and could not help exclaiming, God’s hand is here!”¹⁷ What the reporter observed was just a small *external* reflection of the family spirit.

By familiarity-family spirit Don Bosco meant that a Salesian house (oratory, hostel, school, even if very large) should be like a home, and that all the people forming the educational community should live together as in a family. The home-family concept here functions as a model to be approximated as much as possible. In modern times, the family image has lost much of its traditional real and symbolic quality. The very notion has lost much of its appeal in a culture that has practically succeeded in dismantling the home as the affective space where an individual receives fostering love and care from people to whom in turn he/she relates in love. This, however, is the concept Don Bosco had of the family; and his childhood experiences both good and bad persuaded him that family life was a value that could not be dispensed with. The educational community (such as it exists in a school, for instance), in Don Bosco’s view was truly educative only when it fostered as much as possible the affective bonds and relationships that are at work in the biological family.

Many testimonies on how Don Bosco tried to create a family environment in the Oratory community could be cited.

The life he led in common with us made us feel as though we lived not in a hospice or school, but in a family, under the guidance of a most loving father who had no other concern than for our spiritual and temporal wellbeing.¹⁸

At the Oratory we lived as in a family. Our love for [Don Bosco], our desire to please him, the hold he exercised over us caused us to vie with one another in the practice of virtue.¹⁹

To be with the young was Don Bosco’s holy and irresistible passion. If he was ever irked by anything it was when he was forced to leave the sweet and familiar company of the youngsters to attend to some visitor.²⁰

¹⁷ *EBM* XVI, 131-132.

¹⁸ Father Giovanni Cagliero in *EBM* IV, 203, retranslated.

¹⁹ Father Giacinto Ballesio in *EBM* V, 486.

²⁰ Father Giacinto Ballesio, in Angelo Amadei, *Don Bosco e il suo apostolato* [...] (Torino: SEI, 1940), Vol. I, 350. This 2-volume work by Amadei is replete with quotes and testimonies

Don Bosco saw living together in an educative community as living in affective sharing as in a family. He would say, “I want us all to be one heart.” I would like to be able to describe the life we lived together, for I was there, at the Oratory in Don Bosco’s time. [...] We all felt part of a family. Don Bosco always referred to [the Oratory] as the *house* (home).²¹

As a matter of fact, Don Bosco never referred to the Oratory as a *collegio* (a school, a boarding school). In official documents he called it the *hospice* (*ospizio*). Otherwise, even in the Regulations, he called it *this house, our house, the house of the Oratory*. This kind of language more nearly expressed the idea that the Oratory was a *home, a family* to which he was father. When speaking of Savio’s entrance into the Oratory, Don Bosco writes: “He arrived at the house of the Oratory, and came up to my room.” This was different, perhaps unique—not a boarding school, but a house, a home; not an office, but a room; not a director or an administrator, but a father.

Now, the “family model” to describe the educational relationships was a traditional one. However, it usually stressed the father-son relationship, rather than other family relationships. The educator was “a father” to the youngster, who related to him as a “son/daughter.” This relationship was indeed characterized by mutual affection, but it was also characterized by a certain severity and aloofness on one side, and by awe and respectful distance on the other. Don Bosco complemented this image by the aid of other family relationships. The educator must be motivated by a type of *loving-kindness* that is made evident in *tender loving care*. In the family this is characteristic of the mother-child relationship. He also wanted the educator to draw close to, and be with, the youngster in a spirit of equality and comradeship. In a family, this defines the relationship of brothers and sisters. The educator should be father, mother, brother and sister to the youngster.

The “family model” to describe the educational community was not the only one available to Don Bosco from tradition; but apparently he considered it the best. In his mind, just as the family is the prime educational community and is naturally designed for the education of the child, so any educational community should ideally and optimally reproduce the family situation.

that describe the Oratory’s educational-spiritual environment and Don Bosco’s educational style.

²¹ Alberto Caviglia, *La pedagogia di Don Bosco* (Torino: SEI, 1955), 18f.

There were also personal reasons for this preference of Don Bosco. Lemoyne states that “spiritual love as experienced in a family was an overwhelming need of his heart.”²² Braido speaks of this passion for family intimacy as a characteristic feature of Don Bosco’s temperament.²³ Stella believes this to be an aspect of Don Bosco’s personality resulting from his having been orphaned as a small child.²⁴

2. Don Bosco’s Word and Example

Speaking to his Salesians involved in education Don Bosco would at every occasion recommend this family-style approach. “One must have the heart of a father, rather than the head of a superior.”²⁵ The educator “should be like a father among his children.”²⁶ In a letter he wrote that being a “superior” means being an “educator,” and that means being “father, brother, and friend” to the youngsters.²⁷ “Every youngster who comes to a house of ours should regard his companions as brothers, and his superiors as those who take the place of his parents.”²⁸

Don Bosco practiced what he preached. He had a truly fatherly/motherly heart in speaking and acting. He loved all the boys without distinction; and this meant, not in general, but in such a personal way that each one regarded himself as his favorite. This was a widespread perception at the Oratory, and it originated in the way he spoke to a boy. His unruffled serenity, his cordial friendliness, his understanding of a young man’s heart, his instinctive perception of individual need allowed him to speak in a way that went directly to the heart. The “Good Night” is to be understood in this context, for it was in effect the last fatherly/motherly word of the day, before the family retired for the night. It is this very special quality, and *only* this, that makes the “Good Night” the “key to good moral conduct, to the good running of the house, and to success in the work of education.” His manner of acting, that is, the

²² *EBM IX*, 324, retranslated.

²³ Pietro Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco* (Zürich: PAS Verlag, 1964), 159.

²⁴ P. Stella, *DB:LW*, 295.

²⁵ *IBM XVIII*, 866.

²⁶ Regulations of the [Festive] Oratory (1877), 6.

²⁷ E. Ceria, *Epistolario IV*, 265.

²⁸ Regulations of the Houses (1877), 61.

way he treated each person, showed incredible sensitivity and concern, and was immediate evidence of love and respect.

Lemoynes quotes Brosio's statement on how Don Bosco received the boys who came to his room for advice, or just to talk:

He received them with the same respect he showed distinguished visitors, asking them to sit on the sofa while he sat at his desk and listened very attentively as if what they told him was most important. [...] When the interview was over, he would show them to the door, open it for them, and send them off saying, "We shall always be friends, right?"²⁹

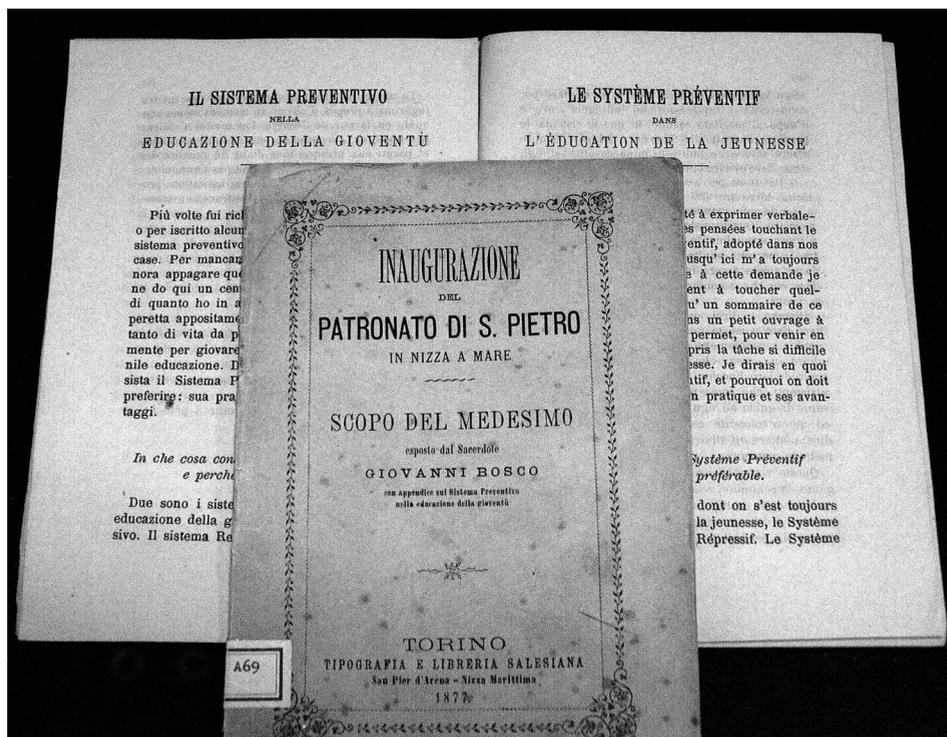
Father Giovanni Francesia related to Father Eugenio Ceria that on one occasion when, as a young seminarian in Savio's time, he had come down with a fever, Don Bosco came to see him in the infirmary. Don Bosco cheered him up, and when he was about to leave he asked him if he could do anything for him. Francesia, feverish as he was, asked for a drink of water from the bricklayers' ladle. (The building that replaced the Pinardi house was under construction at the time, and the bricklayers used a copper ladle to keep the mortar wet as they laid the bricks). Don Bosco went out quietly and after a little while returned with the bricklayers' ladle full of cold water. He lifted the young man's head and put the ladle to his lips. Francesia drank and fell asleep.³⁰

The moral influence and the educational efficacy of Don Bosco's approach is better understood when one considers that a good number of his "sons" had never experienced a mother's or a father's love and care, or were otherwise seriously disadvantaged. Father Joseph Bertello's story is remarkable. As a young lad he witnessed his father's murder (his mother had subsequently remarried). The boy was so traumatized by these experiences that by the age of 14 (in 1862) he appeared to be desperately disturbed. The pastor, Father John Borel's brother, recommended him to Don Bosco, who received him as a son. (He went on to be councilor and financial administrator of the Society). Years later, on the occasion of Don Bosco's feast day, Father Joseph Bertello composed and read a poem in which he described the experience of passing from a loveless existence to a new kind of life with Don Bosco.³¹

²⁹ Brosio, *Memoria* in *FDBM* 554 E10 – 555 D8. Giuseppe Brosio, nicknamed "the Sharpshooter" (*il Bersagliere*) was a steadfast helper of Don Bosco in the early Oratory.

³⁰ E. Ceria, *Don Bosco with God*.

³¹ Poem in *ASC*, quoted by E. Ceria, *Don Bosco with God*.



13 – Little treatise on the Preventive System in its bilingual edition of 1877 (Italian and French)

One should also bear in mind that the early Oratory was “home” to the youngsters also because they found *mothers* there. This was a special touch which Don Bosco sought to maintain, not purely for practical reasons, for as long as possible—his own mother Margaret, her sister “Marianna” Occhiena, Mrs. Rua, Mrs. Gastaldi, Mrs. Bellia, and others.

3. Familiarity and Family Spirit at Work

How does familiarity, the family spirit, affect the educational approach?

First of all, by its very nature, it does away with the *institutional mentality*, the superior-inferior relationship and the official style. It is well known that Don Bosco in those early days had no office or study, but worked out of his room. Don Bosco received Dominic Savio in his room. This famous little room,

which the boys regarded as a sanctuary to be entered with a sense of awe, was open to all always, and was a very important point of reference. There many youngsters received healing, comfort, encouragement and direction.³²

Secondly, and above all, it should do away with *authoritarianism*, which is abuse of authority. Abuse of authority and power destroys the affective relationship, and therefore the educational effort, by releasing aggressive reactions. This has wider application than in the school. Abuse of authority and power by a parent, for instance, can have devastating effects. The person who abuses power, usually claims that it is for the “good of the other,” but in reality it is only for one’s own self-interest and advantage. The young person, who is thus humiliated or cowed into submission always suffers serious, and sometimes irreparable, harm—not the least of which are the loss of self-respect and of the capacity for decision, and the planting of deep-seated hatreds.

In his little *Treatise on the Preventive System*, Don Bosco wrote that recourse to authoritarian repression is the easiest way to deal with a problem, but it has never made anyone a better person. On the contrary, it only causes bitterness and resentment. According to Don Bosco, educators in a Salesian school are not “bosses.” They may not impose their will on the youngsters only because they are in charge. This is why he insisted so much on “reason.” He wrote in fact that his educational method is based on *reason, religion and loving-kindness*.

Meaning and Role of Reason in Education

What did Don Bosco mean by *reason*? A number of things.

First, reason may be defined as *justice*, in the sense that the educator, as well as the youngster, is subject to the rule. Not the whim of the educator but the rule must prevail: rights and obligations must be constantly respected and lived up to by everybody.

Secondly, reason also means *reasonableness* or measure. Everything demanded of the youngster must be reasonable in the sense that it must be proportionate and possible—especially with regard to work assignment, discipline and religious practice.

Thirdly, reason may be understood as *rationality*. The reason for all educa-

³² *EBM* III, 24f. The building in which Don Bosco’s room was located since 1853 was known as Don Bosco’s House.

tional decisions and demands must be made evident, and the good in them appreciated by the youngsters.

Fourth, even more generally, reason may be thought of as *motivation* of the youngster for an intellectual commitment. The importance of the educational process and the validity of the educational program must be made evident to the youngster, and his participation called for.

Religion

Don Bosco did at one time (February 1878) address a memorandum on his educational method to Minister of the Interior Francesco Crispi, without making any reference to religion. The reason for this might be sought in the “political” situation, or even in Don Bosco’s conviction that young people at risk could be helped by the method of reason and loving-kindness, even without reference to religion. However, personally he seems to have believed that the education of a person could not be accomplished without taking the Christian religion as a foundation. In the Western European culture of his time, he could not conceive of being a good citizen apart from being a good Christian, and vice versa.

Religion as a foundation of Don Bosco’s educational method should be distinguished from “religious practice” as an educational reinforcement (“piety,” see below). In this latter respect, there is no doubt that Don Bosco placed great importance on religious exercises. Drawing near to God through prayer and listening to the word of God reinforces the educational effort. But by religion as foundation Don Bosco meant more than that. As a Christian and as a priest he lived by faith in the uniqueness (absolute necessity) of Christ’s mediation, and therefore in the uniqueness of the mediation of the Church of Christ. He regarded Christ’s and the Church’s mediation as uniquely necessary not only for “spiritual” salvation, but also for the whole personal and societal human undertaking. That is why he could not separate being a good citizen from being a good Christian. He based his oratory program on “religious instruction,” and he based his whole educational undertaking, in its varied forms, on the Christian faith tradition. Coupled with the sustained religious experience of prayer and the sacraments, which he provided to his youngsters, this “Christian education,” developed into a “spirituality.” It is at this point that education and the spiritual life became inseparable.

Loving Kindness, Tender-Loving Care, Affection

Don Bosco would often advise: “Try to make yourself loved rather than feared.”³³ In the *Letter from Rome* (1884) Don Bosco used the term “love” 27 times. On many occasions Don Bosco explained the kind of love he had in mind. It is spiritually mature, impartial, generous, selfless, self-sacrificing love. It is the love enjoined by Jesus. More simply, Don Bosco would say that the educator should love the youngsters in the same way that good Christian parents love their children.

If this is the case, then we are not just talking about love, no matter how deep and real, but about love *proven and expressed* in practice. Love is to be expressed in practice as *amorevolezza*. Don Bosco says: “The youngsters should not only be loved, but they themselves should know that they are loved.” Education can only take place through love, and only when love is made manifest. The educator “who would be loved should first love, and manifest his love.”³⁴ But even this is not enough. Love should be expressed with a certain style, much like Jesus, or loving parents, would express it—with loving concern, with caring friendliness, with tender loving care. Don Bosco called love so expressed, “*amorevolezza* (loving concern).” Only in this manner can the educator establish a relationship with the youngster at a personal level.

Trust

“Without familiarity there is no love expressed, and without love expressed there is no trust.”³⁵ There is a reason why Don Bosco attached so much importance to trust and regarded it as essential to education. His educational method is based on an affective relationship, and the prime effect of this is confidence, that is, the act of opening and entrusting oneself to another at a personal level. Don Bosco closed the Letter on Punishments of 1883 with the words: “Remember that education is a matter of the heart, of which God alone is the master”³⁶ Braido comments: “If the educator does not succeed in winning the youngster’s heart, he labors in vain. If a youngster does not

³³ Confidential Advice to Directors (1863).

³⁴ Both quotes from the *Letter from Rome* (1884).

³⁵ Letter from Rome (1884).

³⁶ EBM XVI, 376.

open his heart to the educator, education fails.”³⁷ And moreover, there should be mutuality, trust given and received. This is both crucial and fraught with difficulty.

Trust is not easily established. Don Bosco was keenly aware of the difficulties inherent to this crucial phase of the educative process. Spiritually mature, selfless, self-sacrificing love, expressed as *amorevolezza*, is a necessary condition for trust. But even then trust does not come easy. Trust cannot be bought, forced or commanded. And it is very difficult for educators, parents included, to establish such a trustful, responsive relationship with youngsters, especially with teen-age adolescents. Don Bosco did not always succeed in getting through to a youngster; but generally speaking he did.

How explain this success? *First* of all, Don Bosco was so completely dedicated that his sincerity and authenticity as an educator were never in doubt. His never-failing presence and availability, his simple and utterly sincere (ordinary) manner of speaking and acting; his well timed and gentle approach; his serene and smiling face; his completely non-threatening and disarming attitude usually succeeded in opening the way to trust.

Secondly, Don Bosco was an exceptionally gifted educator. From nature and grace he possessed extraordinary empathic qualities and intuitive powers. Even as a young lad, he was able to divine other children’s thoughts and intentions. He could speak to young people in such a manner that they not only understood what he said, but that they understood *him*. A rapport was immediately established. His language was never learned or difficult, but always the informal talk of a friend. He spoke slowly, clearly, simply, directly, persuasively, and above all in utter sincerity. He would say, “I open my heart to you and tell you plainly what’s on my mind; don’t be afraid to do the same.”³⁸

The episode of Don Bosco and Cardinal Tosti with the street urchins in the Piazza del Popolo in Rome shows how Don Bosco knew how to “draw near” and “be with” young people. The episode took place in consequence of a discussion on how to approach youngsters and win their trust. As reported by Lemoyne, here is how the exchange ran:

“Your Eminence, it is not possible to educate youngsters if they have no trust in their superiors.” “How is one to win their trust?” the cardinal asked. “By trying to attract them to us and by eliminating whatever alienates them.” “How can we

³⁷ Pietro Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco* (Zürich: PAS Verlag, 1955), 205.

³⁸ EBM VII, 305.

attract them to us?” “By going to them first, by trying to adapt to their tastes, by becoming like them.”³⁹

The story continues: they drove to Piazza del Popolo in the Cardinal’s carriage. Don Bosco joined a group of youngsters at play in the square, and demonstrated “his technique” for the Cardinal.

However, making the approach is not enough. How the educator acts and treats the youngsters is paramount, because it is the youngster who must accept the educator. Again, the biographer has collected a body of comments by Don Bosco addressed to teachers. At one point he quotes him as saying:

Let us treat young people as we would treat Jesus if he were a pupil in one of our schools. Let us treat them with love, and they will love us in returns. Let us treat them with respect, and they will respect us in return. They themselves must come to acknowledge us as the educators-in-charge (*superiori*).⁴⁰

4. Some Features of Life at the Home of the Oratory in the Early Days

Spartan Life Style

The life style of every individual at the Oratory was ascetic in the highest degree. Don Bosco himself adopted the life style of the poor both in principle and by force of circumstances. There was no heating to speak of even in the dead of winter. Meals were of the most frugal kind. Clothing consisted almost entirely of hand-me-downs and worn military surplus. The overcrowding was so severe as to cause everybody hardship and discomfort. It is a tribute to Don Bosco’s educational method that these hardships were taken in stride, and indeed fitted into the educational scheme. Don Bosco, of course, sought to improve conditions continually. On the other hand, later he was to lament the loss of that primitive hardihood. Likewise, even though he sought to provide more space, he steadfastly refused to limit enrollment in order to provide greater comfort. Sensitive to need as he was, he always found room for one more youngster. Don Bosco’s personal inspiration was

³⁹ *EBM* V, 600f.

⁴⁰ *IBM* XIV, 846f. (omitted in *EBM*).

the catalyst that united the community in heroic efforts; and the number and the quality of the people that came through that “ordeal” are a testimony to Don Bosco’s extraordinary ways with people.

Don Bosco’s self-sacrificing Spirit

There were things that the young people at the Oratory could perhaps not even begin to understand but that were experienced as real and at work in the community. Foremost among these, was the way Don Bosco sacrificed himself for his boys. Don Bosco maintained his large family only at the cost of untold personal sacrifice. The time, energy and humiliations entailed in raising enough money merely to pay the monthly bills had to tax his health and spirit almost beyond endurance. The youngsters were not in a position to appreciate these sacrifices, or were only dimly aware of them, but their father’s total dedication to their welfare and practical love for them was evident enough. Their response paid large educational dividends.

Don Bosco’s Premonitions for the Future

By the late fifties (the Salesian Society was officially founded in 1859) Don Bosco was “dreaming” of, and making great plans for, the future. He would tell his dreams, but he could not speak of his premonitions openly, partly because of the political situation, partly because of the fragile resolution of his young helpers, and partly because “the project” was still at the gestation stage. But even so, there were vibrations in the air, and these were intensified by the ever-increasing “supernatural” aura surrounding Don Bosco. This fact cannot be discounted as an educational factor that affected the Oratory population generally, but that had a special impact on an inner circle of the Oratory family. The personal charismatic character of an educator has much to do with the success of an educational undertaking.

IV. Strategies in Don Bosco’s Educational Method

Closely associated with educational philosophy and environment are the educational strategies of the method.

1. Use of Religion as Strategy

Above we mentioned Religion in so far as it establishes a context of Christian life and faith, and Religion as expressed in practices of piety apt to lending support to the educational and moral effort (see also below). Religion may also be regarded as an educational strategy in so far as it directs and sanctions the youngster's way of thinking and acting. Certainly, Don Bosco made use of Religion as a strategy. He did, for instance, stress the exercise of the presence of God and meditation on the Last Things (as in the Exercise for a Happy Death) as strategies for the moral life and the performance of duty.

We should also mention the *strategy of the word*, that is, Don Bosco's sustained spiritual animation and direction. He addressed individual youngsters through "little words," personal chats, and in the confessional, a ministry to which he devoted many hours each day. He addressed the community of students and working boys through exhortation in sermons, and especially in the Good Night. As Pietro Enria's testimony (to be quoted below) confirms, the short familiar exhortation delivered at day's end proved to be of great educational value.

Prevention and *Assistance* as strategies hold a place of honor. These concepts are immediately recognized as part and parcel of Don Bosco's educational method.

2. Prevention

Don Bosco's educational method is known the world over as the *preventive* system. And certainly *preventive care* is a specific trait of the method, and a recognizable sign of the Salesian educational tradition. But it should be emphasized that Don Bosco's educational method cannot simply be defined in terms of *prevention*. Actually (as far as we know) Don Bosco did not use the term *preventive* to qualify his method before 1877. It appears that he adopted the term in order to give his method a theoretical position, that is, in order to locate it within a general classification in educational history. And clearly the term *preventive* (in opposition to the *repressive*) expresses Don Bosco's preference in educational practice; but it does not express the richness and complexity of the method. Prevention, however, is an important strategy of the method.

The work of the oratory as a whole was *preventive* in character. It aimed at protecting the youngster from damaging influences, or at repairing the damage by removing him from physically and morally hostile situations.

For example, this is the reason why Don Bosco established workshops at the Home of the Oratory between 1853 and 1862 (see our earlier discussion). He wanted to remove his boys from the physical and moral dangers of workshops in the city.

At a primary level, prevention is a strategy designed to provide young people with support in their personal struggles, to enable them to deal constructively with the difficulties, temptations that come into their life as human beings and Christians.

At a secondary level, prevention aims at limiting and encircling the risk in which young people find themselves, so that they may be brought out of risk, or at least they may not slide into a situation of greater risk.

Don Bosco would certainly have preferred to work the strategy at a primary level, that is with good lads who were not at risk, thus preventing risk situations from developing, and building on good foundations. He prized “innocence” highly. However, while in optimal educational situations he was blessed with Savios and Besuccos, the work of the oratory as a whole was with youngsters existing in situations of risk. In Don Bosco’s practice, we see the strategy at work with the young people in Turin’s prisons. We see it also at work with boarders at the Home of the Oratory.

3. Assistance

Don Bosco had a comprehensive concept of assistance, as he had of education itself. By assistance he meant the total charitable activity on behalf of young people. The word and the concept is found scattered through the *Memoirs*, and is the forerunner of the term “*preventive system*” (that is, the educational method).

Assistance: a Priority in Education

“Assistance” and Preventive System share meaning at two fundamental levels: at the level of content and aims, in that they designate what is done to

meet the youngster's spiritual and temporal needs; at the level of educational strategy, in that they designate the educator's "*vigilance*" and "*presence*" to the youngster.

Don Bosco's first efforts at helping youngsters at risk took the form of "assistance" in the fullest possible sense:

I was beginning to learn from experience that if young lads just released from their place of punishment could find someone to *befriend* them, to look after them, to *assist* them on feast days, to *help* them get work with good employers, to *visit* them occasionally during the week—these young men soon forgot the past and began to mend their ways. They became good Christians and honest citizens. This was the beginning of our Oratory. [...]

On feast days, I gave all my time to *assisting* my youngsters. During the week I would go to *visit* them at their work in factories or workshops. Not only were the youngsters happy to see a friend *taking care* of them; their employers [too] were pleased, gladly keeping under their supervision youngsters who *were assisted* during the week, and even more so on feast days, when they are in greater danger.⁴¹

Ideally, and to a good extent actually, for Don Bosco "assisting" youngsters at risk meant meeting all their real needs: food, clothing, shelter and lodging, a job, a chance for an education ("to study"), useful employment of "free time." This is total human promotion or development, and it defines the educational program that, in Don Bosco's view, would produce mature human beings, "good Christians and honest citizens."

Assistance as Educational Strategy

Generally Salesian and non-Salesian literature speak of "assistance" only as strategy. What's worse, they underscore only the strictly "preventive" aspect of the strategy—"supervision," namely, the "preventive" physical and moral presence of the educator. It is clear, however, that "assistance" in the impoverished sense of "supervision" does not do justice to Don Bosco's concept of assistance, even as "strategy." Don Bosco meant "presence" and "availability" to the young person *for everything that was needed*, in any particular educational situation. Obviously this includes "supervision" when needed, especially in a boarding school setting.

⁴¹ *MO-En*, 190, 197-198; re-phrased in accordance with the original. Italics mine.

The purpose of assistance, it is said, is to place the pupil in the moral impossibility of doing anything wrong, to help the pupil avoid experiences that will be ultimately damaging. This is true, but if taken in isolation and apart from the whole educational undertaking as Don Bosco understood it, this reductive understanding and practice of prevention cannot escape the criticism that in fact educators have leveled against it. The criticism is that it reveals a pessimistic appraisal of human nature (in young people in particular), a phobic preoccupation with sin, a protectionist concern that can prevent free, responsible decision on the part of the youngster and impede normal development toward maturity.

Now, in reply to such criticism, it is pointed out that modern psychology is again stressing the importance of early prevention, protecting the young person from damaging experiences, which, particularly in the critical stages of psychological development, can become insurmountable obstacles. Beyond this, however, one should stress that Don Bosco's preventive strategy is not only a presence tending to prevent evil, but one that is rich in incentives and suggestions to help the youngster toward free decision.

Preventive activity to be educational must include: (1) foreseeing the youngster's psychological moment; (2) allowing calculated and responsible risks; and (3) trust in youthful idealism and sense of responsibility. Practiced in this manner, with these conditions fulfilled, and in an educational environment permeated by Reason, Religion and Loving-Kindness, and by mutual trust, "preventive assistance" can be educational. While positive values need to be defended, freedom remains a general condition for education.

Don Bosco often emphasized the need for the educator's *sustained presence* to the youngster. In the *Letter from Rome*, he stresses the importance of this presence especially during the youngsters' recreation. Since education is based on an affective relationship, contact with the youngster in the classroom and other formal situations alone is insufficient. The educator must establish an abiding presence with the youngsters, and be with them in all situations of the school day and beyond, especially *at play*. Recesses, recreations, games, and play in general, are activities that allow the educator to associate with the young people, not simply as teachers, but as brothers and friends. In the *Letter*, Don Bosco writes: "By being loved in the things they like, through their teachers taking part in their youthful interests, young people are led to love those things too that they find less attractive, such as discipline, study and self-denial." And when he asks how the barriers that keep educator and

youngster apart may be broken down, the Interpreter in the dream (of the Letter from Rome) replies:

“By a friendly informal relationship with the young people, especially in recreation. You cannot have affection without familiarity, and where affection is not evident there can be no confidence. If you want to be loved, you must make it clear that you love. Jesus made himself little with the little ones and bore our weaknesses. He is our Master in the matter of the friendly approach. The teacher who is seen only in the classroom is a teacher and nothing more; but if he joins in the pupils’ recreation he becomes their brother. [...] This confidence creates an electric charge between youngsters and their educators. Hearts are opened, needs and weaknesses are made known. This love enables educators to put up with the weariness, the annoyance, the ingratitude and the troubles that youngsters cause. [...] If this love languishes, things no longer go well. [...] This is sure to happen if there is no friendly relationship.⁴²

It is largely when meeting the youngsters on their own turf, so to speak, that the educator may become a brother/sister and friend to the young person, and open the way to trust. Don Bosco attached great importance to meeting the youngsters at play for this very reason, and obviously here “assistance” is in the nature of a positive, constructive presence.

V. Some of Don Bosco’s Educational Tools

By the mid-1860s the Oratory had become a very large and successful educational establishment, with some 600 boarders, students and working boys, with a few hundred day students, not to mention the number of “oratorians” on Sundays and holy days.

1. Work, Study and “Piety”

As he built up and expanded the Home, Don Bosco had taken care to insist on basic points that everyone accepted as axioms to live by: “work, study and piety (prayer).” This three-pronged, or two-pronged, program was accepted as basic and was in effect at all levels and for everyone.

⁴² Letter from Rome (1884).

The seriousness with which work and study were pursued at the Oratory by the great majority strikes one as truly extraordinary. Don Bosco uncompromisingly demanded seriousness of purpose of everyone. Responsible fulfillment of duty was the boy's personal contribution to the project of his education. He made it clear that he regarded the "perfect fulfillment of one's duty" (work-study) as the mainstay of the ascetic life, and one of the foundations of the spiritual life itself.

The other foundation was, of course, a life of "piety"—a term that meant religious faith and devotion, expressed in prayer, the sacramental life and religious practices. Devotion to Mary was inculcated, and the practice of typically educational virtues emphasized: especially, obedience, discipline, generosity and purity.

As indicated above, these aspects of Don Bosco's educational program immediately reveal its relatedness to Christian life and spirituality.

2. Youth Associations

Youth associations were important educational tools. In the fifties, when Don Bosco had to carry the weight of a large and growing educational undertaking almost alone, he had to rely to a large extent on the youth associations and their mediation to implement his educational program. Their educational mediation lay in the fact that Don Bosco was able to cultivate a select number of boys who had more quickly responded to his spiritual direction and to his suggestions for peer ministry. The Company of St. Aloysius was an example of this mediation among the oratory boys. In the Home the outstanding example of such mediation, one that was typical but not unique, could be seen in Dominic Savio and the Company of the Immaculate Conception (discussed below).

3. Play and the Playground: An Innovative Educational Tool

There were no organized sports, such as football (soccer), in schools or clubs in Italy until late in the nineteenth century, although youngsters and grown-ups played games in the streets with a ball (kicked, carried or thrown) with agreed-upon rules. In Tudor England such games were curbed as caus-

ing “fighting, brawling [...], murder, and great effusion of blood.” In 1624 James I banned such games by an act of Parliament because they interfered with the practice of archery, which was of practical use in warfare. By the 19th century, however, forms of football were played regularly in public schools. But it was not until the middle of the century that the establishment of common rules made it possible to hold matches between schools or clubs.

Here we are not speaking of organized sports but of play in general as an educational tool—to which organized sports can be a contributing factor. The difference between play and organized sports lies in the fact that whereas play is an activity that is open to everybody, organized sports are restricted to smaller groups of youngsters that have the ability. Obviously, sports can also be an educational tool, and Don Bosco would have wanted to use them for that purpose.

It is fair to say that Don Bosco’s concept of play as an educational tool was innovative and ahead of his time. He recognized not merely the *utility* of play, but its *necessity* for a young person’s total development. Education for Don Bosco meant helping the young person toward maturity. Play is an activity that is necessary for the young person’s growth to maturity. It helps the youngster to sublimate certain drives, to achieve self-awareness through competing with others, to recognize and control one’s powers, etc.

The *playground, as it functioned at the Oratory*, was one of Don Bosco’s original creations. Obviously, every school, especially every boarding school, had a playground. But generally speaking, playgrounds were small, “gardens for recreation,” as they were called.⁴³ The youngsters stood around in small clusters talking or playing at some non-physical game under one of the teachers’ supervision.

Don Bosco wanted a playground large enough to allow a great number of young people to take part in games. Moreover, his concept of recreation was unusual for those times. *First*, he required very active recreation, the kind that entailed physical movement and running, even if it meant various games crisscrossing at the same time. The boys were left free to choose the games they wanted to play, provided these were not physically or morally dangerous. *Secondly*, all educators were to participate actively, yet without failing in

⁴³ Don Bosco occasionally uses the current phrase “garden for recreation” (*giardino di ricreazione*) to describe the playground of the oratory, but he does so only for pragmatic or political reasons.

their supervisory role. Don Bosco did not think that this compromised the educator's dignity.⁴⁴ Rather, he thought that this was the best way to win the youngster's confidence, and he believed that one of the areas in which the educator's presence ("assistance") is most effective was on the playground. *Thirdly*, Don Bosco himself would usually appear at recreation and take active part in it. He did this until the early 1860's. When he could no longer do this, he would be present nonetheless to "animate" the recreation. As the opportunity arose, he would chat with the boys and give them "little words," that is, words of encouragement, warning, invitation, etc.

From the *educational standpoint*, this kind of recreation had several advantages. *First*, it benefited the youngsters physically. *Secondly*, it benefited them morally, for the very engagement in games dissolved sadness, worry, bad thoughts, and those troubles usually associated with idleness and standing around. *Thirdly*, play contributed to building up an environment of fun, happiness and joy, which Don Bosco considered a prerequisite for education. *Fourth*, informal, uninhibited self-expression in play offered the educator an opportunity to learn more about the youngster and his character. *Fifth*, the presence of the educators as "big brothers," almost as equals, at recreation boosted the youngsters' morale, fostered the family spirit and mutual confidence.

4. Other Educational Tools

Besides the daily playground activities, Don Bosco used further specific means to foster cheerfulness and to strengthen the educational environment.

Autumn outings

These were excursions that took place around the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary (first Sunday of October). In 1848 Don Bosco began taking a group

⁴⁴ One of the criticisms leveled against Don Bosco's priests and seminarians, especially during the process of approval of the Society and its constitutions, was that they played with the boys, heedless of ecclesiastical decorum.

of boys to his birthplace at Becchi for the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, celebrated in the chapel that he had set up in his brother Joseph's house with external access. The celebration of the feast was followed by excursions into the country round about. These yearly outings continued with ever-expanded itineraries, with the band and a troop of actors, and with Don Bosco himself in the lead, until 1864. These extended yearly outings were held out as a reward for good behavior and good performance, and the young people vied throughout the year for the honor of being among the chosen.⁴⁵

Music

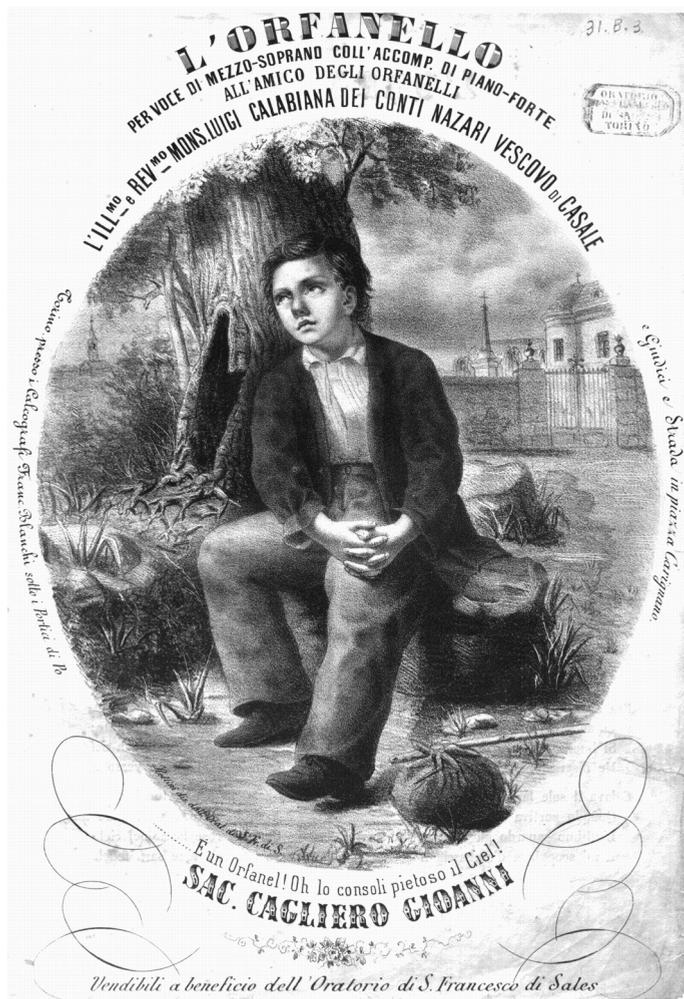
Music was very much in evidence at the Oratory. Don Bosco possessed musical gifts, and though he had no formal musical education to speak of, he could read music, sing tenor, play instruments, and even compose simple songs. Singing and choral music were introduced early into the educational program. In Piedmontese churches at the time the only singing heard, apart from simple devotional songs by the congregation or by a sodality was the man's solo from the choir loft. Musical instruction was usually given individually, and choruses were then formed from such individually trained singers under a chorus master. As far back as 1845 Don Bosco himself began to teach music to youngsters in large groups, to the amazement of music teachers and educators.⁴⁶ All the boys at the Oratory received some musical instruction, including plain chant, and singing by the mass of youngsters at the Oratory was a common feature of church services. A large Choral Society (the Choir Boys) was formed and became an institution at the Oratory. At the Consecration of the churches of Mary Help of Christians (1868) of the Sacred Heart in Rome (1887) the Oratory Choirs performed programs that received critical acclaim. Instrumental music was also important. Beginning with a drum, a trumpet and a guitar on the Filippi Field in 1846,⁴⁷ by 1855 Don Bosco had a proper band under a good musician, John Cagliero.⁴⁸ The band became a standard feature in many recreational and religious activities.

⁴⁵ For an extended description and literature on the "autumn outings" see Father Michael Mendl's essay in *MO-En*, 332-338.

⁴⁶ *MO-En*, 315.

⁴⁷ *MO-En*, 241.

⁴⁸ *EBM V*, 222.



14 – Frontispiece of *L'Orfanello* (the Orphaned Child), a musical romance by John Cagliero (1863)

Above all, as an educator Don Bosco valued music as a civilizing humanistic influence on the youngster's heart and imagination. In a discussion with an educator in Marseilles, Don Bosco repeatedly stressed the value of music: "An oratory without music is like a body without soul."⁴⁹

⁴⁹ EBM V, 222.

Dramatic Performances (“Little Theater”)

Don Bosco also made large use of stage performances for educational purposes and entertainment. He called this the “little theater” (*teatrino*), not only out of modesty, but also to distinguish this form of educational entertainment from the public theater. Very early on, Don Bosco made use of dialogue-presentations. He himself wrote a number of little plays and skits. The House of Good Fortune (*La Casa della Fortuna*) and the skits on the metric system are examples.⁵⁰ The educational purpose of the little theater, as Don Bosco conceived it, is clearly expressed in the regulations that he wrote for it.⁵¹ The performances were held in the spacious dining room in the basement of the church of St. Francis de Sales until 1866, and thereafter in the study hall.⁵² Don Bosco could not afford a separate theater or auditorium. (The first theater-auditorium at the Oratory was built by Father Rua in 1895).

Conclusion

Father Caviglia, an eyewitness of the life as lived at the Oratory, writes of Don Bosco’s way of being with young people.

I speak of the kind of goodness that is homey, humble, cordial, lovable, and at once fatherly, motherly, brotherly. I speak not of the kind of goodness that condescends, but of the kind that draws near to a person and that tries to live with and for that person—the kind that makes room for the other. [...] In spite of his heavy workload, he always kept a part of his person, of his mind, of his heart available to the last comer, no matter what the hour, what the work. In one word, he loved, and we felt the power of his love. That love for young people, expressed as loving-kindness (*amorevolezza*), is truly one of the three cornerstones of his educational method.⁵³

⁵⁰ *La Casa della fortuna. Rappresentazione drammatica*, pel Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni [...] (Turin: tip. dell’Oratorio di S. F. di S., 1865), see *EBM* VIII, 3; For the skits written on the metric system by Don Bosco in 1849 see *IBM* III, 623-652 (omitted in *EBM*).

⁵¹ *EBM* VI, 646-648.

⁵² *EBM* VI, 53.

⁵³ Alberto Caviglia, “Don Bosco.” *Profilo storico* (Torino: SEI, 1934), 91.

APPENDICES

1. Religious Youth Associations for Boarders at the Home

P. Stella, *DB:RO&S*, 349-360 and *DBEcSoc*, 259-269; P. Braidò, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco* (Zürich: PAS Verlag, 1964).

The youth associations sponsored by Don Bosco fall into two main periods, each with its specific context:

The earlier associations were oratory-based and were established in response to the needs of the oratory population. These were the Company of St. Aloysius and the Mutual Benefit Society (discussed in an earlier chapter).

Later associations were based at the Home (*Casa Annessa*) and were established in response to the spiritual and educational needs of the student's and working boys' communities.

Here we give a brief description of the associations in this second group.

'Adjunct' Conference of St. Vincent de Paul

The Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul were founded in Paris in 1833 by Antoine Frédéric Ozanam and seven companions, and were first established in Turin on May 13, 1850, with Count Carlo Cays of Gilette and Caselette (later a Salesian and a priest) as director. In the summer of 1854 the cholera epidemic reached its high point in Turin, and was particularly devastating in the Borgo Dora district. On this occasion volunteers from the Company of St. Aloysius and a group of boarders from the Casa Annessa (John Cagliero among them!) joined forces with the local Conference of St. Vincent de Paul in caring for the victims of the epidemic. It was a magnificent demonstration of Christian charity and a revelation of what young people could accomplish.

It was out of this experience of charitable service that Don Bosco (probably at the request of the youngsters themselves), after studying the general regulations of the Conferences, established a Conference of St. Vincent de Paul among the older boys (both from the St. Aloysius Company and from the *Casa Annessa*). This was without precedent for it was a Conference *for young people*. In spite of this, in 1856 it received official recognition from the Higher Council as "Adjunct" Conference of St. Vincent de Paul.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ *MO-En*, 387; *EBM V*, 305-311 and 334-335 For an extensive study of this little known

As noted in an earlier chapter, in 1857 the “Adjunct” Conference of St. Vincent de Paul absorbed the Mutual Benefit Society, as it also later incorporated within its structure the Conference of St. Francis de Sales that had been started in 1854.

The Conference of St. Francis de Sales

Don Bosco established this little-known society in the autumn of 1854 or in the first part of 1855. It had counterparts in the Conferences of St. Aloysius and of the Guardian Angel in the other two oratories. Their purpose was to band together fairly mature and dedicated young men for the work of the oratories and to provide support for their commitments. The more permanent members were faithful oratory boys (20 years or older); then came a group of ‘clerics’ (18-20 years of age); finally older students from the Oratory school (14 to 17 years of age).

In late fifties the Conference of St. Francis de Sales merged with the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul. This association retained for the longest time the most composite membership, which included young men both from the boys oratory and from the Casa Annessa, students, working boys and seminarians.⁵⁵

Transition in the inner Organization of the Youth Associations

As one reads the regulations of the Company of St. Aloysius and of the Mutual Benefit Society, one is struck by the variety of administrative and disciplinary offices that were created. The same is true of the developments taking place in the students’ and working boys’ communities of the *Casa Annessa*, and of the regulations that reflected these developments. However, with the taking over of the Oratory of the Guardian Angel in 1849 and the gradual diminution of the original Oratory personnel (see our discussion of the oratories crisis in an earlier chapter) one wonders if the leadership, assistance and administrative posts that were created were ever filled.

In any case, between 1850 and 1859, Don Bosco tended to simplify the structure

but important association, cf. Francesco Motto, “Le Conferenze ‘annesse’ di S. Vincenzo de’ Paoli negli oratori di Don Bosco. Ruolo storico di un’esperienza educativa,” in *L’Impegno dell’educare. Studi in onore di Pietro Braido* [...], ed. by J.M. Prellezo (Roma: LAS, 1991), 468-492. It should be noted that Don Bosco wanted the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul established in all his oratories (where they absorbed or united forces with local charitable action groups). The official Organization of the Conferences supported Don Bosco’s work generously everywhere.

⁵⁵ For the membership, funds, and activity (as reported to the Higher Council of the Conferences, and as recorded in President Count Cays’ papers), cf. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 266-267.

of the community and to rely more on internal groups and associations, and therefore on the young people themselves. They exerted spiritual influence in the larger community by engaging in an “exercise of charity toward neighbor.”

This general aim appears to lie at the basis of the youth associations that Don Bosco fostered within the *Casa Annessa*, especially in the student community. Whether operating secretly or overtly, these associations in varying degree were experiments in “practical exercises of charity toward neighbor,” of the kind the eventually produced the Salesian Society,

For example, the evening of June 5, 1852, Don Bosco with a Father Guanti got together a group of 12 young men, and they all pledged to recite every Sunday on their own the Seven Joys of Mary.⁵⁶ On January 26, 1854, in the context of the feast of St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco got his most faithful four together: Artiglia, Cagliari, Rua and Rocchietti (16, 17 and 18 years of age), and proposed to them “a trial in the practical exercise of charity toward neighbor.” Rua later wrote that “from that evening on those who accepted or would accept the proposal were known as “Salesians.”⁵⁷

Dominic Savio’s letter to his father (September 5, 1855) gives us a glimpse of the associative activity for the purpose of charity at Valdocco.⁵⁸ In addition to the group of four “Salesians,” other associations were established between 1856 and 1859: (1) the Company or Society of the Immaculate Conception (1856); (2) the Company of the Blessed Sacrament (1857); (3) the Altar Boys’ Society (1858); (4) the Company of St. Joseph (1859).

*The Company of the Immaculate Conception*⁵⁹

⁵⁶ On a small piece of paper preserved in *ASC*, Michael Rua recorded the 12 names: Beglia (Bellia), Buzzetti, Francis Bosco, Cagliari. Francesca, Germani, Gianinati, Marchisio (12-year old artisan), Angelo Savio, Stephen Savio, Rua, Turchi (aged between 12 and 20), besides Don Bosco and Fr. Guanti. Rua had just become a boarder at the Oratory and was 15 years old [Cf. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 262].

⁵⁷ In *ASC*, as in Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 263. It is thought, however, that the name Salesian in this late note by Rua was “read back.”

⁵⁸ Autograph Letter transcribed in Caviglia, *Opere e Scritti* IV, 86-87 and Ceria (1954), 67; the letter (a difficult text) is discussed also in A. Lenti, “Don Bosco’s [...] Life of young Dominic Savio,” *Journal of Salesian Studies* 12:1 (2001) 1-52, specifically 23-24, especially Note 60.

⁵⁹ For extensive treatment of the topic, especially for what concerns the role of Dominic Savio in the founding and organization of the Company, see Caviglia, *Opere e Scritti* IV, (Essay) 441-464.

Alberto Caviglia, “La Vita di Domenico Savio” e “Savio Domenico e Don Bosco”: Studio di Don Alberto Caviglia (Torino: SEI, 1943), in: *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di “Don Bosco” nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti, a cura della Pia Società Salesiana*, Vol. IV. Don Bosco’s text is that of the fifth edition, 1878. The text is then followed by a 609-page study [Caviglia, *Opere e Scritti IV*]; Alberto Caviglia, *San Domenico Savio nel ricordo dei contemporanei*. Posthumous (Torino: Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, 1957) [Caviglia, *Ricordo*] – Documentation and testimonies; [Eugenio Ceria] *San Giovanni Bosco, Il Beato Domenico Savio Allievo dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. Edited by E. Ceria (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1950, 2nd ed., 1954) Don Bosco’s text is that of the fifth edition, 1878 [Ceria 1950 and Ceria 1954].

Don Bosco credits Savio with both the idea of the Company and the initiative in its founding. He writes:

Motivated by the zealous charity that was habitual with him, [Dominic] selected a few of his most trusted companions, and proposed that they join together in an association to be named after the *Immaculate Conception*. Its purpose was to ensure [for the members] the great Mother of God’s protection in life and especially at the hour of death. To fulfill this purpose Savio suggested two means: to practice and promote exercises of devotion in honor of Mary Immaculate and frequent Communion. Then in agreement with his most trusted friends he compiled a set of regulations. Finally, after a lot of work and pains, on June 8, 1856, nine months before his death, he read them with his friends before the altar of Mary Most Holy.⁶⁰

In the Life this statement is followed by the minutes or acts of the founding, which (except for the opening list of names) have their identical counterpart in the earliest extant minutes or acts preserved in the Salesian Archive and quoted by Stella. Both are transcribed here by way of comparison.

⁶⁰ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 76, in *Opere Edite XI*, 226.

<p>Bosco, <i>Vita Savio</i> (1859), 76-77, OE XI 226-227</p>	<p>MS. in ASC A492⁶¹</p>
<p><i>We, Domenico Savio, etc. (the names of other companions follow) –</i></p> <p><i>in order to ensure for ourselves the patronage of the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin in life and in death, and in order to dedicate ourselves entirely to her holy service; having received the holy Sacraments and resolved to be filially and constantly devoted to our Mother; before her altar and before our Spiritual Director, on this 8th day of June, do solemnly promise that to the full extent of our strength and ability: we shall imitate Louis Comollo; we shall perfectly observe the regulations of the house; we shall edify our companions by admonishing them charitably, by encouraging them by word and example to make good use of their time.</i></p>	<p><i>We, Giuseppe Rocchietti, Luigi Marcellino, Giovanni Bonetti, Francesco Vaschetti, Celestino Durando, Giuseppe Momo, Domenico Savio, Giuseppe Bongioanni, Michele Rua, and Giovanni Cagliero –</i></p> <p><i>in order to ensure for ourselves the patronage of the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin in life and in death, and in order to dedicate ourselves entirely to her holy service; having received the holy Sacraments and resolved to be filially and constantly devoted to our Mother; before her altar and before our Spiritual Director, on this 8th day of June, do solemnly promise that to the full extent of our strength and ability: we shall imitate Louis Comollo; we shall perfectly observe the regulations of the house; we shall edify our companions by admonishing them charitably, by encouraging them by word and example to make good use of their time.</i></p>

In the *Life* Don Bosco follows this founding text up with the 21-article regulations and with his own seven amendments. Clearly then Don Bosco makes the 14-year old Savio the prime architect of both the Company and its regulations.

A contrary claim is made by Giuseppe Bongiovanni (1836-1868) in a letter dated in 1857 and addressed to Don Bosco in response to the latter’s appeal for information regarding Savio in view of the biography. As quoted by Caviglia, the 20-year old Bongiovanni, a close friend of Savio, and later a Salesian and a priest, writes:

[Dominic Savio] was one of the founders, the fourth to accept the proposal, which he did with great joy. One need not be surprised, for Savio, who had the previous May consecrated himself, body and soul, to Mary, could offer her nothing better than to enter into our Society. He would thereby be offered further opportunities to display his devotion to Mary that had already completely won his heart. He observed all the obligations laid down in our regulations with the most exemplary fidelity.⁶²

In his monumental essay, Caviglia takes pains to refute Bongiovanni’s claim by adducing testimonies from people themselves involved, all supportive of Don Bo-

⁶¹ Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 265 and cf. *DB:RO&S*, 353.

⁶² Caviglia, *Opere e Scritti* IV, Essay, 444, in *Summarium* (summary collection of testimonies given at the process of beatification), 480 (Written Testimony No. 14).

sco's position. It should, however, be borne in mind that perhaps no one was more involved than Bongiovanni.⁶³

Lemoyne, probably wishing to combine Don Bosco's statement with various reports gives a more complex scenario. He writes:

One weekday morning something most unusual occurred at Mass: not one boy went to Holy Communion. [...] One of those present was Celestino Durando. [...] On his way [to school] with Giuseppe Bongiovanni [...] Durando remarked to him [...]: "Did you notice? Don Bosco must have felt quite sad." That same afternoon, after they returned from school, they called together a few of their schoolmates: Bonetti, Marcelino, Rocchietti, Vaschetti and Michele Rua. There and then they decided to form a group whose members would go to Communion on different days so that no day would go by without some one receiving. [...] Needless to say, Dominic Savio eagerly joined this group. However, acting upon a suggestion by Don Bosco, he planned to make it permanent. With his usual zeal, therefore, he selected a number of his most trusted friends and asked them to join him in founding an association to be called the Immaculate Conception Sodality. [...] After consultation with these friends, and with the assistance of Joseph Bongiovanni, Dominic drafted a set of regulations. Then, after much thought, on June 8, 1856, nine months before his death, he read them aloud as the sodality members knelt before Our Lady's altar.⁶⁴

The same Caviglia, in summary fashion, writes elsewhere:

Guided solely by the testimonies in our possession, we would be hard put to establish with certainty, and even less with unanimity, the history of the founding of the Company of the Immaculate Conception. This is true for what concerns its primary author, who is Savio himself, its purposes and the date of its founding. The reason for such uncertainty is to be sought in the fact that the activity leading to the creation of the Company was mostly confidential and secret, and restricted to a few chosen friends. Don Bosco alone would have been in a position to tell the true story. Hence we must be guided by what he writes in the *Life*. As for Savio, the founding and the activities of the Company represent the culminating point of his saintly life and his highest and noblest achievement. [...]⁶⁵

⁶³ Don Bosco eulogized Father Bongiovanni in the fifth edition of the *Life* (1878). This dynamic Salesian (who died suddenly in 1868) went on to found the Company of the Blessed Sacrament and the Altar Boys Society.

⁶⁴ *EBM* V, 312-313.

⁶⁵ Caviglia, *Ricordo*, 117, Footnote 2.

At first the existence of the Company was not common knowledge. Its members were a select group engaged in a sensitive apostolate. They may also be regarded as the forerunners of the Salesian Society in the time when it had as yet no official existence.

In the session of July 27, 1856 Giovanni Battista Francesia was voted in as a member. The members present were: Seminarian Rua, presiding, Seminarian Cagliero, and the students Bonetti, Vaschetti, Marcellino, Durando e Bongiovanni. Savio was absent because Don Bosco had sent him home for a period of rest, hopefully to recover his health.

Company of the Blessed Sacrament

It was founded toward the end 1857 among students by Seminarian Joseph Bongiovanni at Don Bosco's suggestion and by his inspiration. Its purpose was to promote regular reception of the sacraments and devotion to the Holy Eucharist.⁶⁶

This association appears to have taken over its main purpose from the Company of the Immaculate Conception. It seems that for a time this latter group, always small and select, was chiefly employed as a covert instrument for educational purposes.

The Altar Boys' Society

Akin to the Company of the Blessed Sacrament and almost a section of it, the Altar Boys Society was founded on February 2, 1858, among students, by Seminarian Joseph Bongiovanni. Its purpose was to ensure that religious services were properly performed and to foster vocations to the priesthood among the better students. "It was dedicated to the service of the altar on the feast of the Purification of Mary."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ For origin, regulations, founder and first director (Cleric Joseph Bongiovanni), see *EBM* V, 499f. Other passages: two conferences by Don Bosco: *EBM* VI, 102; Samples of minutes: *IBM* VIII, 1056 (omitted in *EBM*).

⁶⁷ For origin, regulation, importance and difficulties, cf. *EBM* V, 517-520. For members ridiculed, cf. *EBM* VIII, 168ff.

Company of St. Joseph

Seminarian Giovanni Bonetti founded the Company of St. Joseph by Don Bosco's decision and under his guidance. Its purpose was to promote the practice of a virtuous Christian life among the working boys.⁶⁸

As the artisan population grew, this association was divided into two sections, for younger and for older boys.

*Closing Comments on the Youth Associations**General Characteristics*

In this flurry of associative activity, never conflicting but in part overlapping, we may identify the following general characteristics:

(1) It was inspired and fostered jointly by Don Bosco and by fired-up young people and seminarians under his guidance.

(2) The common inspiration was "the practical exercise of charity toward neighbor," especially in early and mid-fifties; later the educational and spiritual concerns within the *Casa Annessa* were more in evidence.

(3) The same names turn up in the leadership: a group of familiar names that was solidifying around Don Bosco. Joseph Bongiovanni was very active in organization and leadership. Rua provided liaison with Don Bosco, etc.

(4) In the fifties, both leaders and members belonged to the same age group; later the leadership was usually older and seasoned, and the membership younger.

(5) Before the founding of the Company of St. Joseph what distinguished the various associations was their specific purpose rather than the category eligible for membership. So, for instance, anybody could apply to any association if he was interested in what it was doing, and a young man could belong to two or several associations. Later, for reasons due to institutional evolution, categories were established for membership, and moreover students became the predominant element in all associations, except the Company of St. Joseph.

(6) As mentioned above, the association that remained open and mixed for the longest time was the "Adjunct" Conference of St. Vincent de Paul, incorporating the old oratorian Mutual Aid Society and the Conference of St. Francis de Sales.

(7) The associations served not only as instruments for charitable or educational

⁶⁸ For origin, membership, induction, fruits, see *EBM VI*, 103-106; cf. *EBM V*, 395. For regulations, cf. *EBM VI*, 654-657.

activity, but also as means of developing the Christian life in the members. Special exercises of piety, instruction, and spiritual guidance were provided to the members.

Special Features

The various associations also responded to specific needs and exhibited specific traits:

(1) The Company of St. Aloysius was established within the oratory population to provide a means of Christian life and apostolate for the better boys, but to as large a number as possible. The Christian life program that it offered was based on the imitation of St. Aloysius, but in practice it was the program laid out in the *Companion of Youth* (also 1847). It also acted as a Christian service group, as was shown at the time of the cholera.

(2) At first it was the boys oratory that provided the initiative as well as the energy, though the St. Aloysius was opened also to the boarders of the Home. After mid-fifties, on the contrary, it was the Home and its boarders that provided initiative and energy for the oratory. With its new Companies, the *Casa Annessa* offered the oratory, not so much membership, as personnel for catechism and other activities, at least on weekends.

(3) The new associations arose out of educational and spiritual concerns within the *Casa annessa*. Thus, the Company of the Immaculate Conception may have come into existence to promote Holy Communion. But since its members were the better boys, the Company quickly came to serve as an extension of Don Bosco's educational activity, especially in times when personnel was scarce. To do this effectively, the group operated as a quasi-secret society. In this role it paralleled the experience in Jesuit schools, where select groups were used for Christian formation purposes. Secrecy, however, prevented the Company from implementing the original devotional program, such as receiving Communion by turns and setting thereby an example to the whole community.

It was to fulfill this purpose that, with Don Bosco's encouragement and again through the enterprising spirit of Seminarian Bongiovanni, the Company of the Blessed Sacrament was established. The specific aim of this group was to set an example in the reception of the Sacraments, to foster Eucharistic devotion generally, and to provide decorous altar service through the Altar Boys' Society.

Because of this explicit "devotional" program, the Company of the Blessed Sacrament (in a special manner) came under bitter attacks from some "anticlerical" cliques at the Oratory of Valdocco. The prevailing anticlericalism of the times (the sixties, after the unification of Italy) found expression among groups at the Oratory

of Valdocco as a reaction against devotional practice. The Company members were ridiculed and labeled “*Bongiovannisti*.” Don Bosco was adamant in supporting the Company and in defending its educational utility.⁶⁹

(4) The Companies, therefore, had a place in the total educational system through their capillary action, and by filling assistance roles when there was scarcity of personnel. But beyond such ‘utilitarian’ considerations, they fostered religious and spiritual values in the community (by overt witness) as well as in their members. This is the “explicit Christianity” that Don Bosco demanded as part and parcel of the spiritual life.

(5) Precisely because of their role in a particular system, historically the Companies operated within, and were restricted to, the Salesian institutions. They did not produce a system of affiliation outside the Salesian institutions. Even the Mutual Benefit Society, the aim of which was widely shared, never went beyond the boundaries of the Company of St. Aloysius. And this is true even of the ‘Adjunct’ Conference of St. Vincent de Paul *for Young People*, even though this group was itself affiliated to the wider system of the Conferences.

(6) The Salesian boarding school (*collegio*) guaranteed the survival and the continuance of the “four Companies.” They became part of the Salesian educational program as it developed and ramified.

2. Don Bosco’s Conversation with Justice Minister Rattazzi on the Education of the Young and the Generala Episode as Reported in Bonetti’s *Storia* (1854-55?)

Bonetti, *Don Bosco’s Early Apostolate*, 309-324.

Don Bosco’s Conversation with Justice Minister Rattazzi on the Education of the Young

Editions of the Text

The “report” of the conversation between Don Bosco and Grace-and-Justice Minister Urban Rattazzi on the educational method of the Oratory first appeared in Bonetti’s *Storia dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* published in the *Salesian Bulletin* [*Bollettino Salesiano*, October and November 1882, 171-172 and 179-180].

It is significant that neither the “Conversation” nor the Generala episode (dated

⁶⁹ Cf. *EBM* IX, 207 (DB’s conference to the Salesians, Dec 28, 1868).

by Bonetti in 1854 and 1855) is recorded in Don Bosco's own *Memoirs of the Oratory*, although the *Memoirs* reach the year 1854 and have the educational method as one of their concern.

After Bonetti's death (1891), the *Storia dell'Oratorio* was published in book form as *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio salesiano fondato dal sacerdote D. Giovanni Bosco* (Torino: Tip. Salesiana, 1892). *Cinque Lustri* was translated into English as Giovanni Bonetti, *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1908); reprinted for the canonization as *St. John Bosco's Early Apostolate* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1934) [309-317].

The Italian text of the conversation in the *Storia* of the *Salesian Bulletin* has been critically edited with commentary by Antonio da Silva Ferreira, "Conversazione con Urbano Rattazzi (1854)," in *Giovanni Bosco. Scritti pedagogici e spirituali* (Rome: LAS, 1987), 53-69.

The text in *Cinque lustri* and its English translation in *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate* generally agree with the source. It is important to bear in mind that the source (Bonetti in *Bollettino Salesiano*) is reflecting back from the standpoint of 1882 on an incident that took place in 1854. It should be interpreted *in context and with the point of view of the source*.

Context and Point of View of the Source (Bonetti's Storia)

Bonetti's *Storia* was published in the Salesian bulletin as a series of magazine articles designed for publicity, that is, to make Don Bosco and his work known. It incorporates parts of Don Bosco's own (unpublished) *Memoirs of the Oratory* for the period 1841-1854, and continues the story of the Oratory to 1865. The *Storia* pursues the same aims, with the same slants, as the *Memoirs*, especially with regard to its educational concerns (see our earlier discussion).

The Conversation in question, between Rattazzi and Don Bosco, as edited by Bonetti, also has the character of a magazine article written for publicity and shares the same educational concerns as the *Memoirs* and the rest of the *Storia*.

Bonetti writes in 1882 (28 years after the event). He would have gotten the gist of the episode and of the dialogue from Don Bosco himself (less probably from Father John Francesia who claims to have been present). Now, Don Bosco had written the little treatise on the Preventive System a few years before (1877) and was at the time engaged in reflection on various aspects of his work and on the expanding horizons of the Salesian apostolate. Furthermore, Don Bosco's manner of recalling and relating episodes of early Oratory times is often "imaginative," as documented, for example, in Father Barberis' chronicle.

That Rattazzi visited the Oratory (probably in 1854, for the first time) is attested. At this time Rattazzi was Grace-and-Justice Minister in the La Marmora cabinet.

He was a lawyer and had worked in the reform of the penal code. He was especially interested in juvenile offenders, and therefore in Don Bosco's humanitarian and "reformatory" work with juveniles. Under these circumstances it is more than likely that their conversation touched on the subject of education of young people.

It is however unlikely Don Bosco would lecture the Minister on the *Preventive System*, quoting almost verbatim what he would later write in the little treatise in 1877. This would have been premature, in fact anachronistic, in 1854!

The Generala Episode

In the *Storia*, as also in *Cinque lustri* and in *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate*, the conversation with Rattazzi is followed by the *Generala* episode.⁷⁰ Bonetti dates it in 1855 and gives it as an example showing that the "system" works. He quotes it not from Don Bosco but from a biographical sketch of Don Bosco and the Oratory by Count Charles Conestabile (1878) with some additional material. Bonetti also mentions public records.

The following should be born in mind:

No public record of the event has come to light, either from the Ministry or from the *Generala* or from the "Official Record" cited by Bonetti [p. 322].

Later inquiries by Salesians at Stupinigi produced nothing certain by way of confirmation.

There's no record that Don Bosco ever mentioned the episode. Bonetti quotes not Don Bosco but Count Conestabile as his source. (Don Bosco, however, apparently allowed Bonetti to publish the story in the Salesian Bulletin).

That Minister Rattazzi or the Director of the reformatory would stake their reputation and their jobs on allowing a madcap adventure such as that described by Bonetti (over 300 unattended juveniles) appears quite incredible.

⁷⁰ The *Generala* was a "modern" correctional facility for juveniles built in 1845 as part of King Charles Albert's reforms. It was located some 10 miles southwest of Turin, on the road to the little town of Stupinigi.

Chapter 5

DON BOSCO SPIRITUAL MASTER IN THE EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG

P. Stella, *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality* (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996), 199-219, 302-338, 344-349 [DB:RO&S]; W. Cornell, *Don Bosco, Spiritual Director of Young People* (Anthology of selected spiritual writings of Don Bosco); J. Aubry, *The Spiritual Writings of Saint John Bosco*, Tr. By J. Caselli (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications) 73-155; F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, 107-137; F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 694-696 (*Valentino*); A. Lenti, "The Life of Young Dominic Savio," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 12:1 (Spring 2001) 1-52.

This chapter is given two parts. Part I deals with the ideal of holiness that Don Bosco presented to his young people at the Home (especially to the student community), but that proved valid for all young people with whom the Salesian educator comes into contact. Part II deals with Don Bosco's emphasis on the Last Things as means of education and spirituality.

Summary

1. Holiness Proposed to the Young – Prayer and the Sacraments, and Means Thereto
 1. Stella's Study of the Ideal of Holiness Presented by Don Bosco to Young People (Brief Summary)
 2. Don Bosco's Proposal of Holiness for Young People As Articulated in His Biography of Dominic Savio
2. The "Last Things" in Don Bosco's Proposal of Holiness for the Young
 1. A Repertory of Don Bosco's "Extraordinary" Dreams and Predictions of Deaths (1850-1864) as Reported in the *Biographical Memoirs*
 2. The "Last Things" (esp. Death and Judgment) and the Exercise for a Happy Death (Monthly Day of Recollection)

For Part I, we shall be guided by Father Stella's extensive and learned presentation of the topic in *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality* (cited above); but for practical reason we shall use A. Lenti's study of *Don Bosco's Life of Young Dominic Savio* (also cited above). Dominic Savio is presented by Don

Bosco in the short biography as the ideal of holiness for young people—an ideal fully incarnate in a real young person.¹

I. Holiness Proposed to the Young – Prayer and the Sacraments, and Means Thereto

Although Dominic Savio embodies the ideal realized, Stella investigates the origin and history of this spirituality, and the way Don Bosco presented it to the young as a program for a life of holiness. He approaches the subject from a variety of points of view in a number of writings, among which the Savio biography is perhaps the most outstanding.

The *Life of Louis Comollo* (1844) represents an ideal of Christian life, “an example for anyone, lay or religious.” The *Companion of Youth* (1847) calls on the young to enter the path of holiness while they are young and points out the way. The biographical triad, the Lives of *Dominic Savio*, (1859), *Michael Magone* (1861) and *Francis Besucco* (1864), deals with how Don Bosco guided young people of different social and spiritual conditions on the way of holiness. In this respect the three biographies are mutually complementary. In the negative mode, the frightening and sordid story of *Valentino* (1866) describes the destruction of a boy’s youthful ideal.²

After some reflections of a methodological and historical nature, Stella analyzes “important virtues” in Don Bosco’s way of educating young people to holiness. Among them obedience and purity hold pride of place.³ Likewise, Stella gives considerable space to prayer and the sacraments (with emphasis on Confession and Communion), and generally to a life of devotion as young people’s supports in their striving for holiness.⁴

Stella’s closes with significant words:

Aloysius Gonzaga, Aloysius Comollo, Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco acquired an extraordinary taste for prayer at early ages. It continued to grow, enriched by fresh favors from the Lord and made manifest by signs of the degree of perfection they had attained.⁵

¹ Stella, *DB:RO&S*, 199-203.

² Cf. Stella, *DB:RO&S*, 206-209; Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 694-696.

³ Cf. Stella, *DB:RO&S*, 220-271.

⁴ Cf. Stella, *DB:RO&S*, 272-444.

⁵ Stella, *DB:RO&S*, 345.

In the respect, Dominic Savio stands out as the incarnation of the ideal.

1. Don Bosco's Proposal of Holiness for Young People As Articulated in His Biography of Dominic Savio

Fifteen years after the *Life of Louis Comollo*, the edifying biography of a saintly young seminarian (1844), Don Bosco published the *Life of Young Dominic Savio* (1859). Even as he was engaged in his great educational experiment, Don Bosco wished to place before his young people the example of one like them who had achieved holiness: the ideal realized.

The structure of the biography is easily described. As witnessed by his former teachers in Morialdo, Castelnuovo and Mondonio, Dominic's early life had been truly edifying (Chapters 1-9). But in the central chapter of the biography (Chapter 10), he decides "to become a saint," thus giving a fresh orientation to his whole life. The chapters that follow describe his heroic practice of virtue, his zeal for the salvation of others, fraternal charity, devotion, spirit of penance, spiritual friendships (Chapters 10-18). Don Bosco then speaks of special graces granted to Dominic, and relates a number of extraordinary happenings—cases of rapture, ecstasy and mystical prayer (Chapter 19). The description of Savio's last days and saintly death (Chapters 20-24) and additional testimonies to his holiness (Chapters 25-26) show him for what he truly was—a pattern for all to follow and a candidate for canonization.⁶

Dominic meets Don Bosco at Becchi and is enrolled as a Student at the Oratory (1854)

Young Dominic's "fateful" meeting with Don Bosco was no fortuitous event. At mid-1850s Don Bosco was well known in those parts, also on account of the yearly autumn outings on which he took his boys. He had recruited or accepted several boys from the area of Castelnuovo.

Don Bosco relates the circumstances of the encounter. Father Joseph Cugliero, Savio's teacher at Mondonio, had spoken to him about this pupil of

⁶ Cf. Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 130-132, in *Opere Edite* XI, 280-282. Here Don Bosco quotes a letter from Dominic's father writing that his son had appeared to him and assured him that he was in heaven.

his, “a veritable St. Aloysius.” They agreed that the boy should meet him at Becchi in October, when Don Bosco came with his youngsters to celebrate the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary and for the yearly outing. Dominic, accompanied by his father, kept the appointment. It was October 2, 1854, and the rest is history.⁷

The “good material” was now in the hands of a skilled tailor for a “beautiful garment for the Lord.” Dominic entered the Oratory on October 29, 1854 and would leave after a stay of only 28 months on March 1, 1857. He would die nine days later, at home in Mondonio.

When Dominic, a sickly, delicate, small child of 12, entered the Oratory in the autumn of 1854, the cholera epidemic that had raged unchecked and had made numerous victims, especially in Turin, was subsiding, but Dominic would have wanted to join the group that had tended to the stricken with the disease.

On the political scene, the bill of suppression of religious orders and of confiscation of Church properties was under debate in Parliament, and would shortly be passed and signed into law by King Victor Emmanuel II.

On the religious front, Don Bosco was already fully engaged through the press (the *Catholic Readings*) in a bitter polemic against the Waldenses (“Protestants”), who had obtained freedom of worship under the constitution and were actively proselytizing.

At the Oratory itself, as part of Don Bosco’s building program, the church of St. Francis de Sales had been dedicated in June 1852, and in 1853-1854 the first section of a new building (“Don Bosco’s house,” the new “Home attached to the Oratory”) was completed, with an enrollment of 65 boarders for the year 1854-1855. Building continued throughout Dominic’s stay. The old Pinardi house was demolished in 1856 to make room for a second section of Don Bosco’s house, the number of boarders rising to 153. By the time Dominic left the Oratory never to return (March 1, 1857), the boarders numbered 199.

In the meantime, however, Dominic’s immediate concern was to be the good material in the hands of the master tailor, and obviously to pursue his secondary studies for the priesthood in earnest.

⁷ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 34-37, in *Opere Edite* XI, 184-187.

Progress toward Holiness under Don Bosco's Guidance

On April 8, 1849 Dominic at the age of 7 had made his first communion in the parish church of Castelnuovo.⁸ On that occasion he had made two important resolutions: “My friends will be Jesus and Mary” and “Death but not sin.” Cardinal Giovanni Cagliero, at the time a young lad making his third Easter communion on the same occasion, testified to Dominic’s devotion.

The people of Castelnuovo d’Asti were deeply moved by Dominic’s devotion, as he made his first communion on Easter 1849. His perfect demeanor, his spirit of piety and devotion were extraordinary for a 7-year old child. I was present and was part of the service since I was making my third Easter Communion.⁹

About his first meeting with Dominic at Becchi in 1854 Don Bosco writes: “I realized that here was a boy whose soul was totally attuned to the spirit of God. I was quite surprised to see the wonderful workings of divine grace in a person so young.”¹⁰

The resolutions and these words of Don Bosco’s illuminate Dominic’s past life, but they are also a presage of his life at the Oratory. In paragraph after paragraph the biography is a record of Dominic’s striving for holiness.

The saying he (reportedly) read in Don Bosco’s room, “Give souls, take away the rest,” and his own consecration to Our Lady on December 8, 1854, on the occasion of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, marked the beginning of a ceaseless striving.¹¹ At this point Don Bosco writes:

After placing himself under Mary’s protection, Dominic’s life and conduct became so edifying that from that moment on I began to record some of the many virtuous deeds so as not to forget them. [...] I have now accumulated such a store of edifying and virtuous incidents, all deserving of being presented to the reader, that I have decided to proceed topically rather than chronologically. [...] I shall begin by speaking of his Latin studies [for the priesthood], for this was the main reason why he was accepted into this house.¹²

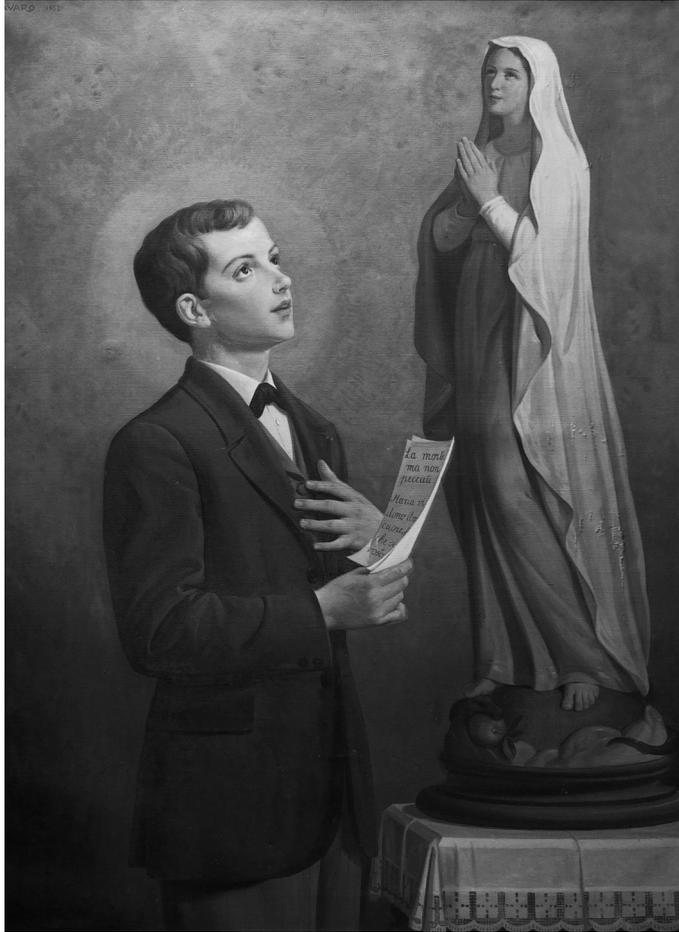
⁸ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 19-20, in *Opere Edite* XI, 169-170.

⁹ Cagliero, in *Summarium*, 132-133, from Caviglia, *Ricordo*, 101.

¹⁰ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 35, in *Opere Edite*, XI, 185.

¹¹ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 58-40, in *Opere Edite* XI, 188-190.

¹² Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 40-41, in *Opere Edite* XI, 190-191.



15 – Dominic Savio and Mary Immaculate in a painting by artist Peter Favaro (1952)

Beginning Secondary Studies

The course of secondary studies (*ginnasio*) was a five-year course conducted under the terms of the school reform inaugurated by Carlo Boncompagni with the liberal revolution of 1848. The law allowed the running of private schools, whether by individuals or by institutions, provided they complied with standards set for state schools, especially with regard to programs and teacher certification.

When Dominic entered in 1854, no in-house school program had as yet been established at the Oratory. The students attended the private schools of Professors Carlo Giuseppe Bonzanino (d. 1888) and Father Matteo Picco (1812-1880), who admitted Don Bosco's students out of charity. Professor Bonzanino's school offered the lower section of the 5-year secondary course of studies and Professor Picco's the higher section.

Dominic then joined the group that attended Professor Bonzanino's school in the city. The students gathered in the entrance (Dominic often scolding the tardy), and under the supervision of a trusted leader, "Don Bosco's boys" twice a day made their way to school and likewise returned.

Since Dominic had already begun the study of Latin under Father Cugliero in Mondonio, and because of his diligence and desire, he was able to complete two years in one: 1st and 2nd *ginnasio* (or Grammar).

Edifying Incidents

For this first year at the Oratory, Don Bosco records in detail Savio's heroic intervention to stop a fight between two schoolmates and to bring about their reconciliation. He also speaks of Dominic's exemplary conduct on the way to and from school, and of his repeated refusal of invitations by schoolmates to go off and play instead of going straight home.¹³ Dominic was active in helping his companions in other ways—by good example, by zealous concern, by advising new boys, by helping with the catechism classes, etc.

Giovanni Roda-Ambrè, an apprentice who also entered the Oratory in 1854, testified at the Apostolic Process of beatification:

I first knew the Servant of God in the year 1854, when I was accepted at the Oratory. The Venerable Don Bosco entrusted me to Dominic Savio so that he would guide me during the first days and would instruct me in what I was to do. He spent the first few days almost entirely by my side, and I remained ever after the object of his attentions and concern. This was the job the Venerable [Don Bosco] had given him. I'd like to add that when I entered the Oratory, I was completely ignorant of the prayers that a good Christian should know and had never gone to Confession or Communion. I owe it to the Servant of God's zeal that I began to receive the holy Sacraments once a week, and later almost daily.¹⁴

¹³ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 42-49, in *Opere Edite* XI, 192-199.

¹⁴ *Summarium*, 22 and 55, in Caviglia, *Ricordo*, 15.

On one of my first days at the Oratory, as Savio and myself were playing at *bocce*, I let slip a blasphemy, a habit I had formed when living without parental care, instruction and education. No sooner had Savio heard the blasphemy than he stopped playing and reacted instinctively with a groan of painful surprise. Then he came up to me and in the kindest manner urged me to go to Don Bosco without delay and make my confession. This I did immediately, and this admonition turned out to be so very helpful that from then on I have not blasphemed again.¹⁵

Savio's "Second Conversion": Turning Point in the Pursuit of Holiness and in the Spiritual Life

Some six months after arriving at the Oratory (perhaps in April 1855), Dominic experienced something in the nature of a second conversion. A sermon (apparently by Don Bosco) on "becoming a saint" turned the initial resolve into a new life's orientation. He expressed himself in these terms: "I have a great desire and an urgent need to become a saint. My life would be a total failure if I did not become a saint—especially since now I know that it is easy, and that one can be happy and be a saint too." On hearing from Don Bosco that the name "Dominic" meant "of the Lord," he replied: "See, even my name tells me that I'm the Lord's."¹⁶

Don Bosco immediately set out for him a way of spiritual life, holiness through the exercise of practical charity.

The first suggestion Dominic was given to become a saint was to try to win souls to God, for there is no work in the world so holy as helping to save those souls for whom Jesus Christ shed every drop of his precious blood.¹⁷

This proposal of a spirituality for young people functions as the hagiographical foundation of the whole story. From this point on, much of the biography is dedicated to describing Dominic's ascent to holiness through ardent and practical love of God and neighbor. He corrects a boy who had uttered a blasphemy. He expresses his desire to be a missionary and instruct other youngsters in the faith. And when a schoolmate scolded him: "What

¹⁵ *Summarium*, 55 and 220, in Ceria (1954), 82.

¹⁶ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 50-52, in *Opere Edite* XI, 200-202.

¹⁷ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 53 [Chapter XI], in *Opere Edite* XI, 203.

business is all this of yours?” Savio’s answer was: “It’s my business because Jesus shed his blood for us, and we are all brothers.”¹⁸

The theme is voiced again a little later: “The thought of winning souls to God was ever present to him.” He animates the recreation with friendly conversation; he dissuades schoolmates from masquerading and from going swimming; with some good friends he forms a group dedicated to helping wayward companions and encouraging them to receive the sacraments.¹⁹

Savio’s already fervent spirit of prayer and his devotion to Mary, especially during the month of May, become more intense. He speaks of Mary and invites companions to honor her. He organizes a little raffle to raise funds for a shrine in Mary’s honor in the dormitory.²⁰

In speaking of Dominic’s spirit of piety, Don Bosco enunciates another important principle of the spiritual life for young people: the Sacraments. “Experience proves beyond question that Confession and Communion are a youngster’s greatest source of spiritual power.” Don Bosco goes on to describe Savio’s frequent and regular use of the sacraments of Confession and Communion. Dominic began by choosing a steady confessor who would guide him in the spiritual life. He received Communion each day with a different intention, and lived in union with Christ with great joy.²¹

Out of love for Christ, Dominic had a burning desire to practice the kind of penance that punishes the body. Don Bosco forbade any such penance and recommended instead, “obedience” and “putting up with injuries, heat, cold, tiredness, wind, rain and all the discomforts of weak health”—another wise directive for the spiritual life of young people.²²

Summer of 1855

Don Bosco discouraged his boys from going home for holidays, in the belief that they would be exposed to spiritual and moral harm. He encouraged them to stay on at the Oratory, and made sure they had an enjoyable time. Dominic wanted to stay on, but Don Bosco overruled him and, once school

¹⁸ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 53-56 [Chapter XI], in *Opere Edite XI*, 203-206.

¹⁹ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 57-62 [Chapter XII], in *Opere Edite XI*, 207-212.

²⁰ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 62-67 [Chapter XIII], in *Opere Edite XI*, 212-217.

²¹ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 67-72 [Chapter XIV], in *Opere Edite XI*, 217-222.

²² Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 75, in *Opere Edite XI*, 225.

was over at mid-July, sent him home for a month's vacation, for he had not been well and needed a break. Dominic spent part of that month with his family, keeping busy with entertaining and teaching children in the village, as well as his "little brothers."²³

Back from the holidays in fairly good health in mid-August, Dominic learned that the cholera that had flared up again during the summer was in remission. He settled in with the scheduled classes preparatory to regular school year and eventually got to see Don Bosco, for he was carrying a request from his father that had to do with Dominic's sister Remondina. In a letter to his father he speaks of an hour-long conversation with Don Bosco.

[Undated, but postmarked September 5, 1855]

Dearest Father,

I have a very interesting piece of news, but first let tell you about myself. I've been well since my return, thank God, and at the moment I'm enjoying perfectly good health. I hope it's the same with you and the whole family. I am making steady progress in my studies, and Don Bosco has been increasingly pleased with me.

Now for the good news: I spent a whole hour alone with Don Bosco—unusual, since up until now I've never spent more than ten minutes at a time with him. I spoke to him about a number of things, including an association for protection against cholera. He told me that it has begun to flare up and that, were it not for the chilly weather that is setting in, it would still be causing much damage. Don Bosco made me also a member [of the association], but now it's really only for prayer.

I also spoke to him about my sister [Remondina] as you asked me to do. He suggests that you take her to his house [at Becchi] on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, so that he may have some idea of her education and of her abilities, and together you may come to a decision.

This is all for now. Sending regards to you and our whole family, to my teacher Father Cugliero, and also to Andrea Robino and my friend Domenico Savio of Ranello,

I am your most devoted and most loving son,
Dominic Savio.²⁴

²³ Cf. Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 56, in *Opere Edite* XI, 206.

²⁴ Autograph Letter transcribed in Caviglia, *Opere e Scritti* IV, 86-87 and Ceria (1954), 67. The passage in the letter that speaks of the cholera and the association is far from clear: Dominic writes: "La novella è, che avendo potuto stare un'ora sol con D. Bosco, siccome per lo addietro non ho mai potuto stare dieci minuti solo, gli parlai di molte cose, tra le quali di un'associazione per l'assicurazione del colera, il quale mi disse che è in un buon principio e se non fosse del

Special Friends

On entering the Oratory in the fall of 1854, Dominic made the acquaintance of a saintly young man, Giovanni Massaglia, who had entered the year before.²⁵ They became close friends and entered into a spiritual relationship that deepened during the time they spent together at the Oratory in the summer of 1855. The young man, apparently in good health, took sick and had to leave. He died at home on May 20, 1856. In late October (1855), the new boys were entering for the school year 1855-1856, and Dominic was eagerly on hand to meet them and help them adjust to the new environment. Under these circumstances Dominic met another saintly lad, Camillo Gavio, and a deep spiritual friendship again developed between the two. Gavio had been ill, and almost immediately suffered a relapse and was forced to go home, where he died on December 26, 1855. Don Bosco devotes two whole chapters to these friendships, which he encouraged, clearly with an educational purpose in view.²⁶

For the school year 1855-1856 Don Bosco began an in-house program of secondary studies, starting with 3rd *ginnasio* ("Grammar"), under teacher Giovanni Battista Francesia (1838-1930), a 17-year old Salesian seminarian. Under him Dominic took his Grammar that year. In this connection Don Bosco notes Dominic's failing health and gives this as the reason why he did 3rd *ginnasio* at the Oratory. He wouldn't have to walk to and from school twice a day.²⁷

freddo che già s'inoltra, forse farebbe un grande guasto, e mi ha anche associato io, il che sta tutto in preghiera." I take this to mean that Dominic spoke to Don Bosco about the group (association) that had been active during the height of the epidemic the year before. Perhaps he suggested that it be reassembled and that he should be allowed to join it. Don Bosco replied that there was no need, because in spite of the recent flare-up the cholera was being contained by the cold weather. He did, however, allow Dominic into the group (association), which was now only for prayer. The sentence, "Mi ha anche associato io" makes it unlikely that Dominic asked Don Bosco for permission to found a new association. The English *Biographical Memoirs*, however, understand the passage differently [EBM V, 219]. In this connection Lemoyne goes on to report the incident in which Savio discovered a woman stricken with the illness in a nearby tenement [EBM V, 219-220].

²⁵ Cf. Molineris, *Nuova Vita Savio*, 167-168, citing archival documents and correcting Caviglia.

²⁶ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 85-95 [Chapters XVII and XVIII], in *Opere Edite* XI, 233-243.

²⁷ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 49, in *Opere Edite* XI, 199.

Charismatic Experiences

At one point in the biography, Don Bosco devotes some space to Savio's charismatic experiences. He writes:

Up to this point I have reported nothing extraordinary [of Dominic], unless we view his perfect conduct, [...] his lively faith, firm hope and an ardent charity as extraordinary. Now, however, I intend to speak of some special graces and uncommon experiences that may draw criticism from some people. But I want to assure the reader that [...] these are things that I witnessed personally and directly.²⁸

Don Bosco mentions incidents of ecstasy before the Blessed Sacrament, ecstatic colloquies with God, supernatural knowledge of a dying person in need of reconciliation, etc. Then there is also mention of Dominic's purity of life and of his intense love of and union with God, even during recreation. Finally, Don Bosco relates Savio's vision of Pius IX bearing the torch of the Catholic faith to England.²⁹

The Company of the Immaculate Conception

In the biography Don Bosco devotes a sizable chapter to the founding, purpose and regulations of the Company of the Immaculate Conception.³⁰ In his first edition of the *Life*, he speaks of Dominic Savio as the sole originator and founder of this sodality and as the author of its regulations. Although the date of the founding is given as June 8, 1856, Don Bosco connects it (at least as to the original idea) with the definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1854, and with Dominic's own consecration to Mary on that occasion. With regard to the purpose of the association, Don Bosco writes:

²⁸ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 93-94 [Chapter XIX], in *Opere Edite* XI, 243-244.

²⁹ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 94-98, in *Opere Edite* XI, 244-248. Don Bosco adds that during the audience of 1858 he told Pope Pius IX about the vision. Pius was very happy and made favorable comments.

³⁰ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 75-85 [Chapter XVI], in *Opere Edite* XI, 225-235.

The purpose [of the founding] was to ensure the great Mother of God's protection [for the members] in life and especially at the point of death. To this end Savio proposed two means: to undertake and promote devotional exercises in honor of Mary Immaculate, and frequent Communion.³¹

In the founding act of consecration to Mary, which functions as a kind of preamble to the 21 articles of the company's regulations, the members promised to imitate Louis Comollo to the best of their powers. They recited together:

Therefore we bind ourselves, 1st faithfully to observe the regulations of the house; 2nd spiritually to help our companions by charitable admonition, and to encourage them to good conduct by word and even more by example, and 3rd to make the best possible use of the time at our disposal.³²

Illness and Rest at Mondonio in the Summer of 1856

Dominic's declining health had Don Bosco worried to the point that he called in Dr. Francesco Vallauri, who had a reputable practice in the city. The doctor found no symptoms of any specific disease, but only an extreme general weakness that he ascribed to intense spiritual effort. He suggested a period of rest away from the smoky city. Dominic left school for home toward the end of June, hence before the end of the term, which ran to mid-July. His health improved only slightly, but he was back at Valdocco for examinations in August. On September 12, Dominic asked permission of Don Bosco to go home to see his mother who was "ill." The sickness in question was Mrs. Savio's confinement for the birth of her eighth child, Caterina. As reported by Dominic's sister, Teresa Tosco-Savio, it was a difficult and painful delivery, successful nonetheless due to the scapular that Dominic put around his mother's neck as she lay "ill" in bed.

Dominic stood as godfather at Caterina's baptism, the next day (September 13), and then returned to Valdocco. But his stay in Turin was brief, for Don Bosco sent him home to Mondonio for the remainder of the holidays (September-October).

³¹ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 76 [Chapter XVI], in *Opere Edite* XI, 226.

³² Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 76-77 [Chapter XVI], in *Opere Edite* XI, 226-227.

Fourth Ginnasio in the school of Father Matteo Picco

Feeling better but not quite well, Dominic returned to the Oratory after mid-October to get ready for the new school year (1856-1857). He would be in 4th ginnasio or humanities. The in-house school program consisted only of 3rd *ginnasio* or grammar, established the previous year, attended by Savio and taught by Seminarian Francesca, and of the two lower classes, 1st and 2nd ginnasio, recently established and taught by Professor Francesco Blanch.

For his 4th year of *ginnasio*, therefore, Savio in November 1856 began to attend the private school of Professor Father Matteo Picco, in the city. In spite of frequent bouts with illness, however, he excelled, as the Professor Picco stated in his eulogy after Savio's death. Witnesses concur in praising his extraordinary diligence and perseverance. Some testimonies also give him credit for superior intelligence. Others, on the other hand, speak of average intelligence, supplemented by hard work. Mgr. Giovanni Piano, who had been a schoolmate of Savio, testified at the process of beatification: "In my opinion his intellectual powers were ordinary, but by his diligence and perseverance in study he almost always placed among the first in his class. This won him the love and esteem of his teachers."³³

The four months during which he attended Fr. Picco's school, before he left for home never to return, were plagued with the recurring illness, coughing and splitting headaches. He was often confined to the infirmary, where Marianna Occhiena (Mamma Margaret's sister) also ill, held a room. A former companion of his, Giuseppe Reano, testified at the process of beatification:

The pain he endured in his illness was extremely severe, yet for the whole time of his illness at the Oratory never once was he heard to complain. Once I saw him depressed and I asked him why he was not willing to talk. He answered me that he had such a splitting headache that he felt like he had knives driven into his temples. He added, however, that he bore it all with patience in the hope that his pain, united with the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, would gain him heaven. Jesus had suffered a lot more without complaining.

When he got some of his strength back, he would get out of bed. Once I found him in Auntie's room warming himself by the fire, while she moaned and complained of her aches and pains. Dominic, young as he was, did not hesitate to scold her for her impatience.³⁴

³³ *Summarium*, 84, in Caviglia, *Ricordo*, 18.

³⁴ Giuseppe Reano, Written Report No. 3, *Summarium*, 458-459, in Caviglia, *Ricordo*, 64.

Don Bosco speaks of Savio's premonitions of death. "Because of poor health, frequent ailments and unrelenting spiritual tension he was getting weaker by the day." The spiritual program of the Company of the Immaculate Conception, the exercise for a happy death practiced at the Oratory, and Dominic's own reflection reinforced those premonitions. When consulted about Savio's health problem, Dr. Vallauri, verdict was: "The best cure would be to let him go to heaven."³⁵

He attended classes on and off, and finally his weakness became extreme, so that he had to be confined to his bed. He hated the thought of having to go home and discontinue his studies. But the time came when his father had to be sent for and his departure was set for March 1, 1857. He knew he would never return. He wanted Don Bosco's reassurance that his sins had been forgiven, that he would be saved by God's mercy and that from heaven he would be able to see and visit his companions and his parents.³⁶

The morning of his departure he insisted on receiving Holy Communion for the journey. He then took leave of his schoolmates and of his companions of the Company of the Immaculate Conception. It was an emotional goodbye. Out the door, he asked Don Bosco for a parting gift: to be included in the plenary indulgence recently granted by the Holy Father.³⁷

Progress of Dominic's Illness and Saintly Death

The excitement of the trip and the change of scene reinvigorated him, and he was up and about for four days before taking to his bed. Don Bosco records details of his fervent reception of the sacraments and of the last rites. Before entering into agony, Dominic asked his father to read the litany for a happy death from the *Companion of Youth*. His mother broke into tears and left the room. Dominic's last words were: "Goodbye, dear dad! Oh, what

"Auntie" ("Magna" in Piedmontese) was the boys' familiar name for Marianna (Maria Giovanna) Occhiena, Mamma Margaret's elder sister. The boys called her Auntie and they called Margaret, "Mamma," She had joined Margaret at the Oratory after Father Lacqua, whom she served as housekeeper, died in the early fifties. Marianna died in 1857, two years after her sister.

³⁵ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 101-102 (Chapter XX), in *Opere Edite* XI, 251-252.

³⁶ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 102-106 (Chapter XXI), in *Opere Edite* XI, 252-256.

³⁷ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 106-109 (Chapter XXII), in *Opere Edite* XI, 256-259.

a beautiful thing I see! Dominic died on March 9, 1857.³⁸

The news of Dominic's saintly death reached the Oratory by a letter from his father, Carlo Savio. It reads:

Mondonio, March 10, 1857

Very Reverend Sir,

It is with tears and profound sorrow that I write this note to you, most reverend sir, to convey the saddest possible news. My dear little boy, Dominic, your pupil, the spotless lily and new Aloysius Gonzaga that he was, returned his soul to God the evening of the 9th of the current month of March.

[The course of] his illness was as follows. He took to his bed on Wednesday, March 4, and under the care of Dr. Cafassi they performed ten bloodlettings on him. But while we were waiting to learn [from the doctor] what the disease was so we could write and let you know, he passed away. He had also developed a deep cough.

I can't think of anything else, very Reverend Father, except of offering my regards to you and wishing you every success.

Your most obedient servant,
Carlo Savio³⁹

On receiving the news of Dominic's death, his teacher, Father Matteo Picco, spoke of him to the class extolling his virtues. Set down in writing by Professor Picco, the eulogy is quoted by Don Bosco, apparently in full.⁴⁰

In a brief foreword to the biography, entitled "Dear Young People," which may also serve as a closing exhortation, Don Bosco writes, "Dear young people, you have repeatedly asked me to put in writing for you some of the things that have to do with your schoolmate, Dominic Savio, and I have done my best to comply with your wishes."⁴¹ A little further on he adds:

Some may wonder why I have chosen to write about Dominic Savio, rather than about other young men who lived among us and have left behind them a reputation for outstanding virtue. [...] Such were Gabriele Fascio, Luigi Rua,

³⁸ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 109-119 (Chapters XXIII-XXIV), in *Opere Edite* XI, 259-269.

³⁹ From the reproduction in Caviglia, *Savio Domenico and Don Bosco* (the study), facing 560.

⁴⁰ Bosco, *Vita Savio* (1859), 121-129, in *Opere Edite* XI, 271-279.

⁴¹ Bosco, *Vita Savio*, 7; *Opere Edite* XI, 157.



16 – Dominic Savio’s portrait as envisioned by painter Mario Caffaro Rore (1960)

Camillo Gavio, Giovanni Massaglia, and others. However, the life of none of these is as noteworthy and as beautiful as Savio’s. [...] Begin, therefore, with taking to heart what I will be writing [about Savio], for, as St. Augustine used to say, “If he [succeeded in becoming a saint], why not I?”⁴²

⁴² Bosco, *Vita Savio*, 8-9; *Opere Edite* XI, 8-9: “*Si ille, cur non ego?*”

II. The “Last Things” in Don Bosco’s Proposal of Holiness for the Young

P. Stella, *DB:RO&S*, 170-179, 338-344; F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, 55-57.

What follows is a survey of reports from Volumes III-VII of the Biographical Memoirs, of Don Bosco’s extraordinary experiences and their effect in the communities of the oratory and of the Home, in the 1850s and early 1860s. It concentrates on dream narratives and it serves two purposes. It describes the “supernatural” aura surrounding Don Bosco and the supporting developing “legend” of Don Bosco as a charismatic visionary. It also documents the particular spiritual emphases connected with predictions of death in those years.

1. A Repertory of Don Bosco’s “Extraordinary” Dreams and Predictions of Deaths in the Fifties and Sixties with Special Reference to the Exercise for a Happy Death

P. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 213-230 “Sicknesses and Deaths at the Oratory” (Meticulous study of frequency, causes, as compared with other institutions).

Repertory

–1847, Dream Related to DB’s Work – Premonitory [*EBM* III, 25-28].

The Dream of the Rose Bower took place in 1847, and was repeated with some variations in 1848 and in 1856. Don Bosco related it for the first time to the Salesians in 1864.

–1849, January, Extraordinary Occurrence [*EBM* III, 311-312].

Don Bosco multiplied the hosts for about 600 oratory lads, as Joseph Buzzetti forgot to place a second ciborium on the altar. Don Bosco himself confirmed the fact on October 18, 1863.

Other witnessed multiplications are: of chestnuts, Nov. 1849 [*EBM* III, 404-405]; of hosts, confirmed by Don Bosco himself according to Bonetti’s

report, 1854 [EBM VI, 580-581]; of bread rolls, as witnessed by Francis Dal-mazzo, Oct. 1860 [EBM VI, 453-455].

–1849, Dream [EBM III, 378-379].

Don Bosco dreamt of meeting King Charles Albert after the latter's death on July 28, 1849 in Oporto, (Portugal); and related it “many years later.”

–1849, Extraordinary Occurrence [EBM III, 349-355, citing ten witnesses]. The raising of the boy named Charles is dated in 1849.⁴³

–1850, Prediction of Death [EBM IV, 211].

At a meeting of a select group of the St. Aloysius Sodality, Don Bosco predicts the death of a boy named Burzio, a saintly young man of the festive oratory, the first recorded death of an *oratory boy* as reported by Joseph Buzzetti.

In this connection Father Rua reports: “I attended the Oratory from 1847 to 1852. I remember that from the earliest days, whenever a member of the St. Aloysius Sodality died Don Bosco had predicted his death. [...] He would say, “Within fifteen days or a month, a sodality member will be called to eternity. It may be myself or it could be any one of you. Let us be ready!” A salutary fear kept the boys alert. [...] I personally heard several such announcements, and [...] they never failed to come true” [EBM IV, 210].

–1853, Extraordinary Occurrences [MO-En, 420ff.; EBM IV, 495-502, citing witnesses]: stories of the dog *Grigio*.

–1854, end of year: two Predictive Dreams [EBM V, 115-123].

After the Rattazzi Bill was introduced, Don Bosco dreamt of a messenger announcing solemn funerals at Court. Five days later, the dream was repeated in a slightly different form, and warning letters were written to King Victor Emmanuel II, threatening misfortunes if the king signed the bill. In Jan 1855 at brief intervals deaths occurred within the royal family: Queen Mother (Maria Theresa), Queen Consort (Maria Adelaide), Prince Ferdinand, Duke of Genoa, and the king's young son (Prince Victor Emmanuel-Leopold).

⁴³ For critical study of the “evidence” see Stella, *DB and the Death of Charles, an Appendix to DB: Life and Work* (published separately: New Rochelle, NY: DB Publications, 1985).

–1854, March, Predictive Dream of Death [*EBM V*, 246ff.].

Don Bosco related the Dream of the Twenty-two Moons to the boarders predicting the death of Secundus Gurgo. John Cagliero, John Turchi, John Baptist Anfossi, Felix Reviglio, Joseph Buzzetti are cited as witnesses. Gurgo died before Christmas 1855. This is the first recorded death of a *boarder* at the Oratory.

The Biographer prefaces this story with the words: “The Oratory boys were firmly convinced that God had given Don Bosco extraordinary spiritual gifts because, among other things, he had predicted several deaths and other events that were totally unforeseeable. In 1854, however, they were even more impressed when Don Bosco began telling them of certain dreams that really should be called “visions” because through them God revealed what He wanted from Don Bosco and from his boys— especially, what was best for the spiritual welfare of the Oratory” [*EBM V*, 242]. Lemoyne adds Canon John Baptist Anfossi’s, Father Joachim Berto’s and his own testimony concerning Don Bosco’s predictions of almost all of the boys’ deaths that took place at the Oratory [*Ibid.* 249-250].

Father Rua also testified: “Don Bosco had the gift of prophecy to a remarkable degree. His predictions—fully realized—were so varied and numerous as to lead us to believe that this charism was habitual with him. He often told us of his dreams concerning the Oratory and the Salesian Society” [*Ibid.* 297].

–1856 ca., Predictive Dream [*EBM V*, 297].

As an instance of the above, Father Rua relates the Dream of the Wheel of Fortune (Roulette), heard from Don Bosco about 1856. Five increasingly noisier spins of the wheel represented five decades of expansion of the work: Turin, Piedmont, Italy, Europe and the world.

–1857, Moralistic Dream [*EBM V*, 478f.].

Dream of the Four Kinds of Bread: DB saw the boys divided into four groups eating different kinds of bread, signifying four different moral-spiritual conditions.

–1859, November, Moralistic Dream [*EBM VI*, 160f.].

The Dream of the Little Marmot: DB sees the spiritual condition of the boys as they return for the new school year, and sees a man distracting the boys from the sacraments with a little domesticated marmot.

–1859, Prediction of Death [*EBM VI*, 59-67].

As related by Father John Garino (witnessed to by many), in the Good Night of Dec. 31, 1858 Don Bosco announced that one person would die at the Oratory before Carnival was over (before Lent), and placed his hand on Michael Magone's head. Magone died on Jan. 21. A boy named Constantius Berardi, who had thought he would be the one, breathed a sigh of relief. But on Jan. 25 Don Bosco announced that Magone was not the one that was meant. The 16-year old Berardi died on Feb. 5, 1859.

–1860, Prediction of Death [*EBM VI*, 291f.].

As Ruffino writes in his chronicle (entry of Apr. 7), Don Bosco had repeatedly predicted that one of the boys would die; and 14-year old Alexander Trona, who had just entered the Oratory, died on Apr. 24, 1860.

The Biographer reports that Don Bosco explained how he learnt that someone would die: "I see boys walking on different paths which may be intersected by a ditch about one half, one third, or one fourth of the way. At other times I see a date written across the paths—year, month, and day" [*Ibid.* 292].

–1860, Prediction of a Political Event and of a Death [*EBM VI*, 466].

In April Don Bosco had predicted the conquest of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Naples) [by Garibaldi] and the death of Cleric Louis Castellano. [Cf. *EBM VI*, 292, 375.] The latter died in November.

–1860, May 23, Premonitory Dream [*EBM VI*, 311f.].

Don Bosco dreamt that there would be a house search by the police.

–1860, August 5 (Father Rua's first Mass), Moralistic Dream [*EBM VI*, 410f.].

Dream of the 14 Tables: the boys are seated at 14 tables placed at different levels, in 3 orders, symbolizing different moral-spiritual conditions.

–1860, Nov. 25, Prediction of Death [Cf. *EBM VI*, 466].

Don Bosco announced that a boy would die shortly, and 12-year old John Racca died on Dec 13.

–1860, December 28, 29, 30, Moralistic Dreams [*EBM VI*, 478-482].

Dream with Father Cafasso, Silvio Pellico and Count Cays. The boys write on a pad symbolizing their moral-spiritual condition. Some are in a very bad situation.

Father Rua's comments on the source of Don Bosco's knowledge of the boys' spiritual condition: "Someone may think that, in manifesting his pupils' conduct and personal secrets, Don Bosco was availing himself of information he had received from the boys themselves or from the young seminarians supervising them. I can state with absolute certainty that [this was not the case]. [...] The belief that Don Bosco could read our sins on our foreheads was so common that, when anyone committed a sin, he shied away from Don Bosco until he had gone to confession. [...] Besides showing them their state of conscience as he had seen it in his dreams, Don Bosco used to announce things one could not humanly know, such as future deaths and other events. The more I consider these facts and revelations [...] the more deeply am I convinced that God had endowed him with the gift of prophecy" [*Ibid.* 482f.]. Father Bonetti's chronicle is quoted with regard to the good effects of this dream [*Ibid.* 484f.].

–1861, January, Reading of Conscience [*EBM VI*, 485].

Don Bosco confronts a boy with having withheld a sin in confession.

–1861, January, Dream Predictive of Death [*EBM VI*, 486f].

Dream of Death Claiming a Boy: Don Bosco warns the boy (who had not made a good confession since his first Communion) and relates the dream to the whole community.

–1861, April 3, 4, and 5, Moralistic Dream [*EBM VI*, 508-518].

Dream of the Hike to Heaven narrated in three Good Nights.

Lemoyne's extensive comments and interpretations relating to this dream are worth reading [*Ibid.* 518ff.]. Don Bosco's comments on the death of one of the boys and on hearing boys' confessions are revealing [*Ibid.* 522f.].

–1861, May 1, Moralistic-Predictive Dream [*EBM VI*, 530-544].

Dream of the Wheel of Eternity, narrated in three Good Nights: On a path leading to Capriglio DB meets an Interpreter, who shows him the condition of the boys, present and future in the Wheel of Eternity, with various symbolic predictions.

Comments (from witnesses) on the effects and on the images of the dream [*Ibid.* 545-554].

–1861, June 14, Moralistic Story or Dream [*EBM VI*, 582ff.].

“A little story or a kind of dream,” Dream of the Handkerchief of Purity: Don Bosco sees himself in church, about to give a sermon, then in a valley in front of a palace. A Lady gives each boy a handkerchief, with admonition not to display it in the wind.

–1861, November 28, Moralistic Dream [*EBM VI*, 627f.].

Little devils distract the boys at Mass.

–1862, January 30, Clairvoyant Dream [*EBM VII*, 37f.].

Don Bosco dreamt of three boys gambling. The next day, he sent Cagliero to look for them, because he “heard the tinkling of money.”

–1862, Dream Predictive of Death [*EBM VII*, 76-83].

Dream of the Specter and the Casket, predicting the death of Victor Maestro: Don Bosco dreams of the specter of death coming into the Oration courtyard and beckoning to one of the boys at recreation pointing to a casket set up at the end of the porch. He was to die suddenly before Easter (April 20) or Pentecost. On Apr. 16, 12-year old Louis Fornasio died at his home. (He had previously made a general confession.) Don Bosco, however, said that a second lad would die whose name began with the letter M. Everyone thought that it would be Louis Marchisio, who was gravely ill. Instead it was 13-year old Victor Maestro who died suddenly of a stroke.

–1862, May 26, Parable or Allegory (*Similitudine*) of the Two Columns [*EBM VII*, 107ff.] (So-called Dream of the Two Columns).

–1862, Moralistic Dream [*EBM VII*, 125].

Don Bosco dreamt repeatedly of a boy whose heart is eaten by worms and confronts him with having withheld sins in confession.

–1862, July 6, Composite Dream [*EBM VII*, 128f.].

Dream of the Marchioness of Barolo (about taking care of girls) and of the Great Red Horse (allusion to Book of Revelation?).

–1862, July. Prediction of Death [*EBM VII*, 133ff.].

At the beginning of July Don Bosco predicted the death of a boy; and on July 18 18-year old Bernard Casalegno died a saintly death at his home in Chieri. According to Bonetti Don Bosco, though on retreat at St. Ignatius (25 miles away), was immediately aware of the death.

–1862, Clairvoyant/Visionary Experience [*EBM VII*, 135f.].

On that same occasion, at St. Ignatius, Don Bosco became aware (through clairvoyance) of four wolves at large among the boys at the Oratory, of some boys out of place during night prayers, of three lads who cut services on the Sunday to go swimming, etc.

–1862, Prediction of Death [*EBM VII*, 142f.].

As witnessed by Father John Garino, Don Bosco had predicted that one of the boys would die before 3 moons had passed. Seriously ill 19-year old David Quarelli thought he would be the one. Don Bosco assured him that it would not be he. On August 15, 14-year old John Petiti died.

–1862, August 20, Moralistic Dream [*EBM VII*, 143f. 146f.].

Dream of the Serpent and the Rope: in the first part, the snake is killed by the rope, which takes the shape, *Ave Maria* (Rosary); in the second part, some boys eat the snake's flesh and collapse.

–1862, Premonition and Prediction of Death [*EBM VII*, 166f.].

One evening at Vignale, during the fall outing, Don Bosco was chatting with some boys (among whom Joseph Buzzetti and Modesto Davico). All of a sudden he asked them to say a prayer for the boy who would die that night. At prayers he asked all the boys to pray for one who was gravely ill at the Oratory. In the morning he asked the boys to pray for the boy who had died during the night. A letter from Father Alasonatti brought the news that one Rosario Pappalardo had died suddenly.

–1862, December, Prediction of Death [*EBM VII*, 202ff.].

As witnessed by Frs. Cagliari and Albera, Don Bosco was discussing a seminarian (“Da...” by name), who had been a Salesian and then had left for his diocese once he saw himself well provided for through the charity of benefactors. He was being “punished” with an illness. He would die before

long. The prediction was fulfilled when he died of tuberculosis shortly after ordination (remarkable story having to do with vocation, divine retribution, etc.).

–1862, December 20, Dream and Prediction of Death [*EBM VII*, 204f.].

In the Good Night Don Bosco announced: “By Christmas one of us will go to Heaven.” That evening 10-year old Joseph Blangino took sick and by 2:30 the next morning he was dead. Don Bosco had seen all this in a dream.

–1862, Prediction of Death Related to the Exercise for a Happy Death [*EBM VII*, 205-210]. Death of Albert C., (See below.)

–1863, January 6, Moralistic Dream [*EBM VII*, 213-219].

Dream of the Fiendish Elephant and Mary’s protection: DB wrote down the names of the boys he had seen wounded by the elephant.

–1863, July, Moralistic Dream Predictive of Death [*EBM VII*, 281].

Dream of the Messages from Mary: all the boys picked a message (on a slip of paper) out of a pouch. One left in the pouch read “death.” Don Bosco revealed the message to each boy.

–1863, Prediction of Death Related to the Exercise for a Happy Death [*EBM VII*, 238].

Exhorting the working boys and students to make the Exercise for a Happy Death well, Don Bosco announced that for two of the boys (one from each community) it would be their last. Fifteen-year old apprentice John Baptist Negro died on March 23; while 13-year old student Joseph Scaglietti died on April 3, both at home.

–1863, November 1, Dream Predictive of Death in Connection with the Exercise for a Happy Death [*EBM VII*, 332].

Before the Exercise for a Happy Death, Don Bosco dreamt he was accompanying one of the boys on his funeral.

–1863, November 13, Moralistic Dream [*EBM VII*, 333f.]. Dream of the Snake in the Pit.

–1863, Predictions of Death [*EBM* VII, 332f.].

On November 3 Don Bosco in Turin announced that a boy was to die; on December 10 [?] he made the same announcement at the newly opened school of Mirabello [*Ibid.* 348]; and back in Turin on December 14 [?] he called for prayers for the one who was to die [*Ibid.* 348]. On Dec. 26, 19-year old Teresio Robert died at home; and on December 29 news was received that 20-year old Louis Prete had died at home on December 5. Don Bosco at first was noncommittal [*Ibid.* 350], but in a letter of December 30 to the boys at Mirabello he stated that Prete was the one. He added, however, that, as the boys often died in pairs, another death was to be expected [*Ibid.* 352]. Francis Besucco died on January 9, 1864 [*Ibid.* 357-362].

–1864, Predictions of Death [*EBM* VII, 362].

After the solemn *Requiem* Mass for Besucco on January 11, Don Bosco confided to a few that a working boy would die within the month, and two other boys within three months. On January 30 18-year old Stephen Cavaglia died at the Cottolengo Hospital. The other two died before Easter. Don Bosco had confided their names (Vincent Tarditi and Peter Palo) to the infirmary attendant, Ignatius Mancardi, who wrote a memorandum and handed it in a sealed envelope to Father Alasonatti (Prefect), to be opened after Easter [*Ibid.* 372f.].⁴⁴ Palo, who had been in poor health, died at the age of 16 at St. Aloysius' Hospital on February 2; while 16-year old Tarditi died at the Cottolengo Hospital on March 12. Easter fell on March 27 [*Ibid.* 383ff.].

–1864, Apr. 3 and 13, Two Moralistic Dreams [*EBM* VII, 392f.].

Dream of the Crows (wounding the boys); Dream of the Man with the Jar of Healing Ointment.

–1864, Prediction of Death in Connection with the Exercise for a Happy Death [*EBM* VII, 405f.].

On June 14, in connection with the up-coming Exercise, Don Bosco announced that one of the boys would die before the next Exercise. On July 15, 15-year old Louis Vallino died at the St. Maurice Hospital [*Ibid.* 420].

⁴⁴ For a photographic reproduction of Mancardi's memorandum and Fr. Alasonatti's endorsement see G.B. Lemoyne, *Vita di S. Giovanni Bosco*, edited by A. Amadei (2 volumes) (Torino: SEI, 1947) I, opposite p. 656.

–1864, October 22, Moralistic Dream [EBM VII, 467-470].

Dream of the Golden Wagon and of the Ten Hills: few boys arrive at the tenth hill riding on the wagon (the innocent ones); others arrive on foot.

–1864, November 15, Prediction of Death in Connection with the Exercise for a Happy Death [EBM VII, 480f.].

Don Bosco announced that one of the boys would die before the end of the year. Don Bosco himself relates the sad story of the death of 16-year old John Baptist Saracco. He had refused to go to confession before leaving for home and had died suddenly in the house of relatives on November 26 [*Ibid.* 483f.].

Comment

As may be seen from the above survey (not an exhaustive one), Don Bosco also narrated “dreams” that had to do with the lads’ moral and spiritual condition, as well as purely moralistic “dreams.”

With respect to “dreams” predictive of deaths, Don Bosco himself (as mentioned above) described how he came by the knowledge that someone would die. It wasn’t always a clear or definite premonition. Some times he himself had to wait to see how things would turn out. But for educational purposes and for the spiritual good of the individual he would not hesitate to announce it publicly. He certainly believed that confronting the youngsters with the thought of death was both educational and spiritually helpful.

Significantly these “dream” narratives are concentrated in the period of Don Bosco most personal involvement in education.⁴⁵

2. The “Last Things” in Don Bosco’s Proposal of Holiness for the Young

P. Stella, *DB:RO&S*, 170-185, 338-344.

On scanning the *Biographical Memoirs* for the period of the 1850s and 1860s,

⁴⁵ The frequent occurrence of death at the Oratory seems to indicate that the mortality rate was rather high. But Stella (cited at the head of this survey) finds that mortality at the Oratory rated about the same as that of similar establishments throughout Piedmont [*DBEcSoc*, 220].

one is struck by the recurrent thought and talk of death. Don Bosco is said to have predicted the death of numerous boys, either in consequence of dreams or of simple premonitions. He attached great importance to the Exercise for a Happy Death, in connection with which he often predicted the death of boys for moral and spiritual purposes. The Comollo biography that he had authored, and re-edited to serve as a spiritual manual for his boys, emphasized the Last Things. The members of the Immaculate Conception Sodality were sworn to imitate Louis Comollo, and the biography served as a kind of identity card for membership. Hence a comment on the death-focused spirituality, and on the Exercise for a Happy Death in particular, its origin, nature and practice, seems appropriate. Emphasis on the Last Things was traditional, and it certainly figured as a component of the spirituality of the Oratory.

The Exercise for a Happy Death (Monthly Day of Recollection) at the Oratory

The practice of the Exercise for a Happy Death was firmly established at the Oratory from the start. It was included in all editions of the Companion of Youth (*Giovane Provveduto*), beginning with the first in 1847. Indeed the practice acquired a key role in the spiritual and devotional life of the boys, and it appears to have been regarded as an indispensable educational tool for fostering the moral and spiritual life in the community of both students and artisans. The Biographer takes pains to stress this very fact. A couple of examples will suffice.

[Don Bosco] offered [the boys] another spiritual prop, [...] the Exercise for a Happy Death. “Remember,” he wrote, “that at the hour of death we shall reap what we have sown in life. If we have done good works we will be happy. [...] Otherwise, woe to us! Remorse of conscience and the open jaws of hell will await us [...]” In 1847 Don Bosco began to set aside the first Sunday of each month for this salutary exercise, inviting all the boys to make a confession as if it were each one’s very last, and to receive Holy Communion. [...] He heard the confessions of crowds of boys for hours and hours. After Mass and removing his vestments, he would kneel at the foot of the altar and recite the prayers of the Exercise for a Happy Death. [...] He would read aloud with great feeling the brief descriptions of the various stages of approaching death, and to each of them the boys would respond: “Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me!”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ EBM III, 14f.



17 – Don Bosco hearing young Paul Albera’s confession (photograph by Francesco Serra, Turin 1861)

The Exercise for a Happy Death was another powerful factor in his educational system. When boys began boarding at the Oratory, they made the Exercise for a Happy Death with the day pupils; later on he scheduled it on the last Sunday of the month for the former, and on the first Sunday for the latter. To make it truly effective, he exhorted them to put all their spiritual and temporal things in order as though they were to appear before God’s tribunal on that day and to be mindful that they could be suddenly called into eternity. [...] The worldly-minded might think that mentioning death to young boys would fill their minds with gloomy thoughts, but that was not so at all. On the contrary, it filled their hearts with peace and joy. Spiritual unrest comes from not being in God’s grace.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *EBM* III, 251.

On the day of the Exercise for a Happy Death, the boys not only faithfully carried out the customary practices of piety, but they also truly acted as though that day might be their last on earth. When they went to bed they even laid themselves out in the manner of a corpse. They longed to fall asleep clasping the crucifix; indeed many of them truly wished that God would call them to Himself that very night when they were so well prepared for the awesome step into eternity. One day Don Bosco remarked to Father [Giovanni] Giacomelli: "If everything is going so well in the Oratory, it is mainly because of the Exercise for a Happy Death."⁴⁸

Don Bosco's Predictions of Boys' Deaths Particularly in Connection with the Exercise of a Happy Death

The Biographer has been quoted above as saying that talking of death and of the last things to young boys is a good thing. Don Bosco evidently thought so too; and he went even farther. On many occasions, particularly in connection with the Exercise for a Happy Death, he predicted the death of one or more of the boys, for the purpose of stirring up fervor and of obtaining conversions. The Biographer states: "The Exercise for a Happy Death, held on the first Thursday of every month, was nearly always preceded by Don Bosco's announcement of a forthcoming death at the Oratory."⁴⁹ The following examples are chosen to illustrate the point. (For other instances of this practice see survey above.)

Albert C., a 16 year-old boy who had been led astray by another lad, had successfully been evading Don Bosco. When Don Bosco finally cornered him, he scolded: "Albert, why do you keep running away from me? [...] You must make a good confession as soon as possible." But the boy would have none of it. Don Bosco insisted: "The time will come when you'll ask for me and you won't find me. Think it over seriously." At the Good Night on December 1, 1862 Don Bosco urged the boys to make the Exercise for a Happy Death well because one of them would die before he could make another. "He is right here among you. [...] He does not know and does not want to know that he is doomed to die. But let him bear in mind that he will not be here for the next Exercise for a Happy Death." Albert heard, but the frightening prediction went unheeded. Don Bosco

⁴⁸ EBM IV, 477-478.

⁴⁹ EBM VI, 214.

told the infirmiry attendant and a couple of Salesians to keep an eye on the boy and try to get him to go to confession. But the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and Christmas came and went, and Albert did not mend his ways. To make a long story short—on December 31, the day before the next Exercise for a Happy Death [on New Year's Day!], Don Bosco was out preaching, when Albert took suddenly ill. The doctor came, only to pronounce the verdict. Sensing his critical condition, Albert then began to call for Don Bosco. When told that Don Bosco was not available, “uttering a heart-rending cry, he broke into a flood of tears. [...] ‘I am lost,’ he cried. ‘I’ll die without ever seeing Don Bosco. [...] God is punishing me.’” Fr. Rua and Fr. Alasonatti were at the boy’s bedside. Albert finally made his confession to Fr. Rua, and then received Holy Viaticum and the anointing. He died at 3 A. M. on New Years’ Day.⁵⁰

This is the story in broad outline; but there are further horrifying details, which (if true) reveal the intensely charged religious atmosphere in which the community at the Home lived. This charge came from the ever-present thought of death and of the Last Things, an important component of that spirituality.

Words spoken on another occasion indicate how Don Bosco made use of the thought of death for spiritual and educational purposes. On June 14, 1864 Don Bosco announced the forthcoming Exercise for a Happy Death and added:

One of us will not be able to make it again. Who? It may be myself, or it may be one of you! [...] I could tell you, but I won’t just now. [...] When that happens, you will say, “I never thought he would be the one to die!” [...] I gave you something to think about. Really we should meditate [on death] all the time. [...] We have but one soul. [...] If we lose it, it would be lost forever. [...] I know that boys [...] do wrong with inconceivable light-mindedness and then sleep for a long time with a horrible monster that could tear them to pieces at any moment. Is there anything to alert us to this danger? Yes, the thought of death! I shall have to die one day. [...] Will it be a slow death or a quick one? Will it be this year, this month, today, tonight? What will happen to my soul in that fatal hour? If we lose it, it will be lost forever.⁵¹

Many similar predictions in connection with the Exercise for a Happy Death, couched in much the same rhetoric, could be cited.

⁵⁰ *EBM VII*, 205-210.

⁵¹ *EBM VII*, 405-406.

*The Tradition and Practice of the Exercise for a Happy Death*⁵²

Wherefrom did Don Bosco receive this spirituality of the “Last Things,” and in particular the Exercise for a Happy Death? The spirituality focused on the Last Things was in the Christian theological and devotional tradition that came down to the nineteenth century from older times. It was fostered in the seminaries, and Louis Comollo, much admired by Don Bosco, provided a model. St. Alphonsus propounded in his preaching and in his writings (*Preparation for Death, Maxims for eternity*, etc.). It was cultivated in the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*), which Don Bosco attended.

As for the Exercise for a Happy Death in particular, Don Bosco’s immediate model may have been the practice at the Pastoral Institute, and Fr. Cafasso himself, who made the thought of death and preparation for death an integral part of his spiritual life.

On the first Sunday of each month, Fr. Cafasso faithfully made the Exercise for a Happy Death, following the usual format. But he added embellishments, such as the act by which he closed the exercise: “receiving through Mary’s intercession a month’s reprieve before I die, and spending that month preparing for death under divine scrutiny.” But neither Don Bosco nor Father Cafasso were the originators of the Exercise for a Happy Death or of the spirituality connected with it.

As practiced by adults, Priests and religious in particular, the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death derived ultimately from the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius. The Jesuit Father Jean Croiset promoted the monthly retreat in France in the belief that many who could not set aside seven or more consecutive days for a yearly retreat could easily set aside one day for a monthly retreat. At the beginning of the 18th century, the Jesuit Father Anthony Joseph Bordonni promoted the monthly retreat in Turin. He founded the Sodality for a Happy Death, and his Sermons for the Exercise for a Happy Death became a standard reference on the subject for the preacher. Up to their suppression, the Jesuits promoted both the sodality and the practice. The Second General Chapter (1880) recommended the sermons on Death and the Last Things by the Jesuit Father Charles Ambrose Cattaneo to the Salesians for their meditation. Likewise the writings of (among others) St. Alphonsus were a handy source for the themes and much of the rhetoric accompanying these exercises.

⁵² Cf. Stella, *DB:RO&S*, 335-341.

Applied to young people, however, the Exercise for a Happy Death appears to have been an adaptation both of the monthly retreat and a continuation in extended form of the monthly sacramental practice prescribed for the schools and for the student congregations in the period of the Restoration.

Among the prayers prescribed for the Exercise in the Companion of Youth (*Giovane Provveduto*) and in the tradition of the Oratory the most characteristic is the *Litany for a Happy Death*. Pius VII enriched this prayer with indulgences in 1802, but the Litany had been in use since the latter part of the eighteenth century. It was attributed to a “Protestant young woman who was converted to the Catholic Religion at the age of 15, and who died ‘in the odor of sanctity’ at the age of 18.” Although obviously intended to instill a salutary dread of sin, this prayer is permeated with the terrors of approaching death and judgment. The repeated invocation, “Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me,” expresses deep personal anguish rather than trust in a loving God and the hope of resurrection with Christ.

*Traditional and Personal Components in a Death-Focused Spirituality*⁵³

Don Bosco himself in his *Memoirs* records experiences of death that made a deep impression on him. Of these the experience connected with the death of his friend Louis Comollo was by far the most significant. The special nature of this experience arises not so much out of the loss of a very close friend, but out of the theological and spiritual motifs that accompanied and indeed nourished that friendship. Don Bosco’s biography of Louis Comollo clearly identifies those motifs, and we soon realize that they are the same that surface in Don Bosco’s life and in the life of the Oratory community. The motif of death with its possible issue in eternal damnation dominates the Comollo biography, as it had apparently dominated the relationship between the two friends. Uncertainty surrounding death and a person’s last fate, and the eternity of such a fate, place a person’s spiritual life under the sign of fear. “See to it that your whole life is a preparation for death and Judgment.”⁵⁴

⁵³ P. Stella discusses the role of Death and the Last Things in Don Bosco’s, and concomitantly in the community’s spirituality, in *DB:RO&S*, 177-185. In two additional chapters he discusses various components of that spirituality (*Ibid.* 187-225).

⁵⁴ Bosco, *Cenni storici* [...] (Comollo Biography, 1844), 61.

But together with the traditional themes and their rhetoric there was at work a personal component, a true anxiety about one's eternal salvation that may have been responsible for John Bosco's prolonged depression or illness of 1839. Up to (and even after) the publication of the *Life of Dominic Savio* (1859), Comollo (as portrayed in the biography) continued to serve as the model.

Among the songs included in the Companion of Youth (*Giovane Provveduto*), clearly included in view of the Exercise for a Happy Death, there was one with the title, "Alas, the frightening trumpet sound" (*Abil che l'orribil tromba*). At the point of death, and at the prospect of judgment and hell, the sinner will cry (words of the song): "Mountains, fall on me, earth open beneath me," "One must face the terrible presence of the supreme Judge and bear his condemnation. The Lord, without pity, full of terrible wrath, will demand an account. Lord, have mercy on me, a wretch and a traitor [...]."

Apparently it was Don Bosco's firm belief that the thought of the Last Things was a force for conversion and for resolve to lead a moral and spiritual life. In 1844-45 Don Bosco is said to have attended Father Ferrante Aporti's lectures on educational method (and later made "a factual report" to the Archbishop). The biographer adds:

Don Bosco soon noticed that the truths of faith were indirectly excluded. Father Aporti did not want hell ever to be mentioned to the young. At one time he exclaimed: "Why talk of hell to children? Such morbid ideas can only hurt them. Such fears are not good for their upbringing." The holy fear of God was thus excluded.⁵⁵

The Biographer then records Don Bosco's words spoken many years later to Fr. Francis Cerruti, when the latter was writing the regulations for the kindergartens of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians:

Do you want to know who Father Aporti really was? He was the spokesman of all who want to reduce religion to mere sentiment. Never forget that: one of the evil features of modern education is its aversion to mentioning eternal truths, above all death and hell.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *EBM* II, 167.

⁵⁶ *EBM* II, 168.

Closing Comment

The question of the value of such emphases in the education and spiritual life of young people is much debated. Perhaps, from a non-technical and practical point of view, one should distinguish between preparation for death *in fear*, and preparation for death *in hope*. This hope is founded on the unchanging and faithful love of God and on its assurance won for us by Christ.

Fear can never be a force for education and for the spiritual life. Clearly some of the theological premises and much of the rhetoric connected with the “preparation for death” and generally with the preaching on the Last Things were apt to engender fear rather than hope. If the emphasis Don Bosco placed on the Last Things, especially through the Exercise for a Happy Death, produced salutary results and brought about an atmosphere of joy and freedom (as the Biographer assures us) then some force other than fear must have been at work.

Be that as it may, the educational concern that, given the special psychological condition of a child or adolescent, the emphasis on the Last Things may indeed be harmful and counterproductive should be taken seriously. It would seem, however, that completely to deprive the young (even young children) of such an important aspect of the Christian faith, as is that represented by the Last Things, would itself be counterproductive.

Chapter 6

DON BOSCO'S WRITING ACTIVITY IN THE 1850s COUNTERACTING THE LIBERAL ANTICLERICAL PRESS

Francesco Malgeri, "Don Bosco's Work as a Publisher," in *Don Bosco's Place in History*. Acts of the First International Congress of Don Bosco Studies [...], ed. by Patrick Egan and Mario Midali. (Roma: LAS, 1993) 451-459 [*DB's Place*]; Stella, *DB:LW*, 259-288; *DBEcSoc*, 327-368. For the text of the writings (reproduced photographically (in original size, in some instances in various editions), cf. *Giovanni Bosco, Opere Edite* (Prima Serie: Libri e Opuscoli), ed. Centro Studi Don Bosco, UPS, 37 volumes (Roma: LAS, 1976-77) [*Opere Edite*]; For text and studies of some writings, cf. Alberto Caviglia, *San Giovanni Bosco, Opere e scritti editi e inediti* Caviglia (Torino: SEI, 1929-1965) and F. Desramaut cited below.

Summary

1. New Socio-Religious Context brought about by the Liberal Revolution
 1. Mass Education and Increased Literacy
 2. Catholic Response to the Liberal Reforms and the Secularization of Society
 3. Don Bosco's Response as a Writer (and Publisher)
2. Don Bosco's Writings in Defense of the Church and the Papacy
 1. History of Italy, First Edition (1855-56)
 2. History of Italy, Second Edition (1859)
 3. Lives of the Early Popes (1857-1858)
3. Devotional-Educational Writings
 1. The Month of May in Honor of Mary Most Holy Immaculate (1858)
 2. The Christian's Pocket Guide (1858)
 3. The Life of Young Dominic Savio (1859)

Appendix: Don Bosco's Letter of 1885 on the Apostolate of the Press

I. Historical Context of Don Bosco's Activity in the Apostolate of the Press

1. Introduction: Three Areas of Concern

Don Bosco's activity as a writer began in his seminary days and continued through the 1840s with ad hoc devotional and educational works. But in the 1850s and thereafter writing with Don Bosco took on the aspect of a proper "apostolate of the press." It was felt and undertaken as a "vocation."

The reasons for this development in Don Bosco's work must be sought in the changed socio-religious situation brought about by the liberal revolution and its liberal reforms. These related to three areas in particular:

(1) The expansion of mass education brought about by school reforms resulted in greater literacy, increased need to read. This brought about increased activity of the press, the Catholic press included, vying for access to the masses.

(2) The liberal reforms brought about a secularization of society by diminishing or neutralizing the influence of the Church in society. Hence the necessity arose on the part of the Church to catechize and even Christianize the people in a new way, through an increased publishing activity.

(3) The freedoms acquired by non-Catholic religious groups, especially the Waldenses ("Protestants") (freedom of worship, freedom of expression and of the press, etc.) resulted in an increased proselytizing activity. This needed to be counteracted from the Catholic side.

2. Mass Education and Increase in Literacy

Even before the *Casati* school reform of 1859,¹ the older *Boncompagni* and *Lanza Ordinances* (1848 and 1857), and more generally the progress of liberalization, provided notable impetus to public education. There was an increase in the number and quality of students and teachers, an expansion and improvement of school facilities, and a dramatic increase in literacy.

¹ The *Casati Law* written by Minister Count Gabrio Casati and promulgated by King Victor Emmanuel II on November 13, 1859 restructured the educational system already reformed by the *Boncompagni* and *Lanza* ordinances.

Hand in hand with public education went an increase in the daily and periodical press. The publishing and circulation of books also increased. The law of 1848 on the freedom of the press is to be credited with favoring these developments.

The Catholic press of every tendency experienced a tremendous upsurge, even though by and large it failed to impact society as a whole. It remained either entrenched in ultra-conservative positions (and thus out of touch with people at large) or mired in local issues that appealed to a restricted readership.

3. Catholic Response to the Liberal Reforms and the Secularization of Society

The irreversible acceleration of the liberal movement and of its program for the secularization of society alerted the Church to the fact that not only education, but also the masses were passing out of its control. The alarm was quickly raised. The bishops of Piedmont in their conference of July 29, 1848 (held at Villanovetta) passed a resolution to counter “irreligion and immorality with good books, so that the people need not have recourse to bad books to satisfy their desire to read.”

As Fr. Leonardo Murialdo reports, one strategy was to appoint a “provincial committee whose responsibility it was to examine books and newspapers, and to proscribe and forbid those that were loose and licentious [...]” Another strategy was to establish “an association for the publishing and for the distribution of good and wholesome books.” Bishop Luigi Moreno of Ivrea and Bishop Tommaso Ghilardi of Mondovì were to coordinate this effort. They were also to prepare:

A list of errors and propositions against faith and morals, as well as against the Church, the Pope and the clergy, circulated in the press. These could then be refuted in [Catholic] newspapers and through books and pamphlets, written in a simple, easy style, to be distributed free of charge among the people.²

Pius IX in his encyclical, *Nostis et nobiscum* (You know that also to us) of December 8, 1849 stressed the need to counteract “the press through the

² Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 348.

press”—a theme to which he returned at greater length in his encyclical, *Inter multiplices* (Among the manifold) of March 21, 1853.

The Catholic daily *L'Armonia* was founded in Turin in December 1848. A second, more conservative Catholic newspaper, *L'Unità Cattolica*, would begin publication in Turin in March 1863 (after the unification of Italy). The Jesuit conservative religious periodical, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, was founded in April 1850 (in Naples then transferred to Rome). The Vatican daily, *L'Osservatore Romano*, would be founded in June 1861.

4. Don Bosco's Response: Writer and Publisher

Don Bosco quickly realized the importance of moving into this field, both as author and as publisher. As author he had already proven himself in various genres and would now enter the field in a major way. By 1856, Don Bosco could claim authorship of 26 works:³ As publisher he would enter the field in 1862 with the establishment of the print shop and bookstore (see earlier discussion). In his Circular Letter of 1885 (On the Apostolate of the Press), Don Bosco wrote: “This is one of the most important apostolates entrusted to me by Divine Providence; and you know that I worked at it untiringly, even when engaged in a thousand other tasks.”⁴

Don Bosco's writings may be classified by the prevailing concerns driving him at various periods during his lifetime. For example, as mentioned above, he authored devotional, educational, works in the 1840s, apologetic works in the 1850s, works relating to the Salesian Society in the 1860s. In the present context, in response to the Church's call, he engaged in the apostolate of the press by authoring writings on two fronts—in defense of the Church against the onslaught of the liberal revolution and in defense of the Catholic faith against the proselytizing activity of the Waldenses or “Protestants.”

Leaving the anti-Waldensian apologetic for later discussion, here we survey writings authored by Don Bosco in the fifties in defense of the Church (as well as some other important works).

³ Last will and testament of July 26, 1856, in *IBM X*, 1331-1333 (omitted in *EBM*). See list and comments given earlier. Stella, *DB:LW*, 259-299; M. Ribotta, Don Bosco's History of Italy [...], in *Journal of Salesian Studies* 4:2 (Fall 1993). For the Life of Dominic Savio see discussion in the preceding chapter, based on A. Lenti's study in *JSS* 12:1 (2001), 1-52.

⁴ For the complete text of this Letter see Appendix below.



18 – The conservative Catholic newspaper *L'Armonia* pictured in the guise of an old nun, in a caricature from the anticlerical satirical journal *Il Fischietto* (The Whistle) (1854)

II. Writings in Defense of the Church and the papacy

F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 465-485 (History of Italy, 1st edition), and 547-560 (2nd edition); 478-485 (Lives of the Popes); Alberto Caviglia, *Storia d'Italia*, in *OSEI III* (Torino: SEI, 1935), cxii+644 p.; F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 465-476; Francesco Traniello, "Don Bosco e l'educazione giovanile: La 'Storia d'Italia'," in *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare*, a cura di F. Traniello (Torino: SEI, 1987), 81-111; M. Ribotta, "Don Bosco's History of Italy [...]," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 4:2 (Fall 1993) 107-129.

1. The History of Italy, First Edition (1855-6)⁵

Among Don Bosco's writing in the 1850s the *History of Italy* should be accorded a place of honor, if only because of its success. On the drawing board already in 1853,⁶ it was completed in 1855 and published in 1856.

Purpose and Style

Its purpose was to be religious, moral, and apologetic—that is, to show that Italy was what it was because of the Catholic religion, that same religion which was now being vilified in the liberal press.

It was addressed to “children,” young people, and simple folk. As was the case with Don Bosco's *Bible History* and his *History of the Church*, its language was basic, simple and direct. The narrative was extremely simple in construction and story line, as well as highly selective with respect to the historical material used.

Sources

In the introduction Don Bosco assures the reader that, though addressed to simple people, the history is based on the most reputable works. His sources, however, are few. He ignored the more scholarly works but used instead a few that were didactic in purpose and addressed to young people. Besides works already used in his *History of the Church* (such as Bérault-Bercastel adapted and continued by Henrion), he made some use of textbooks authored by contemporary teachers for classroom use. Among the latter were a *History of Italy* by Leone Tettoni (published by Paravia, 1852), and a *History of Europe*, with emphasis on Italy, overall reliable, in three small volumes by university professor Ercole Ricotti (1816-1883).⁷

⁵ *Storia d'Italia narrata alla gioventù da' suoi primi abitatori sino ai nostri giorni corredata di una carta geografica d'Italia*, dal Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni (Torino: tip. Paravia e Co., 1855), 560 pp. (Even though dated 1855, it did not come off the press until August 1856.)

⁶ Don Bosco to publisher Marietti, Letter of February 14, 1853, in Motto, *Epistolario* I, 190.

⁷ *Breve storia d'Europa e specialmente d'Italia*, di E. Ricotti, profess. di storia moderna nella R. Università di Torino, 2nd. Ed. (Torino: Stamperia Reale, 1852-1854).

But the two works on which he relied the most, both written for children, were: the universal history series by Jules-Raymond Lamé-Fleury (1797-1878), and the series on Italian history entitled, *Giannetto. Letture elementari per fanciulli* by Luigi Alessandro Parravicini (1799-1880). The language adapted for children, the warm and direct presentation, and the avowed moral purpose of these two authors supplied Don Bosco with the model he was looking for.

Organization and Contents

Don Bosco organized his History of Italy in four parts: Pagan Italy, from its origins to the beginning of the Christian era; Christian Italy, from Christ to the end of the Western Roman Empire (C.E. 476); Medieval Italy, from 476 to the discovery of America (1492); and Modern Italy, from 1492 to March (!) 1856.

Each section is divided into chapters bearing capsule titles, centering on a person or an event, preferably of a religious nature: "The Era of the Martyrs," "The Crusades," "The Battle of Lepanto," "Julian the Apostate," "Gregory VII," "Emperor Napoleon," etc. Social, political, economic issues are carefully avoided.

In the actual composition of the text, Don Bosco selected what was most appealing and edifying. He used his sources without any critical concern. Some times he drew on the source literally, at other times he reworked his source, or again he compiled the passage from different sources. The text of History of Italy is therefore heavily indebted, and its factual reliability is that of the few minor works used in its compilation. But even more damaging is the ideology that runs through it.

Ideology

The *History of Italy* was clearly intended as a long lesson in personal and social morality, a lesson shaped by Don Bosco's own personal religious, moral, and political ideas. Thus, in commending Archimedes of Syracuse he writes: "A virtuous person is honored by all, even by his enemies." The story of the (revolutionary) Gracchi brothers closes with the words: "Thus perished the two Gracchi brothers. They would have been cherished as good and honest

young men, had they not attempted to take by force and violence that to which an honest citizen has no right.”⁸ His comment on the suicide of one of his “heroes,” Seneca the Younger (d. 65 C.E.), is: “The Christian religion, however, regards as a greater hero the person who knows how to bear the burden of misfortune.”⁹

According to Don Bosco, virtue or vice is what determines the destinies of nations, as well as the actions of political leaders, of artists, and above all of saints. Thus he explains the fall of individuals and nations as due to pride, envy, egoism, infidelity to treaties, treachery, and sacrilege. Attila and Napoleon are blamed not for their policies, but for their pride and cruelty. On the other hand, Emperor Charlemagne was “admirable in all things,” “simple in his lifestyle,” a soldier of great piety, and a supporter of the new “arts, the sciences, to civilization, and to virtue.”¹⁰ Among the popes, Gregory VII (1073-1085) is the most admired. “We Italians cannot but greatly admire this Pope—first, because in some respects he freed Italy from foreign domination; and secondly, because from that time on emperors and kings lost their power to interfere in the election of Roman Pontiffs.”¹¹

The role of Providence is emphasized, and historical forces are overlooked. Thus “Providence decreed that Rome should dominate the whole of Italy.” Providence is manifested also in the catastrophes that befell people and nations. Thus Savonarola was punished for opposing the Pope, God’s representative on earth: “If Savonarola had been submissive to his superiors, he would not have suffered those misfortunes.” Commenting on the frightening starvation death of the Tyrant of Pisa, Count Ugolino della Gherardesca and his sons in the tower, he writes:

My lads, the events I have just related to you, cause us to reflect seriously on how God’s high Providence watches over men’s actions and destiny. [...] Count Ugolino had been cruel, and had caused numerous fellow citizens to perish in his prisons. That is why he himself, when condemned to death, had to suffer all the horrors of starvation. How terrible are God’s judgments!¹²

⁸ *History of Italy*, 76 and 80, both comments taken from Lamé-Fleury.

⁹ *History of Italy*, 95.

¹⁰ *History of Italy*, 219, 221, 222.

¹¹ *History of Italy*, 244-249.

¹² *History of Italy*, 293.



19 – Map of Italy inserted in Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia* (History of Italy) (1855)

On the other hand, Francis Joseph of Austria “was blessed by God” for his concordat with the Holy See; and so was Napoleon III for protecting the Catholic religion.¹³ Don Bosco’s theory of history then was “Providentialist.” Virtue or vice, respect for, or opposition to religion decide the historical process.

Occasionally Don Bosco makes political comments with implicit or explicit reference to the situations in his day. Thus he takes occasion to downgrade democracy: “My friends, Venice became the most powerful republic in Italy because she had always been governed by the best men, and had never fallen into the hands of the people, as did the republics of Florence and Genoa.” He supports legitimacy and monarchic rule. He attacks freemasonry as dedicated to the destruction of society and to the annihilation of the Holy See and of all other “thrones.”

The moral-religious and the political comments that punctuate Don Bosco’s *History of Italy* are essentially those of a conservative still writing in the spirit of the Restoration. Don Bosco clearly supports Pius IX’s temporal power, the Piedmont of Charles Albert, and the Austria of Francis Joseph.

It was for this very reason, its ultramontane ecclesiology, that the liberal anticlerical newspaper, the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, mounted its vicious attack against the History in its second edition (1859).

2. History of Italy, Second Edition (1859)¹⁴

Eight New chapters

In the second edition (bearing the same title as the first) Don Bosco revised and enlarged the text of his *History of Italy* and brought it up to date. The new period runs from the Crimean War (1854-1855, treated in the first edition) to March 1859, the eve of the Second War of Italian Independence (involving Piedmont and France against Austria).

The aim of the new edition was to make it suitable as a text in secondary and teachers’ training schools. For this purpose, while keeping the fourfold division of the first edition (see above), he enlarged the early sections and added 8 new chapters to Part IV (Modern Italy).

¹³ *History of Italy*, 522-523. These assessments were written in 1855!

¹⁴ Cf. F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 547-560.

Ch. 37 is dedicated to the earthquake at Naples, the opening of China, and the appearance of the comet Donati.

In Ch. 38, Don Bosco gives sketches of important contemporary people. The last one mentioned in the first edition was the sculptor Antonio Canova (1757-1822). Among these new people, he speaks of the priest Carlo Denina, a learned historian (*Le Rivoluzioni d'Italia*, among other titles). In real life this historian was a bitter social critic, relegated to the backwater of Vercelli for ascribing the decadence of Italy to bad educational systems, corruption of the nobility, endemic mendicancy, and excessive numbers of monks, nuns, and priests. But Don Bosco praises him for his perseverance in study and hard work: true grit.

In Ch. 39 Don Bosco makes up for having omitted in the first edition mention of Joseph-Marie de Maistre (1754-1821). Having escaped from France at the time of the French Revolution, he served as ambassador and minister under Victor Emmanuel I of Savoy. He was a dedicated, anti-revolutionary political writer and a die-hard ultramontanist. Among his works, Don Bosco singles out for special praise *Du Pape* (1819) and *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* (1821) for their “sublime philosophy.” He is also praised for having been throughout his whole life “an avowed enemy of idleness.”

Ch. 41 speaks of Antonio Cesari (1760-1828), an Oratorian who had written commentaries on medieval Italian religious classics. But he also “found time to instruct the young, to visit prisoners and the sick, and to help indigent families.”

In Ch. 42, Don Bosco speaks about the poet Vincenzo Monti (1754-1828), and quotes some of his anti-revolutionary verse. Although his life had not always been exemplary, he died a holy death.

Ch. 43 presents the linguistic genius, Cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti (1774-1840), “who could speak more than 300 languages and dialects.” He cared nothing for food, clothes, or sleep. He spent 14 or 15 hours a day at his studies, and was untouched by vanity.

Ch. 44 is devoted to Silvio Pellico (librarian to Marchioness Barolo and a friend of Don Bosco). After the terrible experience of his imprisonment by the Austrian police in the Spielberg fortress, he came to Turin where “he spent his days in study and in the practice of religion.” He also found his happiness in helping the young and the poor.

Before concluding, Don Bosco allots a short and non-committal chapter (Ch. 45) to the great Antonio Rosmini-Serbati (1797-1855). Don Bosco knew

that some of the great philosopher's books had been placed on the Index, but refrains from discussing the matter of Rosmini's thought. He praises him for his charity and for humbly submitting to the pope's judgment. "In Rosmini the depth of scholarship were joined to the staunch and humble faith of a good Catholic."

Besides its moralizing, the second edition of the *History of Italy* evidences Don Bosco's thinking at the time when he was founding the Salesian Society.

Critical Review of the History of Italy in the Gazzetta del Popolo

The most important liberal (and anticlerical) Turin newspaper, the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, published an excoriating review of the *History of Italy* (October 18, 1859).

Citing Don Bosco's advocacy of ideas and of people that denied everything that the liberal revolution and the movement for Italian unity and independence stood for, the reviewer calls Don Bosco, "Father Loriguet redivivus" (*Padre Loriguet redivivo*). The famous French Jesuit, Father Jean-Nicolas Loriguet (1767-1845) had published a *History of France A.M.D.G.* (1823) for use in schools. The Larousse *Grand Dictionnaire* had branded it as a "skein of lies designed to inspire pupils with hatred for the ideas, institutions, and principles on which modern society has been based since 1789 [...]."

The comparison with Loriguet (whether or not Loriguet merited such censure) was extremely damaging to Don Bosco and his book, since it cast them both in the role of reactionaries. To make his point, the reviewer went on to cite numerous examples from the book that would substantiate his indictment. For example, he accused Don Bosco of being pro-Austrian, especially in his description of the First War of Italian Independence (1848-1849) and of the Crimean War (1854-55).

The reviewer finally pleads with the Minister of Public Instruction to ban the book and forbid its use in schools.

Niccolò Tommaseo's Moderate Review

A literary figure and historian of some note, Niccolò Tommaseo (1802-1874) was an independent thinker and a moderate liberal who had

been driven into exile (Paris) by Italian regional rulers and by Pope Gregory XVI for his ideas and books. Although a republican (though a federalist), in the 1850s he lived in Turin undisturbed, though not at ease, being critical of both the monarchy and Cavour's policies. Don Bosco, trying to advertise his *History of Italy*, sent Tommaseo a complimentary copy with a note asking him to mention the book in the teachers' journal *L'Istituto*. Tommaseo, who knew of Don Bosco and his work, and had been impressed with his charity during the cholera epidemic of 1854, wrote a short, moderate review praising the author for his efforts to present the complicated history of Italy in a simple and moral way to children.¹⁵ Don Bosco was delighted with this unexpected boost.

3. The Lives of the Early Popes (1857-58)¹⁶

Purpose of the Series. Life of St. Peter (1857)

This project had an apologetic aim, namely that of defending the papacy and Pius IX in particular, who since 1848 had become very unpopular. As Don Bosco states in his introduction, knowledge of the facts of the papacy would provide an antidote to "the hatred and aversion directed against the popes and their authority." Thus began a project, hagiographic surely, but the difficulty of which he had perhaps not anticipated.

He already had some experience in the area of Christian antiquity. Besides the *History of the Church*, he had recently published the *Life of St. Martin of Tour* (4th century) and the *Life of St. Pancratius Martyr* (1st century) in the *Catholic Readings*.¹⁷

For these pamphlets (so he states in his introductions) he had used, directly or indirectly, several ancient sources, the Bollandists, as well as more modern works. For the lives of the early popes he had to rely on similar sources, material that was hagiographic and (except for the Bollandists) to a large extent

¹⁵ *L'Istituto*, Nov 26, 1859.

¹⁶ Alberto Caviglia, *Le Vite dei Papi*, in *OSEI* II. Part I & II (2 volumes). (Torino: SEI, 1932), xliii+446 & 592 pp. (from St. Peter to St. Melchiades, d. 313); F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 478-485. As was the case with the history of Italy, here also I am guided by Desramaut's presentation.

¹⁷ *Catholic Readings* 3: ##15 & 16 (Oct. 10 & 25, 1855), and 4: #3 (May, 1856).

legendary. He did so without any critical suspicion, and hence from the start the series suffered from its doubtful presuppositions.

The Life of St. Peter was the first of a long series of lives of ancient popes.¹⁸ For St. Peter, so Don Bosco tells us, he used a three-volume life by Luigi Cuccagni, and a more recent one by Antonio Cesari. Guided by these authors, he used the New Testament data, as well as the (apocryphal) Acts of Peter and other ancient legendary material, all granted the same reliability. The value of the booklet, therefore, has to be sought elsewhere—namely, in the apologetic and moralizing purpose and in the comments connected with the stories. For example, after relating the episode of Peter walking on the water, he writes: “The Fathers see [in this episode] the dangerous predicaments in which the Heads of the Church have some times found themselves. Jesus Christ, however, the Church’s invisible Head, comes quickly to the rescue. He does permit persecutions, but the victory always goes to the Church.

Further Lives of Early Popes

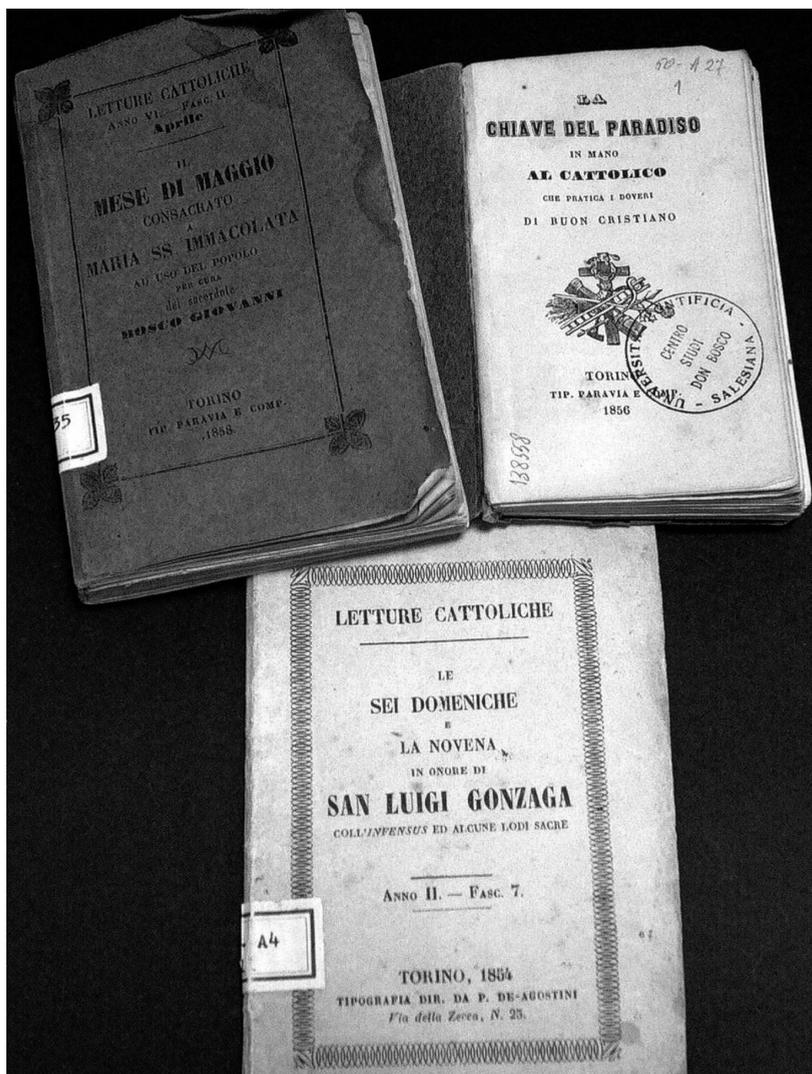
The Life of St. Peter was followed by that of St. Paul (by association) and then by the Lives of more popes.

In 1857: Life of SS. Linus, Cletus, and Clement; Life of SS. Anacletus, Evaristus and Alexander; Life of SS. Sixtus, Telesphorus, Hyginus, and Pius I (with an appendix on St. Justin Martyr, d. 167 C.E.).

In 1858: Life of SS. Anicetus, Soter, Eleutherus, Victor, and Zephirinus; Life of St. Callistus I.

A few remarks will suffice: (1) Don Bosco maintained the distinction between Cletus and Anacletus. (2) After St. Peter, Don Bosco abandons the strictly biographical format and surveys pontificates, thus introducing many people and topics. (3) Justin Martyr [see above] was dealt with in an appendix, but St. Polycarp of Smyrna, M. (d. 166 C.E.) and St. Irenaeus of Lyons, M? (d. 202 C.E.) deserved a separate issue within the series, even though they were not popes. (4) Don Bosco does not deviate from the hagiographic model and from an uncritical use of sources. He writes in the medieval hagiographic tradition for simple nineteenth-century folk. (5) The names of authors (old and

¹⁸ *Vita di S. Pietro principe degli Apostoli, primo Papa dopo Gesù Cristo* Per cura del sac. Bosco Giovanni (Torino: G.B. Paravia, January 1857), in *Lecture Cattolice* 4: #11, 180 pp.



20 – Some devotional pamphlets authored by Don Bosco

new) to whom he refers in his introduction, are in all probability cited from the manuals he is using. (6) Moral and religious exhortations are paramount. (7) Unlike many of the other works of Don Bosco, the *Lives of the Popes* were not re-edited during his lifetime.

III. Devotional and Educational Writings

1. The Month of May in Honor of Mary Most Holy Immaculate (1858)¹⁹

This is Don Bosco's first of a number of Marian writings, and (as the title implies) it was a contribution to a widespread devotion (Month of May). Moreover, in the late fifties (!) it was intended as a homage to the Immaculate Conception.²⁰

In reality, the book says very little about Mary, but very much about the Christian life. It is a little spiritual catechism that takes the reader from God the Creator to salvation in heaven.

The practice of the Month of May took root in Italy at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In 1726 the Jesuit Annibale Dionisi authored a *Month of May in Honor of Mary*, and in 1758 another Jesuit, Francesco Lalomia, did the same. In 1785, another Jesuit, Alfonso Muzzarelli, authored a *Month of May*, which became standard. The practice consisted in an exercise "of flowers" (virtues) with prayers, meditations, and songs. St. Alphonsus' *Glories of Mary* provided patterns for the meditations, but practical moral, religious, and even political issues were raised and "practices" suggested.

Don Bosco's format is traditional, and he borrows from St. Alphonsus, St. Leonard of Porto Maurizio, and from Muzzarelli. But his *Month of May* is unique in many ways. Refraining from the usual theological, poetic and mystic meditations on Mary, he presents a series of dogmatic and moralizing little sermons covering the subjects usually heard at spiritual exercises or at parish missions.²¹

¹⁹ *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo*, per cura del sac. Bosco Giovanni (Torino: G. B. Paravia e Co., April 1858), in *Lecture Cattoliche* 6: #2, 192 pp. Studies: an in-depth study by P. Stella, "I tempi e gli scritti che prepararono il 'Mese di Maggio' di Don Bosco" in *Salesianum* 20 (1958) 648-694; F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 508-513.

²⁰ The *Month of May* will be discussed later in connection with Don Bosco's Marian devotion.

²¹ Here is the list of topics: God the creator, the Soul, the Redeemer, the Church of Christ, the Head of the Church, the Pastors of the Church, Faith, the Sacraments, the Dignity of being a Christian, the Value of time, the Presence of God, the Purpose of human life, the Salvation of one's soul, Sin, Death, Particular judgment, Universal judgment, the Pains of hell, the Eternity of the pains of hell, God's mercy, Confession, the Confessor, Holy Mass, Holy Communion, the Sin of impurity, the Virtue of purity, Human respect, Heaven, Means

The significance of Don Bosco's *Month of May* lies in the fact that it is a statement of how he conceived practical Christian living. It is a presentation of the spiritual, ascetical program he had been developing for himself and for his educational purposes, and he takes advantage of the month of May to set it forth in simple language for simple folk. Salvation in the full sense of victory over evil and over death ("God, soul, eternity") is what the book is all about. At the center of the Month of May (between the fifteenth and the nineteenth day) stand the "Last Things," death and the verities that follow it. The first fourteen days explain how one may prepare one's self for that supreme confrontation. The next ten days explain how one may return and "win" heaven, by sincere conversion after having strayed.

2. The Christian's Pocket Guide (1858)²²

The pamphlet may be regarded as an appendix to the Month of May, for it is a series of moral, social, domestic advice to help one achieve one's salvation in one's actual circumstances. The advice (so Don Bosco states) is gleaned from the Bible, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Francis de Sales, St. Philip Neri, and Blessed Sebastian Valfré. They were the holy patrons of the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*).

In the first place, Don Bosco established a general framework, with advice on: God, Church, Pope, commandments, faith, sin and heaven. These topics express his basic convictions as spiritual director (Dominic Savio!). "God wants all of us to be saved, in fact, to become saints. To be saved one must keep eternity firmly in mind, God in one's heart, and the world under one's feet. Each one is bound to be faithful to the duties of one's state in life."

Secondly, Don Bosco envisages situations in which individuals in various walks of life may find themselves. He addresses these situations with moralistic advice (stressing "duties") derived from the above-mentioned sources. For

to ensure one's going to heaven, Mary our protector in this life, and Mary our protector at the hour of our death. (The *Month of May* is discussed later in connection with Don Bosco's devotion to Our Lady.)

²² *Porta teo, Cristiano*, [Take it along, Christian] *ovvero Avvisi importanti intorno ai doveri del Cristiano, acciocchè ciascuno possa conseguire la propria salvezza nello stato in cui si trova* (Torino: G.B. Paravia e Co., July 1858), in *Letture Cattoliche* 6: #5, 72 pp. (Don Bosco signed the Introduction). Cf. F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 513-515.

example general advice to fathers is derived from Blessed Sebastian Valfré), and particular advice, from Scripture and the Fathers. St. Philip Neri is the source for the general duties of young people and for things that are especially important for young people. There is also advice for mother, housewives, daughters and women in service.

By stressing duties for the various categories, is Don Bosco just giving basic practical advice, or is he propounding a “morality of duty,” with a somewhat disturbing emphasis on being content with one’s condition? And if so, does it reflect Don Bosco’s own morality and spirituality? In this regard, one should look beyond Don Bosco’s emphases in this work on duties in one’s state in life, and consider instead Don Bosco’s life as a whole. Duty was an important component, certainly, but only in view of doing the will of God, and of loving God and neighbor.

3. The Life of Young Dominic Savio (1859)

Alberto Caviglia, *La Vita di Domenico Savio e “Savio Domenico e Don Bosco”*: Studio di Don Alberto Caviglia (Torino: SEI, 1943), in: *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di “Don Bosco” nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti*, a cura della Pia Società Salesiana, Vol. IV. Don Bosco’s text is that of the fifth edition, 1878. The text is then followed by a 609-page study. [Caviglia, *Opere e Scritti* IV]; Alberto Caviglia, *San Domenico Savio nel ricordo dei contemporanei*. Posthumous (Torino: Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, 1957) [Caviglia, *Ricordo*]. – Documentation and testimonies: Carlo Salotti, *Domenico Savio* (Torino: Libreria Editrice Internazionale, 1915) [Salotti, *Savio*]; Michele Molineris, *Nuova Vita di Domenico Savio. Quello che le biografie di San Domenico Savio non dicono* (Castelnuovo Don Bosco: Istituto Salesiano Bernardi Semeria, 1974) [Molineris, *Nuova Vita Savio*]; [Eugenio Ceria] San Giovanni Bosco, *Il Beato Domenico Savio Allievo dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. Edited by E. Ceria (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1950, 2nd ed., 1954). [Ceria 1950 and Ceria 1954]; A. Lenti, “Vita... Savio,” *Journal of Salesian Studies* 12:1 (2001), 1-52 [Lenti, *Vita... Savio*].

A mere 21 months after Dominic Savio’s death (March 9, 1857), Don Bosco in January 1859 published a biography of young Dominic in the *Catholic Readings*. He followed this little book personally and with love through five successive editions, each revised and augmented.

Publication History: Five Editions Published under Don Bosco's Authority

(1) The first edition was published in the early series of the Catholic Readings and bore the title, *Life of Young Dominic Savio, a Pupil of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*.²³

(2) The second edition came out in April 1860. It appears that this edition, no longer available, was prepared and published by Don Bosco to correct and complement his earlier treatment of the "swimming episode," following criticisms by Savio's companion Giovanni Zucca.²⁴ The 2nd edition also featured various revisions, an additional chapter and an appendix. The additional chapter dealt with Savio's "mortification of all his external senses," and the Appendix reported "graces" obtained through Dominic's intercession.

(3) The third, enlarged edition was published in August 1861. Besides including the new material of the 2nd edition, it permanently established the basic biographical content of the biography through the addition of a good number of episodes. We may mention Savio's horror of blasphemy, his action against the impudent man, his correspondence with his friend Giovanni Massaglia, etc. The Appendix likewise contained more reports of "graces."

The first three editions came off the presses of G.B. Paravia in the older pocket-sized format of the *Catholic Readings*.

(4) The fourth, enhanced edition of 1866 came off the Oratory presses in the new format (32mo) of the *Catholic Readings*. It was personally supervised by Don Bosco who improved the language and added new material in the first section, chiefly in the form of annotations.

(5) The fifth edition came out 12 years later in 1878, again entitled *Life of Young Dominic Savio, a Pupil of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, with an Appendix of graces. The text of the galley proofs was that of the 4th edition, but Don Bosco re-worked the language in places and made two sizable additions. One dealt with Savio's scruples; the other was a biographical sketch of Father Giuseppe Bongiovanni (a close friend of Dominic), who had died in 1868. (Reprints of the fifth edition appeared in 1890 and 1893).

²³ *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*, per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni (Torino: Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp, 1859), in *Letture Cattoliche* 7:11 (January 1859), 142 pages.

²⁴ In the first edition of the *Vita*, Don Bosco wrote that Dominic had consistently declined the invitation to go swimming. Giovanni Zucca revealed (publicly) that Dominic had once gone swimming with him.

Further Editions Based on Don Bosco's Definitive Text (Fifth Edition)

(6) In 1908, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Dominic's death and of the beginning of the Informative Diocesan Process, Father Angelo Amadei published a new edition on the basis of Don Bosco's third, fourth and fifth editions.²⁵ In this "milestone" edition, Part I gives Don Bosco's text with the Appendices of the fifth edition; Part II (entitled, *Additional Memoirs*) gives, among other items, the text of the Lanzo Dream of 1876 (also called Savio Dream, or Dream of the Salesian Garden).

(7) In 1934, on the occasion of Don Bosco's canonization, the Salesian Publishing House (SEI) published a new edition of the Savio biography (together with those of Comollo, Magone and Besucco) in the Series, *Letture edificanti*. The text is taken faithfully from Don Bosco's 5th edition.

(8) Father Alberto Caviglia's edition of 1943 in *Opere e Scritti* IV (followed by the "Essay") gives the text of 1934 faithfully checked against the Ms. and the original of Don Bosco's 5th edition. As Caviglia writes, it is a "true and authentic definitive edition given us by the saintly Author in his own words, and in his own words only."²⁶

(9) Father Eugenio Ceria's editions of 1950 and of 1954 appeared on the occasion of Savio's beatification and canonization respectively. The text is again that of the 5th edition. Comments, with quotes from the Processes, follow each chapter.²⁷

This summary publication history is sufficient to show the importance of the Savio biography in the Author's mind and in the history of the Salesian Society.

Sources of the Savio Biography

For the biography Don Bosco obtained information and testimonies from people who had known Dominic in the places where he had lived. During his brief life of not quite 15 years Dominic lived in four different places. (1)

²⁵ Ven. Giovanni Bosco, *Il Servo di Dio Domenico Savio*. Con illustrazioni originali di Giovanni Carpanetto (Torino: Tipografia Salesiana, 1908).

²⁶ Caviglia, *Vita... Savio* (Introduction), in *Opere e Scritti* IV, xvii.

²⁷ Caviglia *Vita di Savio Domenico* (Introduction), in *Opere e Scritti* IV, x-xvii.

He lived in the village of San Giovanni (under the municipal town of Riva, near Chieri), for the first 18 months of his life, from April 2, 1842 (date of his birth) to November 1843, when the family moved to Morialdo (under Castelnuovo). This was Don Bosco's own village. (2) He lived in Morialdo for 9 years and some 4 months, until February 1853, when (3) the Savios moved to Mondonio. Mondonio (today under Castelnuovo) was a small separate municipal town in those days. Having met Don Bosco on October 2, 1854, Dominic left Mondonio and (4) entered the Oratory in Turin on October 29. There he lived until March 1, 1857, nearly two-and-a-half years. (5) He then returned to Mondonio where he died 9 days later, March 9, 1857.

Dominic, as may be seen, spent some two-thirds of his life in Morialdo. There he began his primary school under the local chaplain, which he continued in Castelnuovo and completed at Mondonio.

For the biography Don Bosco, besides drawing on personal knowledge, relied on the witness of persons that had known Dominic.

By letter, he applied for information to the three priests who had been Dominic's schoolteachers: Fathers Giovanni Battista Zucca (1818-1878), chaplain of St. Peter's church at Morialdo and local teacher, Alessandro Allora (1819-1880) teacher in the primary school at Castelnuovo, and Giuseppe Cugliero (1808-1880), teacher in the primary school of Mondonio. Their replies are included in the Acts of the process of Savio's beatification.²⁸

The first of the three to reply, by letter dated April 19, 1857 (a mere 40 days after Dominic's death), was the teacher of Mondonio Father Giuseppe Cugliero. He sent in a substantial report on the virtues and good character of "the best pupil he had ever had in his teaching career of 20 years."²⁹

Father Giovanni Battista Zucca, the chaplain and teacher of Morialdo replied by letter dated May 5, 1857. He had only words of praise for young Dominic, familiarly known by the endearing name of *Minot*, whom he had first known when appointed chaplain in 1848. He does, however, disapprove of the parents' permissive indulgence.³⁰

²⁸ *Positio super introductione causae* and *Summarium* (Rome: typ. Pont. Instituti Pii IX, 1913). Not having access to the *Positio* or the *Summarium*, I rely on works cited in the Biographical Note above.

²⁹ *Cenni storici sulla vita del giovane Domenico Savio di Riva di Chieri, frazione borgata di San Giovanni* (Historical note on the life of the young man, Dominic Savio, from San Giovanni, a village of Riva of Chieri), in *Summarium*, 212-214.

³⁰ *Summarium*, 207-208.

Father Alessandro Allora, Dominic's teacher in Castelnuovo in 1852-1853 wrote a fairly detailed eulogy, with a touching portrait of the boy. On visiting the Oratory some time later, he expressed his satisfaction with the fact that Dominic had persevered "in the way of wisdom" already undertaken under his teaching.³¹

At Don Bosco's request several youngsters, friends of Savio, as well as adults who had known him, submitted notes about him, all of them favorable if not flattering. In the adult category, Don Bosco had a number of testimonies from correspondents. We may list the following: a couple of pages from Giuseppe Reano (an alumnus of the Oratory, 33 years of age); a letter from Giuseppe Bongiovanni (a friend of Savio and a Salesian seminarian, 23 years of age); a memoir from Deacon Michael Rua (22 years of age); a testimony on Savio's virtues from Luigi Marcellino (a seminarian at the Oratory, 22 years of age); a short biographical sketch by Giovanni Bonetti (21 years of age); a letter from Francesco Vaschetti (19 years of age, later a priest). Several young men, companions of Savio, also responded to Don Bosco's invitation: for example, one named Roetto and another named Antonio Duina. These and other testimonies are included in the Acts of the Process of Savio's beatification.³²

Besides the testimonies from the Oratory people, Don Bosco used some correspondence between Dominic and the folks back at home, a eulogy by professor Matteo Picco who had been his teacher for the term 1856-1857 (fourth gymnasium, unfinished because of Savio's death).

More importantly, Don Bosco relied on his own recollections and on notes he had taken regarding Savio over the period of the latter's presence at the Oratory. Don Bosco writes in the biography with reference to Dominic's offering of self to Mary on the occasion of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1854:

After he had thus placed himself under the protection of the blessed Virgin, Dominic's life and conduct became so edifying and his practice of virtue so perfect that I began jotting down some of the things he did so as not to forget them.³³

³¹ *Summarium*, 209-212.

³² *Summarium*, 219-220, 241-243, 225-227, 236-238, 231-233, 233-235, 239, 240.

³³ Bosco, *Vita Savio*, 40, in *Opere Edite*, 190.

Contents of the Savio Biography

The first seven chapters (pages 11-33) of the biography proper describe Dominic's edifying early life and education before entering the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. This section covers the first twelve-and-a-half years of Dominic's real life, from April 2, 1842 to October 2, 1854.

The main part of the book (Chapters 7-22, pages 34-109) is concerned with Savio's meeting with Don Bosco and his subsequent entrance and virtuous life in the Oratory. This period runs from October 2, 1854 to March 1, 1857, spanning some two-and-a-half years.

The closing chapters (23-26, pages 110-136) relate Dominic's departure from the Oratory, the progress of his illness and his saintly death (March 1-9, 1857), with additional testimonies.

The above simply describes the structural organization of the biography, but Don Bosco's aim, evidenced throughout, is to challenge his young people to enter the way of holiness. To this end he places before them the example of one of their companions who accepted the challenge and completed the spiritual journey—the ideal realized.

APPENDIX

**Don Bosco's Letter on the Apostolate of the Press (March 19, 1885) -
"Spreading Good Books"**

A printed copy of this letter bearing Don Bosco's authentic [?] signature exists in *ASC A175 Lettere circolari ai Salesiani, FDB 1368 C12-D3*. The text is given in *Ceria-Ep IV*, 318-321, and in *Lettere circolari di Don Bosco e di Don Rua* (Torino: Tip. dell'Orat. SFdS, 1896), 24-29. It is not found in the *Biographical Memoirs*.

Turin, March 19, Feast of St. Joseph, 1885

Dearest Children in Jesus Christ,

The Lord is witness of how keenly I desire to see you, to be with you, to talk over our affairs with you, and to find comfort in confidential, heart-to-heart exchanges. Regrettably, my dearest children, my failing strength, the lingering effects of past illnesses, and the urgent business requiring my presence in France at this time, prevent me, at least for the present, to follow this impulse of my love for you. And so, since I cannot pay you a visit in person, I do so by this letter. I feel certain that you will be happy to know that I am thinking of you—you who are my glory and my support, as well as my hope. And, in accordance with my desire to see you grow every day more in zeal and merits before God, I will not neglect from time to time to suggest to you such means as will help make your ministry ever more fruitful.

[Theological Rationale]

One such means, the one I wish to commend most warmly to your attention is the spreading of good books. I do not hesitate to describe this work as divine, because God himself made use of it for the regeneration of mankind. The Books which he inspired were the means through which the true teaching was brought to the world. He wished that these Books be available in every town and village of Palestine, and that they be read every Sabbath in religious assemblies. At first these books were the exclusive possession of the Hebrew people. But after the tribes were exiled to Assyria and Chaldea, the Sacred Scriptures were translated into the Syro-Chaldaic language, so that the whole of Central Asia had access to them in its own tongue. With the rise of Greek power the Jews established colonies all over the world, and the Holy Books were copied and given wide circulation. The Septuagint

translation of the Scriptures found its way also into the libraries of gentile peoples. Thus, orators, poets and philosophers in those times drew on the truth of the Bible in not a few instances. Through his inspired writings God was preparing the world for the coming of the Savior.

Therefore it is incumbent on us to imitate the work of our heavenly Father. The spreading of good books among the people is one of the means whereby the Savior's reign can be effectively established and maintained in so many souls. The ideas, the principles and the moral teaching of a Catholic book are derived from the divine books and from apostolic tradition. Catholic books are all the more necessary today, when irreligion and immorality make use of the press as a weapon to plunder the flock of Jesus Christ, and to drag down to perdition the unwary and the disobedient. We must, therefore, counter-strike with like weapons.

[The Power of the Book]

It is noteworthy, moreover, that books, even though lacking the force of the living word, have the advantage in certain situations. A good book can find its way into homes where the priest is not welcome. It will be kept as a souvenir or accepted as a present even by a bad person. A good book enters a home without blushing. If rebuffed, it is not discouraged. If taken up and read, it teaches the truth calmly. If set aside it does not complain, but patiently awaits the time when conscience may rekindle the desire to know the truth. It may perhaps be left to collect dust on a table or on a library shelf, and given no attention for a long time. But then comes the hour of solitude, of sadness, of sorrow, of boredom, of need for relaxation, or of anxiety about the future. Then this faithful friend shakes off its dust, opens its pages, and, as was the case with St. Augustine, Blessed Columbinus and St. Ignatius, it may bring about a conversion. A good book is gentle with those that are hampered by human respect and addresses them without arousing suspicion in anyone. It is on familiar terms with good people, and is always ready to make meaningful conversation and to go along with them at any time anywhere. How many souls have been saved, preserved from error, encouraged in the practice of virtue through good books. The person who gives a good book as a gift acquires great merit with God, even though he may only barely succeed in awakening the thought of God thereby. In most instances, however, the good that is done is much greater. Even though the person to whom the book was given may not read it, once brought into a family it will be read by a son or a daughter, by a friend or a neighbor. In a small town that book may touch the lives of one hundred people. Only God knows how much good a book can do in a city, in a public library, in a workers' association, or in a hospital where the friendly gift of a book is much appreciated. The fear that someone may refuse the gift of a good book should not deter us—on the contrary. A confrere of ours in Marseilles was wont to visit the docks regularly and take along a supply of

good books to give away to stevedores, repairmen and sailors. Such gifts were invariably gladly and thankfully accepted; and sometimes those men would immediately page through the book and then peruse it with curiosity.

[Don Bosco's and the Salesians Commitment to the Apostolate of the Press]

Let these simple preliminary reflections suffice. I would now like to draw your attention to some of the reasons why we, as Christians and especially as Salesians, should make every effort and use every possible means to spread good books.

1. This is one of the most important apostolates entrusted to me by Divine Providence, and you know that I worked at it untiringly, even when engaged in a thousand other tasks. The vicious hatred displayed by the enemies of good, and the persecutions unleashed against me, are clear proof both that error regarded those books as a formidable foe and that the work had the blessing of God.

2. In point of fact, it is only with God's special assistance that we were able to spread good books to such an extent. The number of copies of pamphlets and books made available to the people through us over a period of less than thirty years surpasses the twenty million. While some books surely went unread, some may have had upwards of one hundred readers. Thus the number of people reached by our books greatly surpasses the number of copies distributed.

3. The spreading of good books is one of the principal apostolates of our Congregation. Our Constitutions, at chapter 1, article 7, lay down that the Salesians "shall apply themselves to *spreading good books* among the people, employing all the means that Christian charity inspires. Finally, they shall endeavor both by the spoken and the written word to raise a barrier against irreligion and heresy, which strive in so many ways to work their way among the uneducated and the ignorant. Toward this end should also be directed occasional sermons preached to the people, triduums and novenas, and the *spreading of good books*" [*Salesian Constitutions* (1875), Purpose, Art. 7].

4. Accordingly, those books should be chosen for distribution which are generally held to be good, moral and religious. Moreover, those books that are published by our printing establishments should be given preference, for two principal reasons. First, the profits derived therefrom can be channeled toward helping so many youngsters that are in need. Secondly, our publications tend to cover the field systematically and on a wide scale, and thus to address every segment of society.

[Books for the Young singled out for Special Praise]

There is no need to belabor the point. But with deep satisfaction I should like to comment on the fact that over the years I have spared no effort, whether by the spoken or by the printed word, to help one category of society in particular, the young.

By the *Catholic Readings* I tried to reach people at large and enter into their homes. But at the same time I tried to make known the spirit of our [boarding] schools and to entice young people to virtue through such writings as the biographies of Savio, Besucco and the like. Through the *Companion of Youth* I tried to draw young people to the Church, instill into them the spirit of piety, and win them over to the frequent reception of the sacraments. Through the *Italian* and *Latin* classics series in expurgated editions, through the *History of Italy* and through other books of a historical and literary character, I tried to be present to them in the classroom. My aim was to guard them against so many errors and against the passions that would surely be fatal to them in this world and the next. I have also always wanted to continue to be their companion at recreation, as in the old days. To this end I am planning a series of entertaining books, which, it is hoped, will soon see the light of day. Finally, through the *Salesian Bulletin* I tried, among other things, to keep the spirit and teaching of St. Francis de Sales alive in the young people that have graduated from our schools and returned to their families. My hope was that they would in their turn be apostles to other young people. I am not claiming to have accomplished successfully what I set out to do. I only wish to emphasize that it is now up to you to continue the project and coordinate all efforts so as to bring it to completion in all its phases.

[Recruitment of Young People through and for this Apostolate]

I beg and beseech you therefore—do not neglect this important sector of our mission. Begin by working with the young people that Providence has entrusted to you; and then by word and example inspire them to be, in their turn, apostles for the spreading of good books.

At the beginning of each academic year our students, especially those newly enrolled, are eager to join the student book guilds established in our schools, all the more so as the fees are quite modest. Make sure, however, that they join these guilds of their own free will and not by force. Try to persuade them to do so by reasoning with them and showing them how much good they personally can derive from these books, and how much good they can do to others by sending them out, as they are published, to their homes, to father, mother, brother or benefactor. Family members, even if not practicing Catholics, appreciate such a gesture on the part of a son, a brother, etc., and will thus be drawn into reading these books, if only out of curiosity. Let the boys, however, see to it that the sending of these books does not take on even the appearance of preachment or lecture to the family. Let this action clearly appear for what it should really be, a loving gift or souvenir. Finally, when the students go home [on holidays], let them continue the good work and try to extend the outreach by giving books to friends and relatives. The gift of a book shows appreciation for favor received. They should also place books with the pastor with the request that he would distribute them and so recruit new members [subscribers].

DIFFUSIONE DEI BUONI LIBRI

Torino, 19 Marzo, festa di S. Giuseppe, 1885.

Carissimi figliuoli in G. C.,

Il Signore sa quanto vivo sia il mio desiderio di vedervi, di trovarmi in mezzo a voi, di parlarvi delle cose nostre, di consolarmi colla reciproca confidenza dei nostri cuori. Ma pur troppo, o carissimi figliuoli, la debolezza delle mie forze, i residui delle antiche malattie, gli urgenti affari che mi chiamano in Francia, mi impediscono, almeno per ora, di secondare gli impulsi del mio affetto per voi. Non potendo adunque visitarvi tutti in persona, vengo per lettera, e son certo che gradirete il ricordo continuo che serbo di voi, di voi che, come siete la mia speranza, siete pure la mia gloria ed il mio sostegno. Perciò, desideroso di vedervi ogni giorno più crescere in zelo ed in meriti al cospetto di Dio, non lascerò di suggerirvi di quando in quando i varii mezzi che io credo migliori, onde possa riuscire sempre più fruttuoso il vostro ministero.

21 – Printed copy of Don Bosco’s circular letter on the “apostolate of the press” (March 19, 1885)

Rest assured, my dear children, that these efforts will draw on you and on your youngsters to Lord’s choicest blessings.

[Concluding Exhortation]

Here I rest my case. After reading this letter draw your own conclusions. See to it that our young people learn their moral and Christian principles especially from our publications, yet without depreciating those of others. But let me tell you of my disappointment on learning that in some of our houses books published by us specifically for young people were either unknown or held in no esteem. You should not love, nor teach others to love the knowledge that, in the words of the Apostle, *inflates* [puffs up]. Recall how St. Augustine, renowned as he was as a master of letters and as an orator, once appointed bishop, preferred common language and inelegance of style to risking not being understood by his people.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always. Pray for me.

Most affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Sac. Gio. Bosco [Fr. J. B.]

Chapter 7

DON BOSCO'S APOLOGETIC AND POLEMICAL WRITINGS AGAINST THE WALDENSES

MO-En, 401-426; *Fundamentals of the Catholic Religion* (=Warnings to Catholics) given as an appendix in the Companion of Youth.

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Appendix: Bishop Luigi Moreno, Biographical Sketch

I. The Waldenses and Their Founder Valdes (Peter Waldo)

Y. Dossat in *NCE* 14, 770f; *Corpus Dictionary of Western Churches*, 794f.

Waldo (Valdes, Valdesius; died ca. 1215) was a wealthy merchant in Lyons, France. Little is known about his personal life. Partly as a result of his reading of the Gospels, which he had had translated into Provençal, he experienced a spiritual conversion in 1176, following which he left his family, gave his goods to the poor, and took a vow of poverty. As an itinerant preacher he waged a vigorous campaign against worldliness in the Church.

The disciples that coalesced around Valdes or Waldo in Lyons in about 1175 (now called Waldenses) were a body of Christians who like Waldo renounced their wealth and began a life of evangelical poverty. Hence, they are said to have been “founded” by Waldo. (Historians disregard the claim that the Waldenses go back to apostolic times). They were called the “Poor Men of Lyons,” but they are also referred to in the older literature as *Pauperes Christi* (Christ’s Poor), *Leonistae* (Men of Lyons), *Pauperes spiritu* (Poor in Spirit), and *Insabbatati* (Keepers of the Sabbath). They observed strict poverty and preached against the wealth and laxity of the clergy. Waldo’s and his followers’ way of life was approved in 1179 by Pope Alexander III with the proviso that they obtain authorization from local clergy before preaching. For not complying with this condition they were condemned as heretics in 1184 by Pope Lucius III. In 1211 more than 80 of Waldo’s followers were burned as heretics at Strasbourg. The Waldenses were definitively condemned in 1215 by the Fourth Lateran Council. Nothing further is known of Waldo after Pope Lucius’ condemnation in 1184.

The heresy spread rapidly through the cities of southwestern France and into Alsace, Lorraine, Switzerland, Bavaria, Austria and Bohemia. At the beginning of the 14th century, Waldenses from France to escape persecution moved into the Alpine Valleys of the Dauphiné and Piedmont. From 1368 the Waldenses referred to Waldo as “Peter” Waldo.

Waldensian teaching was similar to that of other medieval lay dissenters. Clerics have no special right to speak in God's name. All Christians can preach since each is a depository of the Holy Spirit. The Waldenses preserve the ideals of primitive Christianity, and the established Church is the community of Satan. The efficacy of the sacraments depends on the holiness of the ministers; and the practice of poverty empowers a person to administer all sacraments. Purgatory, indulgences, fasting, and the cult of the saints are to be rejected.

Each Holy Thursday the Waldenses celebrated the Lord's Supper in a simple rite, but they did not believe in the Real Presence. Worship services consisted of scriptural readings, sermons, and the Lord's Prayer. Some of their beliefs and practices were borrowed from the Cathari. Like the Cathari, they were divided into *Perfecti* and simple believers. The former were celibates who refrained from manual labor and went about as mendicant preachers. The simple believers were married, and worked to provide for the material needs of the *Perfecti*. The ministers (*Barbes*, uncles) came from the ranks of the *Perfecti*.¹ Hence the Waldenses in the Dauphiné and in Piedmont were called "Barbets."

Their modest way of life endeared them to the common people, but their popularity waned with the founding of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders in the 13th century.

In spite of repressive measures against them, the Waldenses survived through the centuries, especially in remote places. In 1532 they subscribed to some Protestant doctrines; and with the passing of time most adopted Calvinistic theology.

The Waldenses continued to form a compact and homogenous group in the valleys of Piedmont and the Briançonnais. In 1403 Vincent Ferrer preached effectively among them for 3 months. The Waldenses became the target of the inquisition and were subjected to confiscation and fines. A crusade was mounted against them in 1487-88, but by 1509 they were allowed to live in peace. Later in the 16th century, however, they were again severely persecuted at the instigation of civil authorities. The French Waldenses, re-

¹ Apart from the two degrees in membership, the Waldenses had no connection with the Cathari. The Cathari (from Gr. *katharioi*, the pure) were a group of neo-Manichean sects that appeared in Western Europe during the 12th century. Catharism was the most widely diffused of all mediaeval heresies. Like Manichaeism it was dualistic, as well as anti-Christian, anticlerical, anti-sacramental and antisocial.

duced in numbers, transferred allegiance to the Reformation churches. The Waldenses of Piedmont, however, stood their ground. Periods of tolerance alternated with periods of violent repression by the dukes of Savoy (usually following attempts at revolt). The massacre following the insurrection of 1655 is the most notorious such episode on record.

To commemorate the tragic event, the English poet John Milton (1608-1674) wrote what is reputed to be the “most perfect sonnet in the English language.”

On the Late Massacre in Piedmont

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshiped stocks and stones.

Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese, that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans

The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway

The triple Tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who, having learnt thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

Under Napoleon they were tolerated; and in 1848 King Charles Albert of Sardinia, in whose domain most of them then lived, gave them full political and religious freedom under the constitution. They have since conducted a vigorous program of evangelization in Italy. A Waldensian university, first established in Florence in 1860, was transferred to Rome in 1922.

The Waldenses are the only surviving dissident Christian sect predating the Reformation. According to a 1980 census taken in Italy, they numbered about 17,000. Most of them were concentrated in the region of Piedmont, in 18 parishes located chiefly in mountain valleys west of Turin. This is the area in the Alps in which Waldo's followers had taken refuge in the 13th century.

This is also the area to which the Waldenses were later restricted by the laws of the Savoy Monarchy, from the Peace of Cavour in 1561 to 1848, when they were given equal rights under the constitution.

II. Don Bosco and the Waldenses or Evangelicals (“Protestants”)—Personal Dealings

Before surveying Don Bosco's anti-Waldensian writings and his style of apologetic, it seems appropriate to describe his position with regard to this new religious situation.

1. Before 1850

In October 1847 a petition for the “emancipation” (official recognition of rights) of Waldenses and Jews was circulated. Don Bosco (among others) refused to sign it.² The Constitution (*Statuto*) granted by King Charles Albert on March 4, 1848 stated that “The Catholic, Apostolic, Roman religion is the sole religion of the State. Such other faiths as are already established are *tolerated* in accordance with the laws.” (Art. 1) On March 29, 1848, a royal decree, or amendment, interpreted Art. 1 and art. 24 (regarding *toleration* of “other faiths”) very broadly, in effect granting Waldenses and Jews not just “toleration” but full civil and religious rights.³ This was finalized, when a bill passed into law on June 19, 1848 granted them official “emancipation.” In Piedmont at the time the Waldenses numbered ca. 21,000 and the Jews ca. 7,000.

The liberal government of the Kingdom of Sardinia (and later of united Italy) as a practical (anticlerical) policy favored the Waldenses. They in turn supported the liberal government against the established Church. Waldensian leaders and preachers in particular enjoyed this support, as well as that of the liberal press and of liberal intellectuals. In some regions they also received strong support from the freemasonry. On their part, they always supported the liberal establishment—first, Cavour and the liberal Right; and later the cabinets of the liberal Left. They were, however, always hostile to Mazzini and Mazzinian republicanism.

² *EBM* III, 190f.

³ *EBM* III, 214f.

Under such favorable circumstances, the Waldenses began a vigorous and expensive program, building schools and chapels and launching a lively propaganda campaign among the general population with the distribution of bibles and by doles of money.⁴

Don Bosco was at the time (1848) preparing the second edition of his *Church History* and took advantage of this ready vehicle to expose the errors of the Waldenses (see below).

2. Polemics of the 1850s

After 1850 the missionary activity and proselytizing of the Waldenses picked up momentum under the influence of the *Reveil* of Genevan Calvinism. This produced a confrontation with Catholics accompanied by vicious polemics on both sides. Noted Waldensian preachers were Paul Geymonat in Genoa, Jean-Pierre Meille (1817-1884), Amedeo Bert (1809-1883), and Luigi De Sanctis (1808-1869) in Turin. The last mentioned had been a religious of the Congregation of the Ministers to the Sick of St. Camillus de Lellis.

In 1850 Don Bosco authored a pamphlet entitled *Warnings to Catholics* (*Avvisi ai cattolici*). He included it as an appendix to the second edition of the Companion of Youth (*Giovane Provveduto*) in 1851. The *Catholic Readings* (begun in 1853) were especially designed to counteract Waldensian propaganda, and the series itself was introduced with a new edition of the *Warnings to Catholics*. This was followed by the publication in 6 installments (between March and August 1853) of an apologetic catechism of 452 pages, entitled, *The Catholic Instructed in the Catholic Religion*.

At the time the Waldensian church (*tempio*) was being built not far from the St. Aloysius Oratory. The *tempio* was dedicated on December 15, 1853.⁵ With reference to this project Don Bosco wrote to Cardinal Antonelli:

Your Eminence, the ferocious beast has come out of its lair, and there is no longer any hunter who is capable of shooting it down. There are only a few

⁴ The Waldenses fought the Oratory of St. Aloysius, established in their area, with all the means at their disposal, fair and foul. Cf. Bonetti, *Early Apostolate*, 113-117; *EBM* III, 284-288.

⁵ *EBM* IV, 481f, telling also of how the government favored the Waldenses, and of an attack on Don Bosco.

insignificant minions around who are crying out in dismay, but whose voice is drowned out by [the beast's] fearsome, rumbling roar. The fact is that the Protestants [Waldenses] are about to begin construction on a second temple here in Turin.⁶

Don Bosco wrote other tracts and pamphlets against Waldensian teachings. We may mention *A Debate Between a Lawyer and a Protestant Minister* (1853); *Conversion of a Waldensian Woman*. (1854). A later example is: *Severino or The Adventures of an Alpine Lad* (1868)⁷. A passage from *Life of St. Zita, Housemaid, and of St. Isidore, Peasant* (1853) is an example of Don Bosco's polemical style. The argument is made that holiness is a mark of the true Church (the Catholic Church).

All her members [of the Catholic Church] are called to holiness and many of them have actually distinguished themselves by their outstanding virtues and miracles. Other religions on the contrary have their origin in sin. Their very beginnings must be traced not to men of virtue and holiness, but to libertines or apostates. The virtues that may be found among their disciples either spring from sentiments that God instilled [...], or are remnants of their former Catholic Faith. We challenge Calvinists, Lutherans, Waldenses, Anglicans, and any other Protestant sect to produce evidence of a single person whose virtuous life has achieved the heroic degree demanded by the Church of Rome from her children before elevating them to the honors of the altars [...].⁸

Waldensian propaganda within the Oratory was opposed by Dominic Savio and the Company of the Immaculate Conception.⁹ The Waldenses were active also in towns other than Turin, including Castelnuovo. Don Bosco and Fr. Cafasso acted to neutralize their proselytizing efforts.¹⁰

It should be noted that while attacking Waldensian teachings with the rhetoric of traditional polemics, Don Bosco never descended to personal attacks or invective at any time. On the Waldensian side, on the contrary, he was made the object of numerous personal attacks.¹¹

⁶ Motto, *Epistolario* I, 197.

⁷ *EBM* IV, 400-402; 483-485; V, 17f.; IX, 34.

⁸ *EBM* IV, 401. Don Bosco's anti-Waldensian apologetic is described below.

⁹ *EBM* V, 320f.

¹⁰ *EBM* V, 413-415.

¹¹ Attacks were also made on his life [MO-En 410, 412f; *EBM* IV, 486-495]. For the dog *Grigio* episodes cf. MO-E, 420-422 and *EBM* IV, 496-502.

3. Personal Encounters

Numerous debates between Don Bosco and Waldenses are recorded in the *Biographical Memoirs*, and conversions are noted.¹²

Of great interest is the exchange between Don Bosco and engineer-architect Giovanni Prina Carpani, a fanatical Waldensian of Evangelical persuasion.¹³ The object of the exchange was to plan a debate “to ascertain the truth.” Point 2 of Don Bosco’s proposal read: “Is the Bible the only authority you recognize, or will you accept arguments from Tradition as well? In the former case what Bible will you use: Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Italian, or French?”¹⁴

Don Bosco helped Waldensian ministers (who had been Catholics) to return to the Church.¹⁵ The relationship and the story of the extensive exchanges between Don Bosco and Luigi De Sanctis (mentioned above), who was an evangelical minister ejected from the Waldensian Church, are of great interest.¹⁶

4. Later Years

In 1861 Don Bosco wrote to Archbishop Gioacchino Limberti of Florence to alert the Archbishop to the danger of “Protestant” activity in Tuscany. After speaking of Anglican missionary activity in Florence, he goes on to describe “Protestant methods.”¹⁷

Turin, June 18, 1861

Your Grace,

[...]

To make converts the Protestants use of a number of means. First, they spread anti-Catholic books in every way they can. Secondly, they make lavish use of money, especially when the prospective convert is a priest, and they’ve won over quite a few. A certain Antonio Agostini, a former curate of a parish church

¹² *EBM* IV, 432-437; V, 291-295; 435-439; VI, 271-273; VII, 43ff.

¹³ *EBM* V, 291-292.

¹⁴ *EBM* V, 292f.

¹⁵ *EBM* VII, 118.

¹⁶ *EBM* V, 87-94.

¹⁷ Motto, *Epistolario* I, 448-450, # 505, from the Archive of the Archdiocese of Florence, Limberti Papers b 3, Don Bosco’s holograph.

in Tuscany [...], is a convert of theirs. I have been able to get in touch with him a few days ago, and found him torn by remorse [...]. Thirdly, the Protestants are active in the instruction of the young, using primary schools and kindergartens to good effect and offering rich awards and gifts of money as a lure. These are the means whereby in the past few years they've succeeded in winning over several thousands of our Catholics.

Your Grace, you know better than I what must be done. In any case, be on the watch and make an all-out effort to prevent ruinous defections among the clergy. Promote the dissemination of good books among the people, of those books in particular that unmask the absurdities of Protestantism. But the principal object of your pastoral concern must be the catechetical instruction of the young, preferably in small classes.

This is what's being done among us [in Turin], and I believe it's the only thing we can do to erect some kind of barrier against the surging evil.

[...]

Don Bosco's "Protestants" whose activity he describes in this letter are the "Protestants" he knew best, namely the Waldenses. It was against them that the apologetic of the Catholic Readings was directed, although the argument has all non-Catholics in view—Waldenses, Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, and even Jews, Moslems and infidels—anybody who isn't a Catholic.

In another letter to Archbishop Limberti, Don Bosco speaks of the Waldenses' latest proselytizing endeavor, the setting up of a print shop in Florence.¹⁸

Turin, March 25, 1862

Your Grace,

[...]

The Protestants have transferred to Florence a print shop they owned and operated here in Turin. The move is designed to give them a more central location so as the more easily to spread their evil publications throughout Italy. This is for your information.

Should you know of any poor lad who might be under attack from these enemies of ours and is in danger of becoming a victim of their godlessness, please let me know. I would be happy to take him into our house, provided he is between 12 and 18 years of age.

[...]

¹⁸ Motto, *Epistolario* I, 489-490, # 556, from the Archive of the Archdiocese of Florence, *Carte Limberti* b3, Don Bosco's holograph.

In December 1863 Don Bosco presented to the Conference of Piedmontese Bishops a memorandum on Waldensian proselytizing activities, and the gains they had made throughout the ecclesiastical province, but especially in Turin.¹⁹

In 1870 Don Bosco decided to build the church of St. John the Evangelist at the St. Aloysius Oratory, precisely in order to counteract Waldensian propaganda and the influence of their church activities in the same area.²⁰ The project was delayed, but the church was consecrated in 1882.

In 1876 Don Bosco opened a house at Vallecrosia (Bordighera), and later built a church there, in order to counteract Waldensian propaganda.²¹

In 1877 Don Bosco opened a house in La Spezia. This action was also motivated by the need to counteract Protestant proselytizing. In this instance, however, it was the English Baptists not the Waldenses that had come into La Spezia in 1862.²²

Don Bosco's effort to counteract the Waldenses at the National Exposition held in Turin in 1884 is noted in the Biographical Memoirs.²³

However, by the 1860s his polemics against the Waldenses had softened considerably, although he never abandoned his ecclesiological position with respect to all "Protestants"—they were heretics, outside the Church, because they were not united with the Pope.

III. Survey and Description of Don Bosco's Anti-Waldensian Polemical Writings (1850-1853)

This survey and description of Don Bosco's anti-Waldensian polemical writings is for a good part based on the following: *MO-En*, 401-426; P. Stella, *DB:RO&S*, 109-137; F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 302-310, 351-375 (in connection with the Catholic Readings), 393-399 (polemic and reaction after 1853).

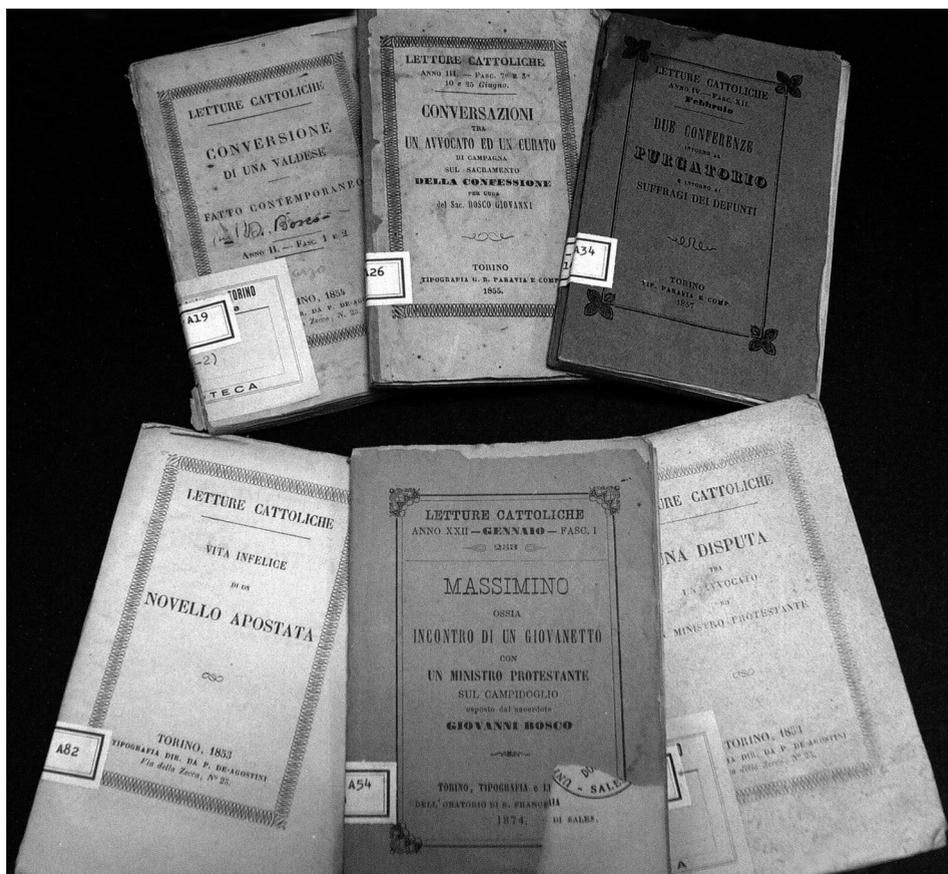
¹⁹ *IBM* VII, 568ff. (document omitted in *EBM* VII, 344f.); *EBM* V, 88-94.

²⁰ *IBM* IX, 921 (omitted in *EBM*) and 925-927 (summarized in *EBM* IX, 445).

²¹ *EBM* XI, 386f.

²² *EBM* XIII, 512f.

²³ *IBM* XVII, 248ff.



22 – Some polemical writings authored by Don Bosco against the Waldenses

1. A Forerunner: Don Bosco's History of the Church and Its Apologetic

In Chapter 1 above we spoke of the origin, publication, structure, sources, contents and concepts of Don Bosco *History of the Church*. We saw that while it is chiefly didactic in purpose it is the vehicle of Don Bosco's conservative ecclesiology. It is in this sense that it is the forerunner of the anti-Waldensian apologetics in which Don Bosco became engaged in the fifties. In 1845 the Waldenses were not yet on the scene as religious adversaries. It was only after being given civil rights and freedom of worship under Charles Albert's constitution that they became a proselytizing force to be reckoned with.

The Waldenses in Don Bosco's History of the Church

In his *History of the Church* (both in its 1845 and 1848 editions) Don Bosco only briefly described and dismissed the Waldenses.

The Waldenses began with Peter Waldo, a merchant of Lyons. Overtaken by fright at the sudden death of a companion of his at a banquet, he encouraged his other friends to embrace voluntary poverty, and he himself began to preach from Holy Scripture of which he was totally ignorant.

He condemned the veneration of sacred images, auricular Confession, Extreme Unction, indulgences, the doctrine of Purgatory. When he received threats in his own country, he did not desist. On the contrary, with a number of vagabond friends he moved to Savoy and thence to the Valley of Lucerna [Luserna] near Pinerolo where people called them Barbets [Little Uncles]. Their errors were repeatedly refuted, but they held on to them with stubborn pride. They were condemned at the Eleventh Ecumenical Council, Lateran III, held in 1179 under the presidency of [Pope] Alexander III, with the participation of over 300 bishops from all parts of the Catholic World. However those restless spirits continued to foment discord wherever they went. They were condemned again in various councils, and were finally severely punished by the Emperor and by the kings of France and Aragon. Subsequently the Waldenses joined the Protestants, thus forming one sect with them.²⁴

It appears therefore that, in Don Bosco's view, the Waldenses were nothing but a heretical sect, born out of the stubborn stupidity of another age. In matters of religion, Peter Waldo, their leader, and his early followers were pretentious ignoramuses that had been solemnly condemned by the Church, that is, the archbishop of Lyons, the pope, and an ecumenical council. They were rebels and they were deservedly punished for being fomenters of discord in society, Their doctrines closely resembled those of the reformers with whom they had foolishly made common cause.

Then in what sense is the *History of the Church* a forerunner?

²⁴ *History of the Church* (1845), 227-228, in *Opere Edite* I, 364-365. The Waldenses were excommunicated by the Council of Verona (1184), which was not ecumenical.

Explicit and Underlying Theses in the History of the Church

Granted that essentially the *History* had a didactic purpose and was designed to impart moral and religious lessons. But the first lesson that is delivered in the very definition of Church history (the first question of the pre-ample) is a meaningful ideological statement: "Church history is simply the narration of those events that were either hostile or favorable to the Church from its founding to the present day."²⁵ The Church therefore appears entangled in the fight between the City of God and the City of Satan. Each of the six epochs that follow contains patterns of hostile attacks by the forces of evil and of eventual victory by the Church.

Don Bosco, however, does not fail to touch upon other aspects of the Church's life. The missionary activity of the Church and the civilizing cultural contribution of monasteries and religious congregations come in for praise. Particular mention is made the beneficent activity of congregations involved in the work of charity; nor is the contribution of lay people overlooked.

A theme recurring throughout the *History* is that just as God is the author of all good so the devil is the author of all the evil that the Church encounters. Satan is the abettor of all the heretics and the persecutors.

God, however, is ultimately "in charge," and does not leave them unpunished. Don Bosco stresses the ignominious deaths of heretics and persecutors—a doctrine of retribution that does honor neither to God nor to the Church. In this respect in answer to the final question of the *History*, "What then are we to learn from the history of the Church?" Don Bosco replies:

The history of the Church teaches us in the first place that most of those who have rebelled against the Church have drawn upon themselves even in this life the divine chastisements and came to a woeful and frightful end. In the second place it teaches us that only the Catholic religion is [the true Church] of Jesus Christ. The others take their name from their founders. [...] Therefore they are not in the Church of Christ, but in the Synagogue of the Antichrist. Moreover, the Catholic Church can trace the succession [of its popes] from Gregory XVI [1831-1846] all the way back to St. Peter and to Jesus Christ. All of them by word and deed have always defended and professed the same truths that we have [from Christ] in the gospel.

Through the ages the Church has been attacked by sword and writings, but

²⁵ *History of the Church* (1845), 9, Preface, in *Opere Edite* I, 167.

has always triumphed. Kingdoms, republics and empires have collapsed all about her and been swept away. It alone has stood firm and unshaken. [...] Guided by the hand of God, the Church will endure and continue to flourish for those who will come after us.²⁶

It is with this ecclesiology that Don Bosco entered the fray and became deeply involved in anti-Waldensian polemic.

2. Don Bosco's Warnings to Catholics or The Catholic Apostolic Roman Church... (1850)

G. Bosco, *Avvisi ai cattolici*. La Chiesa Cattolica-Apostolica-Romana è la sola e vera Chiesa di Gesù Cristo (Torino: Speirani e Ferrero 1850)²⁷

Polemical Beginnings

The Waldensian congregation claimed to be a pure and evangelical church, detached from anything Roman. It condemned the religious, liturgical, devotional Catholic tradition, and therefore the many religious ideas and practices that Don Bosco held dear and inculcated in his young people.

The liberal revolution of 1848 marked the resurgence of the Waldenses in the Kingdom of Sardinia, a sign of which was Amedeo Bert's book on the Waldenses (to be discussed below).

It is in this context that Don Bosco decided to take on the Waldenses, and he did so with criteria (all too common in the apologetic of his day) that were dictated by an arguable theology and by an imperfect knowledge of Chris-

²⁶ *History of the Church* (1845), 587-588, in *Opere Edite* I, 645-646.

²⁷ [Giovanni Bosco] *La Chiesa Cattolica-Apostolica-Romana è la sola e vera Chiesa di Gesù Cristo*. *Avvisi ai cattolici* (Warnings to Catholics). I nostri Pastori ci uniscono al Papa, il Papa ci unisce con Dio (Our pastors unite us to the pope; the pope unites us to God) (Torino: Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero, 1850), 23 pp., in *Opere Edite* IV, 121-143. Further slightly revised editions followed. In 1851 a revised and slightly enlarged edition was included as an appendix in the *Companion of Youth*, with the title, *Fondamenti della cattolica religione* (Foundation of the Catholic Religion). In 1853 the 1851 edition of the Warnings (practically unchanged) served as the introductory volume to the series, the *Catholic Readings* (discussed below). The text is given in *Opere Edite* IV, 165-193. Don Bosco would later claim to have produced and circulated some 200,000 copies of this booklet in two years (!) [*MO-En*, 403].

tian origins and of the historical evolution of the Christian Church. This apologetic was directed not only against Waldenses but also against all other "heretics," with Jews, Moslems, and occasionally also unbelievers, thrown in for good measure.

Such apologetic endeavor of Don Bosco resulted in a number of works, the first two of which were the *Avvisi ai cattolici*, (Warnings to Catholics) first published in 1850, and the *Il Cattolico istruito nella sua religione* (The Catholic Instructed in the Catholic Religion) published in 1853 [see below].

Whereas (as was noted) in his *History of the Church* (1845) Don Bosco had summarily described and dismissed the Waldenses, in *his Warnings to Catholics* (1850) he began to engage them directly, for they were now free to carry on religious activity and to proselytize. He organized his tract in 6 short chapters styled in question-and answer form, in the manner of a brief catechism.

Contents by Chapter of the Warnings to Catholics

Chapter I: "*Basic description of authentic religion.*" "By true religion is meant the worship of God practiced in the manner willed by God." "It consists in believing the truths revealed by God and in keeping God's holy law." God revealed the true religion to Adam, to the Patriarchs, and to the Prophets who proved the truth of this revelation by miracles and prophecies, that is, predictions of the future.²⁸

Chapter II: "*There is only one true religion.*" The various religions, "Moslems, Protestants (that is, Calvinists and Lutherans) and the Roman Catholic Church" cannot all be true. "The true religion is found only in the Roman Catholic Church, because it alone preserves God's revelation. Jesus Christ, true God and true man was its founder. It spread far and wide through the preaching of the Apostles and their successors down to our own day. Finally, it alone possesses the characters of divinity," one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

Don Bosco gives an explanation of each of these terms along the traditional lines of the manuals. In conclusion, after explaining that "apostolic" means continuously holding the faith and the teaching of the Apostles, he writes:

²⁸ *Warnings to Catholics*, 9-10, in OE IV, 171-172.

This characteristic is truly reassuring for us Catholics, because our Church alone, starting with the presently reigning Pius IX, from one pope to another goes all the way back to St. Peter, who was appointed prince of the Apostles and Head of the Church by Jesus Christ himself.²⁹

Chapter III: “*The Churches of the heretics lack the characters of divinity.*” The Church of the Waldenses, the Church of the Protestants or of other heretics cannot be the true Church. (1) “They are not one because they do not profess one faith and one doctrine, and do not have one and the same Head.” [...] Soon after its founding the Protestant Church found itself divided into more than 200 sects. (2) “They are not holy, because they reject all or some of the sacraments, from which stems all genuine holiness, and because they profess doctrines contrary to the gospel. [...] No saint is ever found among heretics, unbelievers and apostates, nor did anyone of them ever perform a miracle. On the contrary, the founders of the principal sects were guilty of vices and crimes.” (3) They are not catholic because they are restricted geographically and they are of recent founding. (4) They are not apostolic because they do not profess the faith of the apostles, do not go back to the apostles, and are not united with the pope who is the successor of St. Peter. There is no difference between the doctrine of the Catholic Church of today and that taught by Jesus Christ and the Apostles.

This chapter closes with the question, “Can one be saved outside the Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church?” Don Bosco answers: “No. Outside this Church no one can be saved. [...] One who dies separated from the Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the true Church of Jesus Christ, the sole possessor and interpreter of the true religion, inevitably goes to perdition.”³⁰

Chapter IV: “*The Church of Jesus Christ is not found in the Church of the Heretics.*” The Jews, the Moslems, the Waldenses, the Protestants, namely the Calvinists and Lutherans, and the like “do not have Christ’s true religion because they do not draw it from the Catholic Church, the sole repository and interpreter of the teaching of its divine Master.” The Jews committed the fatal error of rejecting Jesus Christ and his gospel. “To be saved they must accept Jesus as

²⁹ *Warnings to Catholics*, 10-14, in OE IV, 172-176.

³⁰ *Warnings to Catholics*, 14-17, in OE IV, 176-179.

the Messiah, receive Baptism and keep the Commandments of God and of the Church." After a note of personal blame for Mohammed, Waldo, Calvin and Luther, Don Bosco concludes: "These men were not sent by God. They performed no miracles, nor did they make any prophecy that was fulfilled. They spread their errors and superstitions through violence and debauchery. [They profess] a religion that opens the floodgates to every vice and disorder. [...] They are in the synagogue of Antichrist, that is, in a church opposed to that of Jesus Christ."³¹

Chapter V: "*A Reply to Protestants.*" When Protestants claim to believe in Christ and his gospel, and hence to be in the true Church, one should respond: "It isn't so, since you don't believe all that Jesus Christ teaches in the gospel. You reject many other teachings that Jesus commanded his apostles to preach. [...] You don't believe in his Church or in the Roman Pontiff whom Jesus Christ appointed to govern his Church. By allowing free interpretation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, you open wide the gate to error. [...] Therefore, you are like branches cut away from the tree, like members of a body without a head, like sheep without a shepherd, like disciples without a teacher. Above all and most unfortunately, you are separated from the very source of life, Jesus Christ."

Don Bosco closes this chapter by stating that to be saved Protestants "must abjure their errors, join the Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church from which they were once separated, and be reunited with the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the pope. Anyone who persists in living separated from him will be eternally lost."³²

Chapter VI: "*Protestants agree that Catholics are in the true Church.*" "We Catholics, instead, following the Church's infallible teaching say that Protestants cannot be saved in their sect, and must therefore return to the Church of Jesus Christ." Therefore the Protestant religion is false. After relating the conversion from Calvinism of Henry IV, king of France, Don Bosco makes three points to show the uniqueness of Catholicism. (1) The Catholic Church has suffered persecution through the ages by Jews, by pagans, by heretics and by bad Catholics, but it has always triumphed because it was founded

³¹ *Warnings to Catholics*, 17-19, in *OE IV*, 179-181.

³² *Warnings to Catholics*, 20-21, in *OE IV*, 182-183.

by God. The Catholic Church never persecuted anybody. Such incidents as the war against the Albigenses and the massacre on St. Bartholomew's day were neither ordered nor approved by the Church. (2) No Catholic on the point of death ever wished to be converted to some other religion. On the other hand, the historical record shows that many non-Catholics at the point of death wished to abjure and die in the Holy Roman Catholic Church. (3) Likewise, no Catholic ever left the Catholic Church in order to lead a more virtuous Christian life. Such apostasies occur as an escape to a more permissive religion.

Don Bosco closes the chapter by asking his readers to thank God for the fact that they are Catholics, and to pray for perseverance and for the conversion of those that are separated from God's Church. His final plea is, "Be on your guard against Protestants and bad Catholics."³³

Comment on the Apologetics of the Warnings

The apologetic of the *Warnings to Catholics* is seriously flawed. It is based on ultramontane ecclesiological premises, common enough at mid-nineteenth century (and beyond), but in themselves invalid. A simplistic view of Christian origins, an a-historical view of dogmatic teaching, apostolic succession practically restricted to the popes, total exclusion of non-Catholics from salvation, lumping together under the same "condemnation" Waldenses, Protestants (both Lutherans and Calvinists), Jews, Moslems, all heretics and unbelievers—these are invalid premises for any apologetic. Furthermore the style of this apologetic cannot be described as anything but crude.

3. The Catholic Instructed in the Catholic Religion (1853)

In 1851, after reading a book in defense of the Waldenses written by their minister in Turin (Amedeo Bert),³⁴ Don Bosco began to compile a larger

³³ *Warnings to Catholics*, 21-25, in OE IV, 183-187.

³⁴ Amedeo Bert's apologia of the Waldenses was entitled, *I Valdesi, ossia i Cristiani-Cattolici secondo la Chiesa primitiva abitanti le così dette Valli di Piemonte*. Cenni storici, per Amedeo Bert, "ministro del culto valdese e cappellano delle delegazioni protestanti a Torino" (The Waldenses, that is the Catholic Christians [living] in accordance with the early Church in the

apologetic tract (*The Catholic Instructed*), which was published serially in the *Catholic Readings* (to be described below) beginning with their first year of publication (1853).³⁵

We first look at Bert's book *I Valdesi* before discussing Don Bosco's *The Catholic Instructed*.

I Valdesi by Amedeo Bert (1849)

Bert saw the Waldenses, in their long and troubled history, as the victims of intolerance and persecution by popes and rulers, and as the object of prejudice and hatred on the part of the people.

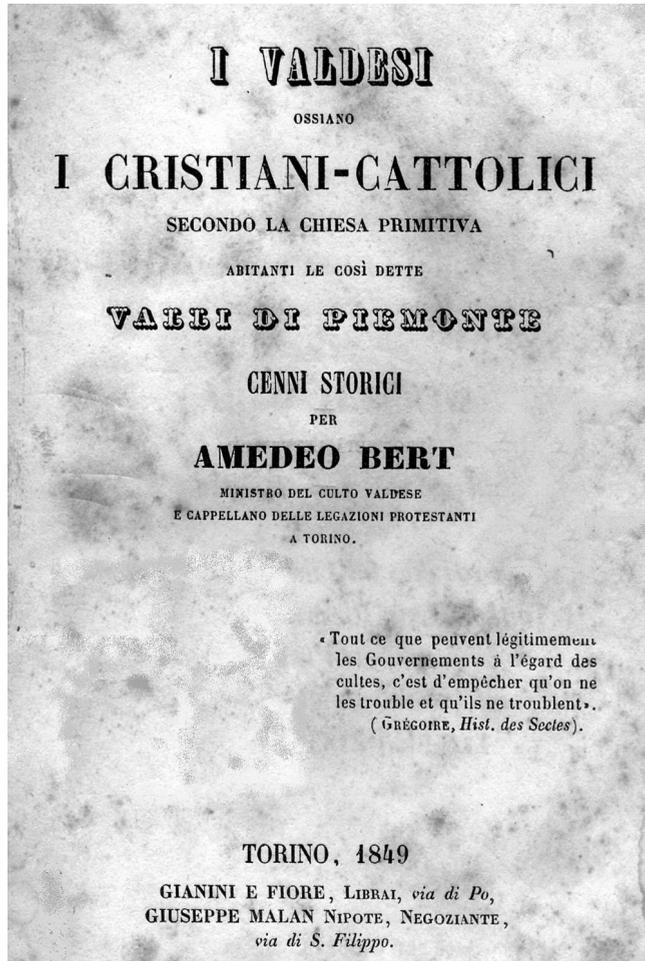
History of the Waldenses according to Bert

He claims that the Waldensian movement had its origin in the times of Emperor Constantine, when the doctrine, worship and government of Christ's Church began to lose their original purity. At this time (so he claims) a group of enlightened Christians resisted this deviation from the gospel way of life. (Bert does not go so far as to claim, as others do, that the Waldenses originated in St. Paul's or in St. James' times).

Throughout the first millennium the Waldenses lived in the alpine valleys according to the gospel way of life and refused to accept papal rule. Those

so-called Valleys of Piedmont, by Amedeo Bert, minister of Waldensian worship and chaplain to the Protestant delegations in Turin (Torino: Gianini e Fiore, 1849), xxxv-498 (As the title states, Bert, besides being pastor of the Waldensian community, also served as chaplain of the diplomatic delegation of Great Britain and Prussia in Turin).

³⁵ Don Bosco's work written to refute Bert's claims was entitled, *Il Cattolico istruito nella sua religione. Trattenimenti di un padre di famiglia co' suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo*, epilogati dal sac. Bosco Giovanni (The Catholic instructed in his/her religion. Conversations of a father with his children prompted by the needs of the times, digested by Fr. John Bosco) (Torino: Tipografia dir. da P. De Agostini, 1853), 111 pp. + 340 pp., in *Opere Edite* IV, 195-305 (Conversations I-VII) + 307-646 (Conversations VIII-XLIII + Note on private interpretation). It was a collection of tracts published in the *Catholic Readings* in six installments, all within 1853. They appeared as follows: #1, 1-111 (March); then (with new, continuous pagination) #2, 1-48 (April 10); #5, 49-100 (May 25); #8, 101-164 (July 10); #9, 165-244 (July 25); #12, 245-340 (September 10).



23 – Frontispiece of *I Valdese* (The Waldenses), a polemical work authored by Waldensian Pastor Amedeo Bert (1849)

evangelical Christians were neither fools nor liars. Even before Peter Waldo in the twelfth century the Waldenses had preserved the original Christian doctrine and worship. However the medieval popes and their inquisitors accused them of heresy and sorcery, whereas in its very simplicity their religion aimed solely at fostering a good moral life. In earlier times their schism from the Roman Church was moral and cultic rather than dogmatic.

They would have loved to live in peace in Southern France, in Bohemia

and in Apulia. But the history of those congregations in the Middle Ages is also the story of “the permanent derangement of the papacy.”

The Protestant Reformation was an event that stirred up enthusiasm and rejoicing among the Waldenses. The ignorance and corruption of the clergy, the practice of selling indulgences, and other abuses tolerated by the Holy See caused Luther to go back to the Christianity of the gospel. He reminded us that “the pope is not infallible.” Because they made common cause with the Reformation the Waldenses living in the Piedmontese valleys were subjected to unceasing persecution. Hundreds of people were driven from their ancestral lands and were forced to flee for safety to Switzerland or to Germany.

The French Revolution, up to 1830, did little to improve the situation of the Waldenses. Only in Piedmont with the accession of King Charles Albert to the throne in 1831 did gradual improvement come about. (King Charles Albert had been a pupil of [Waldensian] Minister Vaucher, professor in the Protestant academy of the canton in Geneva).

Finally under a reformer pope (Pius IX) and at the onset of a new political and social order in Italy, King Charles Albert granted freedom and civil rights to the Waldenses on February 27, 1848—over the protests of some members of the hierarchy. It was indeed an act of grace but also one of justice, long overdue. Bert adds that the rulers of the House of Savoy had persecuted the Waldenses only when abetted by the leaders of a false Catholicism.

Now that a new era of freedom for the Waldenses has begun the Roman Catholic Church has nothing to fear. Our prayer is that Italy might one day be neither Waldensian nor Roman Catholic, but simply Christian.

Beliefs of the Waldenses According to Bert

While telling the supposed history of the Waldenses, Bert also explains their religious beliefs. They professed the pure Christian faith of the early Church.

Jesus preached a pure and simple doctrine, and by his death gave an example of virtue, sacrifice and love. “He restored the human family to its original freedom.”

For the first three centuries the faithful did not use special places of worship, did not acknowledge hierarchical orders, lived in independent communities united only by the “sacred bonds of faith and charity.” Their bishops and

other ministers did not possess either riches or temporal power. Christians gathered in assemblies only to read and to hear the Holy Scriptures explained in their own language, and to sing the praises of the Lord. The faithful kept as feast days only Sundays, a few fast days, and the more important events of the life of Jesus.

The Waldenses revered the Bible and believed the truths of the Apostles' Creed and the teaching of the first four Councils. But they rejected all the innovations that troubled the Church then, and have troubled the Church since. They rejected therefore the primacy of Peter, the supreme authority of the pope, the power of bishops as it had gradually taken form, the priestly hierarchy, and hence all clerical power.

The Waldenses celebrated Baptism and the Eucharist, but did not accept the other five sacraments of Roman Catholicism, because they are anti-apostolic and anti-scriptural. The rites, material symbols, and formulas of these sacraments were not only "strange, useless and blameworthy," but also "blasphemous."

They rejected the doctrine of Purgatory and praying for the dead. They regarded the invocation of the saints as an "idolatrous" practice, contrary to the doctrine of the unique mediation of Jesus. They revered the Virgin Mary as holy, humble and full of grace, but of a grace that could not be shared.

They likewise rejected the veneration of the images of the saints and of their relics. They did not believe in pilgrimages, in holy water, in the sacredness of burial grounds, in the cross, in the blessing of palms, in sacred vessels, and in adornments of churches.

Don Bosco's Anti-Waldensian Tract: Il Cattolico Istruito (The Catholic Instructed)

With the *Catholic Instructed* Don Bosco took on the mammoth task of countering polemically the Waldenses' history and beliefs as presented by Bert.

Polemical Character of the Catholic Instructed

With regard to both the structure and the nature of its apologetic, the *Catholic Instructed* (even more so than its predecessor, the *Warnings*) is pat-

terned after the bristling apologetic of contemporary treatises, such as those of the learned Jesuit Giovanni Perrone, highly regarded by Don Bosco. In his treatise, *De vera religione adversus incredulos and heterodoxos* (On true religion, a treatise against unbelievers and heretics), Perrone develops twelve "traditional propositions" on the true church, leading to the conclusion: "*Vel nulla religio, vel sola religio catholica. Nullum datur medium; vel si medium datur, est medium incoherentiae*" (Either [one opts for] no religion at all, or [for] the Catholic religion alone. There is no middle ground, except the middle ground of incoherence). The *Catholic Instructed* fully reveals Don Bosco's pitiless apologetic fervor.

As the title indicates the work is styled in the literary fiction of "conversations:" (*trattenimenti*).

*Structure and Content of the Catholic Instructed*³⁶

The first, untitled part of the *Catholic Instructed* is a defense of the true religion, consisting of Conversations I-XIV: God exists. Religion, i.e., honoring God, is a need both of individuals and of society. Revelation from Adam to Christ is necessary, because natural religion is insufficient. The Bible is the vehicle of revelation and is true in every respect. The Bible is divine. The history of salvation is a story of prophecy and miracle, from Adam to David; from David to Christ the Messiah. Christ fulfills all prophecy. The Gospel, the most perfect of books, is the story of Christ. He is true God and true man. He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, "another proof of his divinity." Jewish unbelief was blameworthy.

The second, final and longer part, entitled, "The Church of Jesus Christ," is a more complex compilation.

Conversations I-XII are dedicated to proving that the Roman Catholic Church is the only and true Church of Jesus Christ. Its prodigious expansion shows it to be divine. It is a society established for the preservation of the religion of Christ. It is founded on Peter. It is one. It is holy. It is apostolic, because it goes back to the apostles, while others only go back to Luther, Calvin, Waldo, etc. Authority in the Church (hierarchy) was established by Christ and is expressed in ecumenical, national, provincial and diocesan Councils. Christ's Church is visible, with a visible Head, the Pope, the Vicar of Christ.

³⁶ See detailed table of contents of the *Catholic Instructed* in *Opere Edite* IV (before p. 1).

From here on, the remaining 31 Conversations (some 300 pages) are entirely polemic and devoted to debunking other religions, chiefly the Waldenses and the Protestants.

Conversations XIII-XIX (there is no XVI) begin by disposing of Islam (Mohammed, the Koran and its doctrine) and of Greek orthodoxy (a schism in bad faith). The Waldenses then come under merciless attack in four conversations that give an account of the origin of the sect, deplore the bad faith of its ministers, and disqualify the sect from the true Church of Christ.

The remaining Conversations XX-XLIII (the last three pamphlets) are an attack on the Protestants.

The first of the three pamphlets (9 Conversations) deals with Luther, Calvin and Theodore de Bèze, Henry VIII and Anglicanism, and the “preachers of the Reformation.”

The next pamphlet (5 Conversations) compares Protestant with Catholic doctrine. Whereas Catholic doctrine has never changed from apostolic times, Protestant doctrine merely repeats in various forms the old heresies.

The last pamphlet (10 Conversations) deals with the inner contradictions of Protestantism, due especially to the principle of individual interpretation. In the last chapter, Don Bosco abandons the literary fiction of “conversation” and personally appeals to Protestant ministers to join the only ark of safety, the “Church of Peter.”

Comment on the Apologetic of the Catholic Instructed

As was the case with the *Warnings to Catholics (Avvisi)* of 1850, the flaws of such apologetic, common in Don Bosco’s times and milieu, are apparent. Critical interpretation of Biblical and early Christian texts is absent, as is knowledge of the history of the ancient world. No distinction is made between primary and secondary causality etc. The absence of critical spirit alone invalidates most apologetic arguments. But it is the refusal to recognize any value outside the Roman Catholic Church, that is, the denial of any value in non-Christian and non-Catholic religions that raises serious questions about Don Bosco’s ecclesiology.

4. The Catholic Readings (from 1853)

MO-En, PP 401-407; P. Stella, DB:LW, 267-269; DBEcSoc, 347-368; F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 348-359, 375-377.

Planning the Series: Bishop Moreno and Don Bosco

From 1853 on, the *Catholic Readings* (CR) served as the chief vehicle for the polemic described above. How did this remarkable series come into existence? The merit for getting the *Catholic Readings* started belongs to Bishop Luigi Moreno of Ivrea.³⁷

In the absence of exiled Archbishop Fransoni, Bishop Moreno had been the dominant presence at the bishops' meeting at Villanovetta, July 25-29, 1849, which called for a new kind of Catholic apologetic that made use of the press. In response he founded the Catholic newspaper *L'Armonia* (at first moderately liberal), and was the force behind a series of small tracts entitled, *Collezione di buoni libri a favore della religione cattolica* (Collection of Good Books in Defense of the Catholic Religion). The first of these tracts came out on September 1, 1849, a small-format booklet of 144 pages entitled, *Avvertenze di religione ai cattolici d'Italia* (Warnings to Italian Catholics on the Subject of Religion). Other tracts followed, but these pamphlets because of style and subject matter were not really accessible to laborers and peasants. Bishop Moreno then came up with the idea of a truly popular series, in response to the Waldensian propaganda. In his January 1852 *Ad limina* report to the Holy See, he mentions a series of popular religious tracts planned to start publication the following year. Meanwhile, as related above, by early 1852 Don Bosco had completed a sizable anti-Waldensian tract entitled, *Il Cattolico Istruito* composed after reading Amedeo Bert's work on the Waldenses. The thrust and apologetic style of Don Bosco's tract was basically the same as that of the much smaller, earlier pamphlet, *Warnings to Catholics* (both discussed above). As he himself relates in his *Memoirs*,³⁸ he intended to start serial publication of the *Catholic Instructed* immediately, but no bishop would support him. It was at this point that exiled Archbishop Fransoni asked Bishop Moreno to

³⁷ For a biographical of Bishop Luigi Moreno see Appendix.

³⁸ MO-En, 403f.

look into the matter. The Bishop then realized that he had found the man who would put into execution the plan he himself had been forming. *The Catholic Instructed* would eventually be published serially through the first year of the *Catholic Readings* (as noted above and to be noted below).

Throughout 1852 Bishop Moreno kept urging Don Bosco to develop the project of the new publishing venture and write a program for it. The correspondence relating to this matter shows that Don Bosco authored the program and that Bishop Moreno made frequent observations and contributions. In the first phase, Bishop Moreno was also responsible for getting financial backing for the series, to be known as *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings). Don Bosco also proposed that a new edition of his *Warnings to Catholics* be used, with an appropriate introduction, as a presentation of the series to the public. Bishop Moreno concurred. In March 1853 Don Bosco began publication.

Editorial Policy and Start of Publication

As already noted, the *Catholic Readings* were to be a periodical publication of small books written for the common people. The precise editorial policy developed by Don Bosco with Bishop Moreno is not known. But their correspondence and the character of the booklets allow us to reconstruct it. First, these booklets were to be simple, popular in language and style, and entertaining. Second, they were to be religious and moral in content, dealing with religious themes (catechetical, apologetic and hagiographic). Third, they were to be of moderate length (about 108 pages) and published monthly on the same kind of paper and in the same pocket-sized format as the *Warnings*. Fourth, they were to be inexpensive in view of wide distribution, subscription being kept at 90 centimes a semester or 1.80 lire a year.

For the first three publication years (Mar. 1853-Feb. 1856) the *Catholic Readings* came out every two weeks, and subsequently on a monthly basis. In December an almanac for the following year would be published with the title, *Il Galantuomo* (to be discussed below).

Success of the Series

From March 1853, the foundation year, to December 1888, the year of Don Bosco's death, 432 books were published; and some 130 of them went through several editions. Most in demand was the *People's Catechism on the Catholic Church* (*Il Catechismo intorno alla Chiesa Cattolica ad uso del popolo*) by Fr. John Perrone, S.J. It went through 32 editions.³⁹

Don Bosco himself authored some 70 books for the series. But most importantly he banded together a group of good writers that guaranteed the continuance of the publication. Chief among them was: Fr. Joseph Frassinetti, of St. Sabina in Genoa, who contributed some 15 numbers. Others were: Fr. Francis Martinengo, C.M., Fr. Lawrence Gerola, S.J., Fr. Secundus Franco, S.J., Fr. Philip of Poirino, OFMCap., Canon (later Bishop and Archbishop) Lawrence Gastaldi, etc. Don Bosco also encouraged his Salesians to write, and formed what might be termed a 'school of writers' among his followers. Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne, Fr. John Bonetti, Fr. Julius Barberis, Fr. John Baptist Francesia are the best known.

As to their contents, beyond the Waldensian controversy of the fifties, about half of the publications in the *Catholic Readings* pertained to the field of dogmatic-moral instruction; about one-third pertained to the historical-biographical field with special emphasis on the lives of the saints; the remainder were entertaining tales. The *Catholic Readings* remained faithful to the original program of moral-religious education of the masses.

There is no doubt that the *Catholic Readings* were an editorial success and made their mark. This explains the violent reaction on the part of the Waldenses. In February 1856 Don Bosco wrote: "As far as we are concerned, we think we have delivered what we promised. In only three years, with great sacrifice, we have placed over 600,000 copies of the *Catholic Readings* in circulation. We could have done better, if we could have penetrated those villages and towns where they are still practically unknown."⁴⁰

Besides being a series, the *Catholic Readings* were an association, people banded together for the purpose of supporting the production and the widest possible distribution of books relating to the Catholic faith. The first article of the rules written by Don Bosco for the association read: "The purpose

³⁹ It may be noted that Perrone's apologetic was of the most reactionary kind.

⁴⁰ *Catholic Readings* III: 23 & 24 (Feb. 10 & 25). (Turin: Tip. G.B. Paravia, 1856), 5f.

of this Association is to spread books written in a simple and popular style. As to their subject matter, these books shall deal with moral instruction, as also with entertaining and edifying tales; but they shall be concerned exclusively with the Catholic faith.”⁴¹

By the year 1856 Don Bosco had succeeded in establishing a network of nearly 100 associations, guaranteeing distribution in cities and towns throughout Piedmont and (after the Pope’s letter of commendation, November 1853) sparsely also throughout Italy.⁴²

The French language edition of the *Catholic Readings* began in 1854. Later there was also a Spanish language edition. At first, these were translations of Italian counterparts. But it was not long before each country ran its own production, always in line with the original program.

Titles from the Early Years of Publication

The following titles from the early years of publication show the contributors and reflect the purpose of the series.

[Bosco] *The Catholic Instructed the Catholic Religion*. Conversations of a father with his children on contemporary subjects, digested by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: P. De Agostini. – *Catholic Readings* 1 (1853-4) Nos. 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, and 12.

[?] *Contemporary Events Presented in Dialogue Form*. Turin: De Agostini. – CR 1 (1853-4) Nos. 10 & 11.

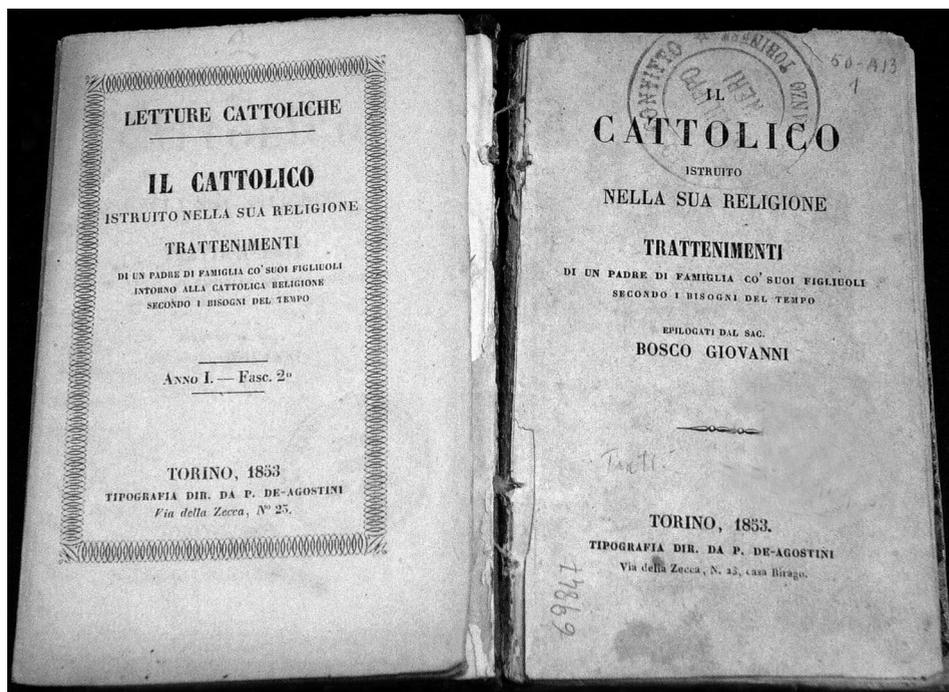
[Bosco] *A Debate Between a Lawyer and a Protestant Minister*. A Play. Turin: De Agostini. – CR 1 (1853-4) No. 19.

[S. Sordi, S.J.] *A Catholic Catechism on Revolutions*. Turin: De Agostini. – CR 1 (1853-4), No. 22.

[Bosco] *The Conversion of a Waldensian Woman*. A contemporary occurrence reported by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: De Agostini. – CR 2 (1854-5) Nos. 1 & 2.

⁴¹ *Piano d’associazione alle Letture cattoliche* (Draft Regulations for a Catholic Readings Association).

⁴² For details of circulation in the years 1853-1860, cf. EBM IV, 371f. The *Biographical Memoirs* at various places report on the story of the *Catholic Readings*.



24 – Don Bosco's tract, *The Catholic Instructed in his/her Religion* (Catholic Readings 1, 1853)

[Bosco] *A Collection of Odd Contemporary Occurrences*, reported by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: De Agostini. – CR 2 (1854-5) Nos. 3 & 4.

[L. Rendu, trans. by Bosco] *The Buying and Selling of Consciences and Protestant Activity in Europe*. Turin: De Agostini. – CR 2 (1854-5) Nos. 13 & 14.

[Bosco] *Conversations Between a Lawyer and a Country Curate on the Sacrament of Confession*, edited by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 3 (1855-6) Nos. 7 & 8.

[?] *Biographical Sketch of Charles Louis Deballer, Member of the High Council of Berne, Switzerland, with His Letter to His Family Explaining His Return to the Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church*. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 3 (1855-5) Nos. 13 & 14.

[Bosco] *The Power of a Good Education. An Odd Contemporary Occurrence*, edited by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 3 (1855-6), Nos. 17 & 18. (Reprinted in 1881 as *Pietro or the Power of [...]*).

- [Bosco] *The Life of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, First Pope after Jesus Christ*, edited by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 4 (1856-7) No. 11. (This is the first of the Lives of [25] Popes, from St. Peter to St. Marcellus, published by Don Bosco between 1856 and 1864).
- [Bosco] *Two Conferences of Two Protestant Ministers and a Catholic Priest on Purgatory and on Prayer for the Dead*. With an Appendix on the Liturgies, edited by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 4 (1856-7) No. 12.
- [Bosco] *The Life of St. Paul, Apostle and Teacher of the Gentiles*, edited by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 5 (1857-8) No. 2.
- [Bosco] *The Month of May in Honor of Mary Immaculate*. [Devotions] for the [Catholic] people's use, edited by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 6 (1858-9) No. 2.
- [Bosco] *A Christian Handbook or Important Counsels Relating to the Christian Life*, so that everyone may achieve salvation in accordance with one's own state of life. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 6 (1858-9) No. 5.
- [Bosco] *The Life of Young Dominic Savio, a Pupil of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, edited by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 6 (1858-9) No. 11.
- [G. Frassinetti] *Spiritual Strategies Required by Changing Times*, edited by Joseph Frassinetti, Prior of St. Sabina in Genoa. Additional: *The Pope. Relevant Issues* by M. Segur. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 7 (1859-60) No. 12. (This is the first of several contribution by Fr. Frassinetti).
- [Bosco] *Angelina or the Good [Catholic] Girl's True Devotion to Mary Most Holy*. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 8 (1860-1) No. 3.
- [Bosco] *The Life of Fr. Joseph Caffasso presented in Two Funeral Orations* by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 8 (1860-1) Nos. 9 & 10.
- [Bosco] *Edifying Examples Especially for Young People. Beautiful Words*. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 9 (1861-2) No. 2.
- [Bosco] *Biographical Sketch of Young Michael Magone, a Pupil of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, edited by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: Paravia & Co. – CR 9 (1861-2) No. 7.
- [?] *The Marian Diary or Encouragements to Devotion to the Most Holy Virgin Mary for Every Day of the Year*, edited by one of her devotees. Torino: Paravia & Co. – CR 10 (1862-3) Nos. 4 & 5. (This is the last issue of CR to be printed by Paravia. Henceforth, beginning with No. 6, the CR will be printed in the newly established printing shop at the Oratory).

[Bosco] *The Entertaining Story of One of Napoleon I's Old Soldiers*, related by Fr. John Bosco. Turin: Tip. Orat. SFdS. – CR 10 (1862-3) No. 10.

Comment

The *Warnings to Catholics* and the *Catholic Instructed* discussed above set the tone of Don Bosco's apologetic through the fifties. In the sixties the *Catholic Readings* become less polemical and more generally religious. They take up topics of moral instruction, edification, hagiography, etc.

Stella discusses the publication history of the *Catholic Readings* in detail, including the transfer of their publication from Paravia Publishers to the Oratory presses (after 1862) and the subsequent litigation with Bishop Moreno over their ownership. In 1867 the court ruled in favor of Don Bosco, and the *Catholic Readings* passed from collective into Don Bosco's personal ownership.⁴³

5. Other Apologetic Writings from the 'Fifties

Don Bosco continued his anti-Protestant crusade in the spirit of the *Catholic Instructed* through further writings, including the following "occasional" pamphlets published in the *Catholic Readings*.

*The Fourth Centenary of the Miracle of the Blessed Sacrament (CR, June 10, 1853)*⁴⁴

The *Miracle* (so the story goes) took place in 1453. Some robbers had stolen a monstrance containing the consecrated host at Exilles (Susa Valley), and had hidden it in a sack that their donkey was carrying as they made their way to Turin. On reaching Turin, at the place where now stands the church of Corpus Christi, the donkey stopped and reared, the sack opened and the

⁴³ Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 357-36.

⁴⁴ *Notizie storiche intorno al miracolo del SS. Sacramento avvenuto in Torino il 6 giugno 1453, con un cenno sul quarto centenario del 1853* (Lecture Cattoliche 1, #6) (Torino: P. De Agostini, 1853), 48 pp.

monstrance fell to the ground. The miracle occurred when the consecrated host was elevated and remained suspended high above the ground until the bishop arrived to take it to a church. By this miracle (Don Bosco argued) God wished to give people a proof of the real presence, against the Waldenses who inhabited the alpine valleys and who denied the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

*Contemporary Episodes Presented in Dialogue Form (CR, August 10 and 25, 1853)*⁴⁵

The *Contemporary Episodes* were about the son of a coal vender, who preferred a life of poverty to a lucrative job in a “corrupt factory.” Of the seven dialogues, two were about avoiding bad books and bad companions; but five were against the “Protestants.”

For example, in Dialogue 1, Minister B. (Bert?) is presented as trying to get Giovanni to join his sect, “a religion whose ministers live in households full of women and children, that has no leader, no sacraments, and lacks any divine character.”

In Dialogue 5, a Protestant minister is standing at the beside of a dying apostate who begs to be allowed to die a Catholic. “The minister orders an attendant to pull the pillow from under the dying man’s head. Then leaving him to choke and gasp, they leave the room locking all doors. They do not go back into the room until they are sure that the man has breathed his last” [33f.].

*Debate between a Lawyer and a Protestant Minister. A Play (CR, December 25, 1853)*⁴⁶

The *Debate*, a play in two acts that deals with a family situation, is a prolonged argument against Protestant proselytizing. They “offer money to induce Catholics to become Protestants, but once the apostasy has been perpetrated, they no longer care.” They are a “church of drunkards.” “Luther

⁴⁵ *Fatti contemporanei esposti in forma di dialoghi* (Lecture Cattoliche 1: #10 & 11). (Torino: P. De Agostini, 1983), 48 pp.

⁴⁶ *Una disputa tra un avvocato e un ministro protestante. Dramma* (Lecture Cattoliche 1, #19). (Torino: P. De Agostini, 1853), 68 p.

himself in speaking of the Protestants in his day had this to say: 'Most of my followers live like Epicureans. [...] If one wished to meet a crowd of liars, usurers, wastrels, rebels and people in bad faith, one would only have to visit a town claiming to be evangelical.' [19f.]. Later Don Bosco refers the reader to an earlier issue of the *Catholic Readings*,⁴⁷ where "it has been amply demonstrated that Protestantism has retained nothing of the early Church; and that Protestants today profess only errors already condemned in earlier times" [44].

Continuing Polemical Engagement

The year 1853 was the year of Don Bosco's fiercest anti-Waldensian apologetic in the *Catholic Readings*. But it did not abate easily.

At the beginning of 1854 a *Catechism on Revolutions* by Father Serafino Sordi, S.J., was published in the *Catholic Readings*.⁴⁸ It was a brutally insensitive denunciation of all revolution. In the name of the Bible and of the Church the author called for the condemnation and execution of all revolutionaries. Don Bosco was no lover of revolution, to be sure, but he objected to the pamphlet's violent approach. Bishop Moreno, however, wanted it published.⁴⁹

Don Bosco, too, resumed his apologetic activity in 1854, but no longer with the harsh polemic of the *Catholic Instructed*.

The new work, *Conversion of a Waldensian Woman*, was a story (given as true) of a fallen-away Catholic young woman (Giuseppa) who is won back by the good example and the life of peace and joy of her friend Luigia. In spite of the surveillance of her minister, the persecution by her father, and the entreaties of her mother, Giuseppa abjured with the diocesan formula, and received conditional Baptism, Penance, Confirmation and Eucharist. Don Bosco closed his account with eloquent and touching appeals to various categories of readers, including Protestants and Protestant ministers, expressing his concern for their eternal salvation and for the unity of the Church.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ He is referring to *Catholic Readings* 1, #9, the latter part of *The Catholic Instructed*.

⁴⁸ *Catechismo cattolico sulle rivoluzioni*, 5. ed., *Letture Cattoliche* 1, #22 (Torino: P. De Agostini, Feb. 10, 1854), 48 pp.

⁴⁹ *EBM* V, 3f. Excerpts are given.

⁵⁰ *Conversione di una valdese*, fatto contemporaneo esposto dal sac. Bosco Giovanni (*Letture Cattoliche* 2: #1 & 2). (Torino: P. De Agostini, March 1854), viii+107 pp.

Don Bosco's polemic against the Protestants continued on till the late fifties, but with less virulence. By and by he opted for the moralizing story and the edifying biography, such as his earlier *Life of St. Zita Housemaid and St. Isidore Farmer*.⁵¹

Don Bosco's "fanaticism" was motivated by his overpowering concern for the salvation of souls, a thing that is incomprehensible in our modern pluralist religious context. Don Bosco firmly believed that personal salvation was strictly connected with faith, understood as adherence to divinely revealed truths, "without which we would be eternally lost [*Catholic Instructed*]." These truths are found only in the true Church (that is, the Roman Catholic Church). After Christ, it is impossible to be saved even in the Jewish religion, which was nonetheless authentic [*Catholic Instructed*]. *A fortiori*, one cannot be saved in those religions that have abandoned the Catholic truth (the Protestant churches).

Don Bosco felt called to fight against the "beast" of religious error unleashed by the liberal laws. As mentioned above, on May 31, 1853, he sent some numbers of the *Catholic Readings* to Cardinal Antonelli and wrote: "Your Eminence, the beast has come out of its lair, and there are no hunters with their weapons ready to shoot it down."⁵²

On the other hand, Don Bosco was personally sensitive to the plight of individual Protestants, and was always ready to talk. He writes to Canon (later Bishop) P. De Gaudenzi: "I have been many times insulted by the Protestants; but, by the Lord's will, Protestants come to me on an almost daily basis, and in good faith, to ask for explanations of what they read in the *Catholic Readings*."⁵³

6. *Il Galantuomo*: the Almanac of the *Catholic Readings*

F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 377-380; Natale Cerrato, "Il Galantuomo," *Il Tempio di Don Bosco*, (March 1991), 29. M. Ribotta, "The Gentleman's Almanac: Don Bosco's Venture into Popular Education," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 2:2 (1991), 54-77

⁵¹ *Catholic Readings* 1, #3 (April 25, 1853).

⁵² Motto, *Epistolario* I, 197.

⁵³ Letter of April 7, 1853 in Motto, *Ep* I, 194.

The year 1853 marked the publication of the first issue of an important serial work that was to be attached to Don Bosco's name and to the *Catholic Readings*, an almanac entitled *Il Galantuomo*.⁵⁴

Origin, Purpose and Inspiration of the Almanac

How did this new development come about? The story as given in the *Biographical Memoirs* is that the almanac was devised to offset a Waldensian almanac called, *L'Amico di casa*, distributed free of charge toward the end of 1853. As friends were arguing about the name, Don Bosco had a brain storm: "We'll call it *Il Galantuomo*"⁵⁵ The name stuck.

Actually, the almanac was conceived under different circumstances, and its purpose was to offset liberal anticlerical activities rather than those of the Waldenses.

The idea came from the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris, through Francesco Faà di Bruno, who had been studying in Paris since 1849. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul produced, on order from the Conferences, a yearly almanac that was ready for distribution by August. It reached the masses of the common people because it was cheap, and it discoursed simply and entertainingly on moral and religious subjects, as well as on topics pertaining to management, agriculture and daily life, with lots of humor.

The anticlerical daily, *La Gazzetta del Popolo* had been publishing its own almanac since 1850. Francesco Faà di Bruno presented the idea of an almanac during the summer of 1853, and Bishop Luigi Moreno and the group connected with the Catholic paper *L'Armonia* (Don Bosco among them) were enthusiastic. However, they left to Faà di Bruno the task of realizing the project. Faà then wrote to the president of the Central Council of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, requesting copies of all their almanacs, mentioning the damage done by the vicious almanac of the *Gazzetta del Popolo*.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *Il Galantuomo. Almanacco nazionale pel 1854 coll'aggiunta di varie utili curiosità. Strenna offerta agli associati delle Letture Cattoliche* (Torino: P. De Agostini, [December] 1853, 119 p). [*Il Galantuomo*: National Almanac for 1854, with the addition of various useful information. A New Year's present to subscribers to the Catholic Readings].

⁵⁵ *EBM* IV, 448-449.

⁵⁶ In describing the origin of the Almanac, Ribotta (listed above) follows the *Biographical Memoirs*, a story that, as Desramaut points out, requires correction. However, Ribotta gives

It appears that Faà di Bruno wrote the introduction, “To My Readers,” and some articles. His brother Alessandro also made contributions, while the rest of the material was adapted from the French almanacs.⁵⁷ In November 1853 *L’Armonia* announced the imminent publication of the almanac, with its name (*Il Galantuomo*) and its price (20 centimes).

Faà di Bruno’s Almanac associated with the Catholic Readings

Up to this point (so it seems) Don Bosco had not been directly involved. But since there remained quite a stack of the almanacs at the printer’s, it was decided to offer it to the subscribers to the *Catholic Readings*. Printer De Agostini then added to the original title, “*Strenna offerta agli associati delle Letture Cattoliche*.” (New Year’s gift offered to subscribers to the *Catholic Readings*). Thus it was that Faà di Bruno’s almanac became associated with the *Catholic Readings*.

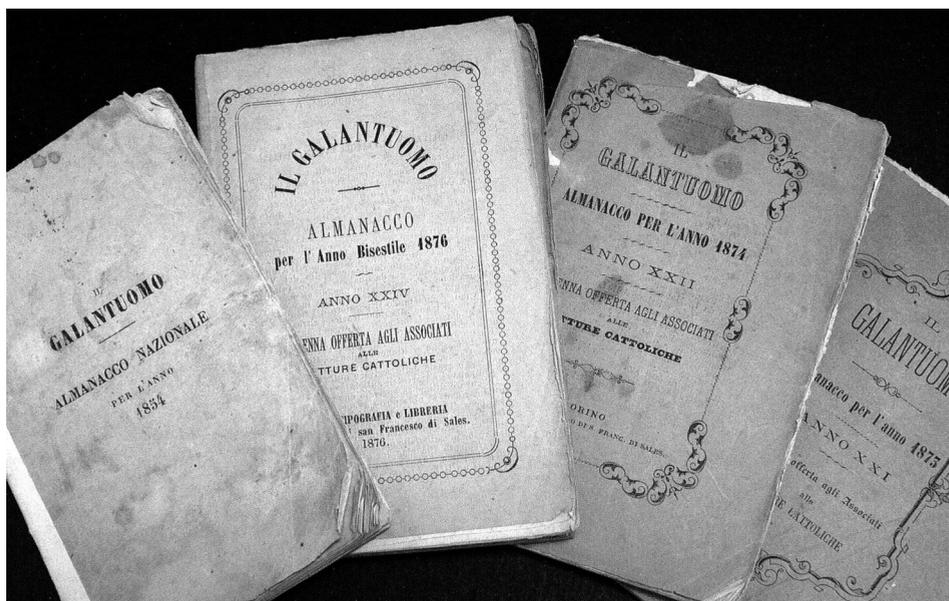
Besides giving calendar and feasts, the almanac covered a variety of topics of interest especially to country folk. It inculcated religion and morality through story and advice, and generally refrained from polemics. With regard to participation in elections, *Il Galantuomo* wrote:

No one has the right to abstain from voting, because no one may refuse to help one’s country. Abstaining from voting is the irresponsible act of a bad citizen. Voting badly is a crime. Your vote must be a free and well-calculated expression of trust. Figure out how you will vote beforehand. First and foremost, check to see if the candidates are and have always been honest persons. Do not be swayed by fine promises, good-sounding speeches and reform plans put forth just to dazzle you. Rather, check to see if the persons who are up for election as representatives or as municipal councilors have (above all) good sense, experience in civil affairs, and good religious convictions.⁵⁸

credit to Francesco Faà di Bruno, on the basis of Cerrato’s article. He also offers a useful description of the first issue of the Almanac with quotes. It should be noted that the word “*galantuomo*” in Piedmontese Italian means something like “honest fellow, a man reliable and true to his word,” rather than “gentleman,” as Ribotta would have it.”

⁵⁷ Stella [in *Gli scritti a stampa*, 29, # 032] writes: “It is likely that at least the introduction ‘To My Readers’ was authored by Don Bosco. Francesco and [his brother] Alessandro Faà di Bruno collaborated [in the writing of the almanac].”

⁵⁸ *Il Galantuomo* [...] 1854, 88.



25 – *Il Galantuomo* (The Man of Honor): almanac of the Catholic Readings

At the time (1853/54) Fr. Margotti (editor of *L'Armonia* and later of the more combative *L'Unità Cattolica*) had not yet called for withdrawal from political activity. The almanac's position must have represented the thinking of the writer, but we cannot say whether Don Bosco concurred with it.

*The Almanac Il Galantuomo for 1855: Don Bosco's Almanac*⁵⁹

Continuing the publication of Faà di Bruno's almanac was important. The publisher then approached Don Bosco, who perhaps took charge of it and wrote at least the opening address ("I am 40 years old"). The closing series of moral and religious anecdotes (81-120), including a long dialogue on Confession, may be attributable to Don Bosco. The Almanac adopted the language of the comic skit, a trait that it retained for all subsequent issues. This may also be a Bosconian trait.

⁵⁹ *Il Galantuomo. Almanacco nazionale pel 1855, coll'aggiunta di varie utili curiosità.* (Torino: P. De Agostini, [mid-November] 1854), 128 pp.

The paper *L'Armonia* advertised it as exceedingly useful, and its contents would bear this out. But in spite of its utility and modest price (20 centimes), it apparently did not sell too well. Hence, it appeared as a double issue of the *Catholic Readings* with the added title: *Letture Cattoliche. Rimembranze* [Souvenirs] *per l'anno 1855*.⁶⁰ In the introduction the editor apologized for, but justified, the use of the almanac for the *Catholic Readings* by calling attention to the closing moral and religious anecdotes. He also expressed the idea of continuing the publication of these “Souvenirs” for the *Catholic Readings* (as the last issue of the year), if the subscribers approved. This editorial presentation indirectly reveals that Faà di Bruno had apparently given up on his almanac and that in the future it would be the responsibility of the *Catholic Readings*, and therefore of Don Bosco.

The almanac then became a yearly issue offered for New Year's (not as a gift but for a small fee) to the subscribers of the *Catholic Readings*.

For 1856 the Almanac, *Il Galantuomo* appeared well before the end of the year. Totally under Don Bosco's control, it now acquired its definitive form.

⁶⁰ *Catholic Readings* 2, #21, (January 10) and #22 (January 25).

APPENDIX

Luigi Moreno (1800-1878), Bishop of Ivrea

Sussidi 2, 298ff; and P. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 347-368, *passim*.

Born in 1800 at Mállare (province of Savona, diocese of Mondovì), Louis Moreno was ordained in 1823. After serving in Sardinia and at the cathedral of Alba (with his brothers Ottavio, Paolo and Ugo), he was appointed bishop of Ivrea in 1838, a position he held for 40 years until his death in 1878.

He sought, with success, to improve the moral and intellectual level of the clergy in his diocese, and his pastoral letters were read in dioceses throughout Italy.

Taking advantage of the freedom of the press granted under King Charles Albert, in July 1848 he founded the newspaper, *L'Armonia della Religione e della Civiltà* with Canon G. Audisio, Marquis Gustavo Cavour (the future Prime Minister's elder brother) and Marquis Biragò di Vische. (This is the paper simply referred to as *L'Armonia* in the literature.) At first (1848-1850) the paper supported the liberal Constitution (*Statuto*) from a Catholic liberal stance that saw no opposition between socio-political progress and the Catholic religion. But as the liberal revolution developed, with the bitter experience of the Siccardi and the Ratazzi Laws, under the editorship of Father (Teol.) Giacomo Margotti, the paper turned rigidly conservative. When Father Margotti left *L'Armonia* to found another, more conservative paper, *L'Unità Cattolica*, Bishop Moreno, not without able collaborators, maintained both the ownership of *L'Armonia* and control of its conservative program.

A synod of the 10 bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Turin was held at Villanovetta (Saluzzo) in 1849 under Bishop Moreno's presidency, while Archbishop Fransoni was already under indictment though not yet exiled. Bishops Moreno and Ghilardi were appointed to set up an association for the printing and distribution of "good and wholesome books." They also received the charge of compiling a syllabus of erroneous teachings that anti-Catholic newspapers were spreading in opposition to the truths of faith and morals, the Church, the Pope, and the Clergy. Such teachings might then be specifically rebutted by means of Catholic newspapers and of books and tracts written in a simple language and made available free of charge to the general public.

Bishop Moreno, serving as Dean of the Piedmontese episcopate throughout Archbishop Fransoni's period of exile, became a leader in the field of the apostolate of the press. He founded, edited, and financed a serial publication called "Library of Good Books" (*Collezione di buoni libri a favore della Religione Cattolica*). Bishop Giovanni Domenico Ceretti of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, former vicar apostolic in Bur-

ma, served as vice-president of the publication, while substituting the imprisoned-exiled archbishop for confirmations and ordinations.

In this context, the collaboration of Bishop Moreno with Don Bosco in the founding and publishing of the *Catholic Readings* is more readily understood. Don Bosco and Bishop Moreno entered negotiations in 1851-52 that resulted in the founding of the *Catholic Readings* in 1853.

The relationship between Don Bosco and the bishop deteriorated when Don Bosco, who meanwhile had established his own print shop in 1862, transferred the publication of the *Catholic Readings* from the publishing house of Paravia to the print shop of the Oratory.

The dispute was, of course, primarily over the ownership of the publication. It should be borne in mind that, although without Bishop Moreno's leadership and patronage the *Catholic Readings* would probably not have seen the light of day, the undertaking was Don Bosco's own, as was also most of the financial burden connected with it.⁶¹ The bitter legal battle that ensued was settled only in 1867. Don Bosco retained sole ownership, but lost Bishop Moreno's friendship for good. Moreno was one of the few bishops that withheld letters of commendation for the definitive approval of the Salesian Society. Three separate requests by Don Bosco for a letter of commendation went unanswered.⁶²

At the First Vatican Council, with most other Piedmontese bishops, he stood with the group that opposed the definition of papal infallibility as "not opportune." The Piedmontese group opposed the definition chiefly on practical grounds. But the formation received at the university, with its Gallican leanings and support of the jurisdictional claims of the royal house, were also significant factors.

Bishop Moreno was a staunch supporter of the House of Savoy, even though the liberal revolution and the ruling (anticlerical) parliamentary majority had weakened its power as protector of the Church. He thought that if Catholic leaders should enter the political arena they would get elected to parliament by the Catholic vote. They would eventually form a conservative parliamentary majority that could restore to the constitutional monarchy its role as protector of the Church.

For the political elections of 1857, Bishop Moreno and his group, through *L'Armonia*, put together a clerical-conservative coalition. But the defeat of his political theory and efforts was total, as the "the Catholic vote" failed to materialize. From then on, *L'Armonia* supported the prevailing trend of Catholic non-participation—a trend made official and definitive by Pius IX's decree *Non Expedit* of 1868, which remained in effect until 1904, after the death of Pope Leo XIII.

Bishop Moreno's last years, after the appointment of Archbishop Alessandro di Netro in 1867, were plagued by illness, but he continued to shepherd his diocesan flock with success until his death in 1878.

⁶¹ Cf. Motto, *Epistolario* I, 495-6; *EBM* VII, 97-8.

⁶² Cf. Motto, *Epistolario* II, 527-8, 538, 598, 73-74, 193.

Chapter 8

ORIGIN OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY - A “CONGREGATION” OF ORATORY COLLABORATORS (1841-1876)

Francis Desramaut, *The Founding of the Salesian Family (1841–1876)* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A Don Bosco Pamphlet Publication), 1985; This is a translation of “La Fondazione della Famiglia Salesiana,” in *Costruire insieme la Famiglia Salesiana* Atti del Simposio di Roma, 19-22 Febbraio 1982, ed. M. Midali (Collana *Spirito e Vita*, 11 (Roma: LAS, 1983), 75-102; This in turn is a rewriting of “La storia primitiva della Famiglia Salesiana secondo tre esposti di Don Bosco,” in *La Famiglia Salesiana. Colloqui sulla Vita Salesiana*, 5, Lussemburgo 26–30 Agosto 1973 (Torino-Leumann: LDC, 1974), 17-45 and 337-343.

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I. An Early “Congregation” and a View of Its Development

1. Nature of the Early “Congregation” (1841-1859)

To speak of the “Salesian Congregation” at its origin, as Don Bosco conceived it, is really to speak of the Salesian Family (or of the Cooperators) before these terms came into being. Three documents in particular, written by Don Bosco between 1874 and 1877, may be cited for this purpose. To these a fourth one may be added (texts given below).

1. The Historical Outline that prefaced the Salesian Constitutions and was removed before approbation in 1874. *De ejusdem Societatis primordiis* (The Origin of this Society)

2. *Cooperatori Salesiani*, an archival manuscript in Don Bosco’s own hand (1876)

3. *Storia dei Cooperatori Salesiani* a manuscript of Fr. Joachim Berto, corrected by Don Bosco and published in *Bibliofilo Cattolico (Bollettino Salesiano)* (1877)

4. Chapter-Appendix on External Members in the early Salesian Constitutions (1860-1873)

These texts describe the form into which he cast and developed his creative purposes, and therefore they describe also the shape of the Salesian Society as he first conceived it. Obviously, not everything that is said in them is literally historical, but the texts merit the same authority that we attribute to his *Memoirs* written in the same period. Though we may question some details, the overall scheme holds up under critical scrutiny.

This is how Don Bosco begins his account of the “Salesian Congregation” in his constitutions.

As far back as 1841, Father John Bosco working in association with other priests began to gather together in suitable premises neglected and poor young people in certain locations of the city of Turin [...]. In order to preserve that unity of spirit and discipline on which the success of [the work of the] oratories depends, as far back as 1844, a number of priests came together to form a kind of congregation (*una specie di congregazione*). This was to help one another by mutual example and study. They did not make any vow properly so called; they only bound themselves by a simple promise to devote themselves solely to those things that their superior judged to be for the greater glory of God and the good of one’s soul. They acknowledged Father John Bosco as their superior

(*Riconoscevano il loro Superiore nella persona del sac. Bosco Giovanni*). Although no vows were made, nevertheless in practice the rules that are herewith submitted [for approval] were observed.

Don Bosco could find no satisfactory name to give the members of this “congregation.” At various times he called them *allies, associates, benefactors, promoters, or cooperators* of the Salesian Congregation.

In the second document, *Cooperatori Salesiani*, we read:

The history of the Salesian Congregation dates back to 1841, when we began to gather together poor and homeless boys in the city of Turin. [...] To meet the wide range of their needs, several [“many” cancelled] gentlemen joined together and by their work and financial contributions supported the work of the so-called festive oratories. They were called by the title of their office, but as a rule they were referred to as *benefactors, promoters, or cooperators* of the Congregation [“Oratory” canceled] of St. Francis de Sales.

This “Congregation” was not a separate entity but was constituted by these same persons, for Don Bosco adds:

These so-called Salesian promoters and cooperators [“associates” cancelled] banded together in a true Congregation under the title of St. Francis de Sales. They first received some special spiritual favors from the Holy See by Brief dated April 18, 1845. [...] In 1850 Father John Bosco informed the Holy See that a Congregation under the name and patronage of St. Francis de Sales had been legitimately set up in Turin, and requested further favors for its members and also spiritual benefits for non-members.

According to Don Bosco, then, at the start the “Congregation of St. Francis de Sales” designated “Cooperators” (or the “Salesian Family”). Obviously the word “congregation” should be understood in the broad sense it had in the nineteenth century, not necessarily a religious society with simple vows. The term was used to designate a group of the faithful who banded together for pious and charitable purposes (for example, the Marian “congregations”).

The “Salesian Congregation” of 1850 was, as its founder stated, an association of Christians united with Father John Bosco for the good of the oratory youth of Turin. Its patron was St. Francis de Sales, the great saint of Savoy then very popular in Piedmont. Don Bosco chose him as patron of his

works, mostly because the spirituality of Francis de Sales coincided with his own educational system of reason and gentleness. Later on, he had a further reason to choose Francis as his patron, when he found himself combating the errors of the Waldenses, much as Francis had done in Calvinist Chablais through the written and the spoken word.

It appears then that, according to these authentic sources, some ten to fifteen years before the founding of the Salesian Society as one of religious with public vows, there existed a “Congregation of St. Francis de Sales,” for whose members Don Bosco applied to the Holy See for spiritual favors.

2. An Association of Clergy and Laity, Men and Women

The Congregation of cooperators described above was not restricted to lay people. Its membership included clergy and laity, men and women. Don Bosco writes:

The harvest was great and kept expanding before our very eyes. Father John Bosco would often find himself surrounded by five or six hundred youngsters, so that it became impossible to control such a multitude and provide for its needs. Many zealous priests and devout lay people then came to help him in this most necessary ministry. With joyful pride we recall the names of the most prominent: Fr. John Borel, Fr. Joseph Cafasso, Canon Borsarelli: these were the first cooperators among the clergy.

These are but three names among many. Some of the clergy cooperators became bishops: Emiliano Manacorda (1833-1909) bishop of Fossano; Eugene Galletti (1816-1879) bishop of Alba; Lawrence Gastaldi (1815-1883) bishop of Saluzzo (1867-1870) and Archbishop of Turin (1871-1882).

But most of these priests were very busy. Don Bosco had to turn to lay persons who were free and wealthy enough to afford the time:

So we had recourse to some upper-class people and others in the city who graciously offered to teach catechism and [evening and day] classes, to assist at the church functions and outdoor activities. It was their task to lead prayer and song, to prepare youngsters for the sacraments and instruct them for Confirmation. Outdoors, they kept order. They met the youngsters at the Oratory entrance and in a friendly way joined them at their games, keeping them within proper

bounds while they played. Another important duty of the cooperators was job placement. Many of the young men came from distant villages; they needed food and work and someone to care for them. Some cooperators took it on themselves to find work for them with decent and honest employers. They made sure that the lads were neatly dressed and knew how to apply for jobs. During the week they would visit these youngsters; they met with them on Sundays so as not to let one day destroy the fruit of several weeks' efforts. Even on the nastiest winter evenings many of these cooperators would regularly walk hazardous streets to come and teach reading and writing, music, arithmetic and grammar to the youngsters. Others would come every afternoon to tutor slower boys in their catechism. [...]

Here Don Bosco mentions a few outstanding names among the many that helped. Women also helped.

Some of our pupils (*allievi*) were nothing but dirty, unkempt ragamuffins. No one could stand them, and no employer wanted them in his workshop. A number of charitable ladies came to the rescue. They washed, they sewed, they patched and they even provided new clothes and linen for these boys, as need demanded.

Among the ladies mentioned, Mrs. Margherita Gastaldi heads the list.

To sum up, the "Congregation" had a patron in St. Francis de Sales, who was both model and spiritual guide. It had a superior in Don Bosco. It had active members from clergy and laity, men and women. It had a specific goal: the care of abandoned youth. It had a Rule, which was that of the Valdocco Oratory. It enjoyed a certain recognition through a Roman document granting spiritual favors (1850). On March 21, 1852 Archbishop Louis Fransoni from his exile in Lyon appointed Don Bosco superior of three Turin oratories.

3. A Twofold Congregation (1859)

Don Bosco probably felt that the structure of that "mixed" congregation was too loose. The oratory crisis of 1851-1852 (discussed earlier) seems to have given him fair warning. We know that by 1852 or even earlier he was already cultivating some young men in the hope that they would stay with him.

In 1859 the “Congregation,” once a single entity, became twofold. But by this division it was not Don Bosco’s intention to *replace* the original “mixed” congregation with a religious congregation of traditional canonical format. All his actions and many statements make it clear that, in the service of his mission, he was organizing a new section or branch of a “congregation” that was already in existence, a branch which would have an entity of its own. We read in *Cooperatori salesiani*:

From 1852 to 1858 we were granted various favors and spiritual benefits, but in that year the Congregation was divided into two categories or, better, into two families. Those who were free and felt they had a vocation came together to lead common life and live in the Home they had always regarded as the mother house and center of their religious association. The Holy Father suggested that it be called the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales, a title which it bears to this day. The others, that is the lay persons, continued to live in the world, at home with their families, but they kept on aiding the work of the oratories. They retained the name of “*Union*” or “Congregation” of St. Francis de Sales, *Promoters* or *Cooperators*. [...]

We note from this last expression that in 1859 the second category alone, that is, the “externs” who lived “in the midst of the world,” retained the original title of “Congregation of St. Francis de Sales.” The category of “interns” was called, at Pope Pius IX’s suggestion, “Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales.” We should not overlook this distinction—two “families,” bearing different names.

4. The Salesian Society: “Life in Community”

The Salesian Society of “interns” was born on December 9/18, 1859. In March 1858, Don Bosco, while at Rome, had presented a sketch of a Rule to Pius IX (to be discussed in the next chapter). The Pope expressly favored a religious congregation properly so called, having the three traditional vows, but allowing each of its members to be “a religious for the Church, and a free citizen in civil society.” That was the concept that Don Bosco enshrined in the earliest draft of the constitutions. But it is far from certain that his understanding of the matter coincided with that of Pius IX. In 1880 he wrote to Father Guiol (at Marseilles) that the Salesians were not a religious congrega-

tion but a charitable religious organization to help abandoned young people, and that the Latin word “vow” might be understood as “promise” in Italian. He claimed that before both Church and State the Salesians are regarded no more than a charitable pious society [!] whose members enjoy and exercise all the civil rights of free citizens.¹

Be that as it may, on December 9, 1859, Don Bosco assembled a group of members in his room and proposed to them a “religious Congregation.” In spite of misgivings (becoming monks!) they decided to “remain with Don Bosco,” and all but two reported to appear at a follow-up meeting on December 18. That evening the founding document of the “Salesian Society” as distinct from the original “Congregation of St. Francis de Sales,” was drawn up (be discussed in the next chapter). It records the names of the eighteen first effective members of the Society, centered about Don Bosco, and describes the Society’s spirit and purpose.

All [present were] united in one and the same spirit with the sole purpose of preserving and promoting the spirit of true charity needed for the work of the oratories on behalf of neglected young people at risk. [...] The group then decided to form a society or congregation with the aim of promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls, especially of those most in need of instruction and education, while providing the members with mutual help toward their own sanctification.

Don Bosco was unanimously requested to accept the office of superior. He reserved to himself the right to choose his own “Prefect” (Fr. Victor Alasonatti, continuing in office). Sub-deacon Michael Rua was unanimously chosen spiritual director, and Seminarian Angelo Savio, financial administrator, etc. On May 14, 1862, the group that had been “living in community” (by then 22-strong, exclusive of Don Bosco) took another step forward—they “promised God to keep the Rule with the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience for three years.” Michael Rua, ordained two years before, led in the profession formula, while the others repeated after him.

¹ Don Bosco to Abbé Guiol, October 6, 1880. Desramaut quotes this unpublished letter from the archives of St. Joseph parish in Marseilles. One should bear in mind that in France in 1880, in the Grévy and Ferry ministries, education was secularized, the Jesuits and teaching religious congregations were persecuted and suppressed. (For how the Salesians escaped closure see *EBM XIV*, 475-489).

5. The “Extern” Group 1858-1874

Between 1858 and 1874, therefore, Don Bosco organized a religious society professing the traditional three vows and living in community. With this development, the older Congregation, the “extern” Salesians resulting from the division, was either lost sight of or wrongly regarded as superseded. The “externs” appeared on the scene (so it was wrongly thought) only after the approval of the Constitutions in 1874—more precisely, in 1876 with the “Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators.

However, such a view of things was certainly not Don Bosco’s idea of what he called “the Salesian Congregation.” Historians of the Cooperators (Frs. Eugene Ceria, Augustine Auffray, Guido Favini, Joseph Aubry) have correctly pointed to the chapter of the Constitutions on “extern Salesians” (Cooperators) as revealing Don Bosco’s view and intention. The gathering of the Salesian Society in 1859 meant that the older Salesian Congregation was being divided into two families, not that it was being substituted by a new entity. The chapter on “externs” also proves that in Don Bosco’s intention the “extern family” continued in existence. It also proves that the Cooperators of 1876 are the “extern family” re-organized, and not a new entity.

The chapter on “Extern Salesians” was first drafted in 1860 and expanded in the constitutions sent to Rome for approval in 1864 by the addition of a fifth article to the original four. The article read: “Any member of the Society who leaves from the same for a reasonable motive is regarded as an external member. He shares at once in the spiritual benefits of the whole Society, as long as he practices those portions of the rule that are binding on external members.” Don Bosco specified that the extern Salesians were “to write and distribute good literature, promote triduums, novenas, retreats, and other works of charity particularly aimed at the spiritual welfare of the young and the working people.”

These so-called “extern Salesians” did certainly exist, even though, as Stella points out, only a couple of names are recorded. These are Fr. John Ciattino, pastor of Mareto (Asti) and Fr. Dominic Pestarino, of Mornese.”² This might lead one to believe that in practice “externs” did not exist. However, Don Bosco often enough was satisfied with an oral commitment. After 1876 many Cooperators in fact did just this. We read their names in the as-

² Stella, *DB:LW*, 165, footnote 86.

sociations' lists. There were "extern" Salesians not formally enrolled in the Valdocco records, e.g., all those mentioned in 1877 as benefactors of Salesian work, co-workers or simply friends of the Founder. Regardless of the general nature of their commitment they were considered "associates" of the Congregation, promoters, benefactors. Don Bosco writes in *Cooperatori salesiani*:

In 1864 the Holy See issued a commendation of the Pious Salesian Society and appointed a Superior. The Society's approval included a section that concerned the externs, who were always called promoters or benefactors and eventually Salesian Cooperators.

The "promoters" and "benefactors" of former years were therefore expressly covered by the chapter on "Externs," to which Don Bosco explicitly refers, while he carefully omits reference to Rome's critical observation (which would have threatened his entire position). It is a fact that the Roman consultor who examined the Constitutions gave a negative assessment: The chapter (appendix) on "Externs" had to be removed before the Constitutions were approved in 1874.

II. Documentation: Texts

1. Origin of This Congregation

[Chapter 2 of the first draft of Don Bosco's Constitutions (1858), in Motto, *Testi critici*, 62-71].

As far back as the year 1841, Fr. John Bosco, working in association with other priests, began to gather together in suitable premises, the most abandoned young people from the city of Turin. The object was to entertain them with games and at the same time break the bread of the divine word to them. Everything he did was done with the consent of the ecclesiastical authority. God blessed these humble beginnings, and the number of young people that attended grew so large that in the year 1844 His Grace Archbishop [Louis] Fransoni gave permission to dedicate a building for use as a kind of church. He granted at the same time faculties to hold there such services as were necessary for the observance of Sundays and holidays and for the instruction of the young people who attended in ever increasing numbers.

There the Archbishop came on several occasions to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation. Likewise, in the year 1846 he gave permission for youngsters who attended this institution to be admitted to [First] Holy Communion and to fulfill their Easter duty there. He also permitted [priests] to sing Holy Mass [celebrate solemn Mass, as in parish churches] and to hold triduum and novenas as occasion might demand.

This was the practice at the Oratory named after St. Francis de Sales up to the year 1847. Meanwhile the number of youngsters was rising steadily, and the church then in use could no longer accommodate them. Thus it was that, in that year, again with the permission of the ecclesiastical authority, a second oratory, under the patronage of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, having the same purpose as the first, was established in another part of the city. And as with time the premises at these two institutions also proved inadequate, in the year 1849 a third oratory, under the patronage of the Holy Guardian Angel, was established in yet another part of the city.

By then the political climate had deteriorated to the point that [the Catholic] religion faced the gravest difficulties and dangers. In this situation, the ecclesiastical superior most graciously approved the regulations of these oratories, and appointed Fr. Bosco their Director-in-Chief, granting to him *all the faculties that would be needed or might be helpful for the task*.

Bishops in many parts have adopted the very same regulations [*piano di regolamento*] and have made an effort to introduce these festive oratories into their dioceses.

But, an urgent need arose in connection with the care of the [youngsters in these] oratories. Numerous young people somewhat more advanced in age, could not receive proper [religious] instruction merely by attending the Sunday catechism. This made it necessary to open day and evening classes, with catechetical instruction [especially for them].

Furthermore, many of these youngsters found themselves in a situation of dire poverty and neglect. Hence they were received into a house [set up for them]. By this means they were removed from dangers, they received proper religious instruction, and they were started on a trade.

This is still the practice at present, especially in Turin, in the house attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, in which the youngsters given shelter number about two hundred. This is likewise the practice in Genoa, in the Work for Little Artisans, so called, where Fr. Francis Montebruno is director and where the youngsters given shelter are forty in number. This is

also the practice in the city of Alessandria, where the work is for the duration entrusted to the care of Cleric Angelo Savio, and where the youngsters given shelter are fifty in number.

When one, in addition to the youngsters that gather in the festive oratories, considers those that attend day and evening school, and those that are given shelter, one realizes how the Lord's harvest has increased.

Hence in order to maintain unity in spirit and discipline, on which the success of oratory work depends, as far back as 1844 a number of priests banded together to form a kind of congregation, while helping one another by mutual example and instruction. They did not bind themselves by any formal vow; they merely made a simple promise to devote themselves solely to such work as would, in their superior's judgment, redound to the glory of God and to the benefit of their souls. They regarded Father John Bosco as their superior. And although no vows were made, nevertheless the rules that are here presented were [already] observed in practice.

Fifteen people at present [1858] profess these rules: 5 priests, 8 clerics, and 2 laymen.

2. Salesian Cooperators (*Cooperatori Salesiani*) (1877)

The document entitled, *Cooperatori salesiani*, is a manuscript in Don Bosco's own hand, written in 1877, probably meant for publication in the *Salesian Bulletin*, but not published. It is in *ASC* A230, 2f.; *FDB* 1,886 E8-1,887 A2. The manuscript was finally published by Ceria in *IBM* XI, 84-86 (with slight editing), translated in *EBM* XI, 73-75 (also with slight editing). The *EBM* translation is given here, with essential textual notes in square brackets.³

The history of the Salesian Cooperators dates back to 1841 when a start was made in gathering together poor homeless boys in the city of Turin. The gatherings were held in churches or other places, where the boys were given instruction and prepared for a worthy reception of the Sacraments of Confirmation, Penance and Holy Eucharist. They were also entertained with wholesome recreation. Several [Ms: "many" canceled] lay persons joined to-

³ The document (*Cooperatori salesiani*) was apparently set aside and replaced by a "softer" document, which was published in the *Bollettino Salesiano (Bibliofilo Cattolico)* 3 (Sep. 1877), 6 [see Document III, "History of the Salesian Cooperators" below].

gether to perform the many and varied tasks [on behalf of these boys], and they contributed to the support of the so-called Festive Oratories either by their personal services or with donations. They were known by the name of the office they held, but as a rule they were called benefactors, promoters, and also Cooperators of the Congregation [Ms.: “Oratory” canceled] of St. Francis de Sales.

The Superior of these Oratories was the Rev. [John] Bosco who operated under the immediate supervision of the Archbishop and with his authorization. The necessary faculties for the exercise of his duties were granted to him both orally and in writing. Whenever any difficulties arose, the Ordinary would deal with them through the Rev. [John] Bosco.

The first faculties to be granted by Archbishop Fransoni were to administer the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist, to fulfill the Easter precept, to admit children to First Communion, to preach, to hold triduum, novenas, and spiritual retreats; to give benediction with the Blessed Sacrament; and to celebrate High Mass.

The so-called Salesian promoters and cooperators [Ms.: “*soci?*” = “associates” canceled], who had banded together in a regular Congregation known as the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, first received a few spiritual favors from the Holy See in a Rescript dated April 18, 1845. It was signed *L. Averardi, Substitute for H. E. Card. A. del Drago*.

This same Rescript also granted several faculties to the Superior, among others that of imparting the apostolic blessing and plenary indulgence to fifty promoters to be selected by the Director.

On April 11, 1847, Archbishop Fransoni approved the Sodality of St. Aloysius founded within the Salesian Congregation and endowed it with favors granted by him as well as by the Holy See.

In 1850 Don Bosco informed His Holiness that a Congregation had been legitimately established in the city of Turin with the name and under the protection of St. Francis de Sales and implored more extensive favors on behalf of its members, as well as other spiritual benefits for the non-members. These favors were granted in a Rescript dated September 28, 1850 and signed *Dominic Fioramonti, Secretary of Latin Letters to His Holiness*.

The Congregation of Salesian Promoters was thus established *de facto* in the eyes of the local ecclesiastical authority and the Holy See. In view of the vast number of boys already attending, it was found necessary to open new classes and oratories in other parts of the city.



26 – Frontispiece of the pamphlet authored by Don Bosco on the Salesian Cooperators (1876)

To ensure unity of spirit, of discipline, and of administration, and to establish the oratories on a firm basis, the Ecclesiastical Superior named the Rev. [John] Bosco Director and granted him all necessary and proper faculties in a decree or certificate dated March 31, 1852.

After this declaration the Congregation of Salesian Promoters was always considered *as canonically instituted*, and all negotiations with the Holy See were always conducted by its Superior.

Several favors and spiritual benefits were granted to it between the years 1852 and 1858, when the Congregation *was divided into two branches, or rather, families*. Those who believed they had a vocation and had no impediment joined together to live in community. They lived in the same buildings that always were the Mother House and Headquarters of the association called *the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales*, a name suggested by the Holy Father himself, by which it has been known to this very day. The rest, that is, the laypersons, kept on living in the world with their own families but continued to work on behalf of the oratories. They retained the title of *Union or Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, Promoters or Cooperators*. However, they were subject to the members [who were living in community] and worked jointly with them on behalf of destitute boys.

In 1864 the Holy See commended the *Pious Salesian Society* and appointed its Superior. In the decree of approval [of the Salesian Society] there was also a section concerning the non-religious members, who were always referred to as promoters or benefactors and finally as Salesian Cooperators. The original members of the Salesian Congregation of St. Francis de Sales were always regarded as promoters and cooperators in the enterprises undertaken by the religious members. They helped in the classrooms, in church, on the playgrounds, and in other fields of apostolate among the faithful.

For this reason, on July 30, 1875 the Sacred Congregation of Briefs empowered the Superior of the Salesian Society to extend the indulgences and spiritual favors proper of the Salesian Society to his first benefactors, as if they were tertiaries, with the exception of those favors that pertain to the common life (*indulgentias et gratias spirituales societati ipsi a S. Sede concessas insignibus benefactoribus communicandi perinde ac si tertiarii essent, iis exceptis quae ad vitam communem pertinent*).

These benefactors are none other than those who were always known as promoters or cooperators. In the first Salesian Constitutions a chapter is dedicated to them under the title of “External Members.”

For this reason, therefore, when the Holy See graciously granted new and more generous favors to the Salesian Cooperators, reference was made to the pious Association of the faithful, *canonically erected*, whose members have the special aim of caring for poor and neglected boys (*pia Christifidelium Sodalitas*

canonice instituta, cuius sodales praesertim pauperum ac derelictorum puerorum curam suscipere sibi proponunt).

This reference was to be understood as applying to:

1. To the original promoters who for ten years were accepted and considered *de facto* as genuine cooperators in the work of the oratories, work formally recognized by the decree of 1852. To this work they continued to give [of their time and effort] as laypersons, even when some of the cooperators in 1858 began to live a community life under their own rules.

And 2. To the religious members, that is, the Pious Salesian Society, which always regulated the activities of these benefactors. In compliance with the rules given to them, the latter offered themselves with zeal and charity to give moral and material assistance to the religious members.

3. History of the Salesian Cooperators (*Storia dei Cooperatori Salesiani*) (1877)

The *Storia dei Cooperatori Salesiani* is a manuscript by Fr. Joachim Berto, corrected by Don Bosco in *ASC* and published in *Bibliofilo Cattolico (Bollettino Salesiano)* 3 (September 1877), 6. (It is transcribed in Eugenio Valentini, "Preistoria dei Cooperatori Salesiani," *Salesianum* 39 (1977) 114-150, with comments).

As far back as 1841 catechetical instruction began to be provided to the poorest and most neglected young people, namely to those youngsters who at any moment found themselves in danger of being sent to prison. The harvest was great, and was increasing by the day. Don Bosco would often find himself surrounded by five or six hundred children, and would find it impossible to keep them properly occupied and to attend to their need. It was under these circumstances that many zealous priests and Christian lay persons wished to be associated with Don Bosco in this ministry.

First and foremost among them we remember the zealous and much lamented Dr. Giovanni Borel, Fr. Giuseppe Caffasso, and Canon [Carlo Antonio] Borsarelli [di Rifeffredo]. These were the first cooperators from among the clergy. But since they had other demanding commitments, they could be on hand only at certain hours and on certain occasions.

Consequently, we turned to gentlemen from the nobility and the middle class for help, and we drew a generous response from a good number

of them. They came and were assigned to teaching catechism, conducting classes, supervising the boys during services in and out of church. With exemplary dedication they led the boys in prayer and song, they prepared them for the receptions of the holy sacraments of penance, communion, and confirmation.

Outside church, they would be on hand to receive the boys as they arrived at the oratory, to assign places for recreation to them, to take part in a kindly manner in their games, to maintain order.

Another important concern of the cooperators was *job placement*. Many boys were from out of town, sometimes from distant places; they found themselves alone, without a livelihood, without a job, without anyone who would care for them. Some of the cooperators then would go after those lads; they tried to clean them up; they placed them with some honest employer, and got them ready to make their appearance at the work place. During the week they would visit those youngsters, and see that they came back to the oratory the following Sunday, so that they might not lose in one day what they had gained by the labor of several weeks.

Many of these cooperators at great personal sacrifice came faithfully every evening during the winter season, and taught classes in reading, writing, singing, arithmetic, and Italian language. Others instead would come daily at noon to teach catechism to those youngsters who were most in need of instruction.

Among the many laypersons deserving recognition for their charity and dedication one of the most outstanding was Mr. Giuseppe Gagliardi, a businessman. He generously devoted all his free time and all his savings to helping the youngsters of the oratory. He would always refer to them affectionately as *our children*. He passed away only a few years ago; and he will be gratefully remembered as long as the work of the oratory endures. Other dedicated cooperators whom God has already called to himself were [?] Campagna, a banker; Giovanni Fino, a businessman; Chevalier Giuseppe Cotta; and the well known Count Vittorio di Camburzano.

Among those who are still with us, we wish gratefully to acknowledge Count Carlo Cays; Commander Giuseppe Dupré; Marquis Domenico Fassati; Marquis Giovanni Scampì; the three brothers, Counts Carlo, Eugenio, and Francesco De Maistre; Chevalier Marco Gonella; Count Francesco [Viancini di] Viancino; Chevalier Clemente di Villanova; Count Casimiro di Brozzolo; Chevalier Lorenzo d'Agliano; Mr. Michele Scanagatti; Baron Carlo Bianco di Barbania; and many others.

Among the many priests who became associated with the work we may mention: the brothers [Giovanni] Ignazio and Giovanni [Battista] Vola; Dr. [Paolo Francesco] Rossi, who died as director of the Oratory of St. Aloysius; Dr. Attorney [Giovanni Battista] Destefanis—all of whom God has already called to their heavenly home. To these must be added Dr. Roberto Murialdo, the present director of the *Famiglia di S. Pietro*, and Dr. Leonardo Murialdo, at present director of the *Artigianelli* Institute.

Among the earliest priest-cooperators who are still with us, God be praised, the following should be mentioned: Fr. Giuseppe Trivero; Dr. Chevalier Giacinto Carpano; Fr. Michelangelo Chiatellino; Fr. Ascanio Savio; Fr. Giovanni Giacomelli; Dr. Prof. [?] Chiaves; Fr. Antò Bosio, now pastor; Fr. Sebastiano Pacchiotti; Fr. Prof. [Giovanni Battista] Musso; Canon [?] Musso, a teacher; Fr. Pietro Ponti [Pontè]; Canon Luigi Nasi; Canon Prof. (?) Marengo; Fr. Francesco Onesti, a teacher; Dr. Emiliano Manacorda, now bishop of Fossano; Canon Eugenio Galletti, now bishop of Alba.

We must above all acknowledge the contribution of our archbishop, the then Canon [Lawrence] Gastaldi. He would faithfully be available for preaching, hearing confessions, and teaching classes. He always regarded the festive oratories as a providential work, a work guided and sustained by God.⁴

All these cooperators came down to the fields of Valdocco to work. The district is now completely built up, but at the time it was fairly deserted. They came and spent time, money, and their best efforts on behalf of young people at risk—to gather them together in order to instruct them in the truths of faith and return them to society as good, productive citizens.

[...].⁵

We had cooperators not only from among the men, but also from among the women. Some of our pupils (*allievi*) were nothing but dirty, unkempt ragamuffins. No one could stand them, and no employer wanted them in his workshop. A number of charitable ladies came to the rescue. They washed, they sewed, they patched, they even provided new clothes and linen for these boys, as need demanded.

The leader of the ladies was Mrs. Margherita Gastaldi, who worked at the

⁴ One should bear in mind that this was written in late 1877, at the time when the conflict between Don Bosco and Archbishop Gastaldi, after a long series of clashes, was reaching the breaking point with the publication of the first anonymous defamatory pamphlet.

⁵ At this point a short paragraph describes how order was kept, and the oratory run, according to a set of regulations, without recourse to threats or punishments.

oratory as a cooperator together with her daughter (both gone to their reward) and her niece, Lorenzina Mazzè. Other faithful workers were the Marchioness Maria Fassati, Countess Gabriella Corsi, Countess Bosco-Riccardi and her daughter Giulietta, Countess Casazza Riccardi, the noble Miss Candida Bosco, Countess Bosco-Cantono, Mrs. Vincenza Occhiena, Mrs. Bianco Juva, and many others. A number of charitable and educational institutes also joined in the effort on behalf of poor young people.

Everyone seemed fired with enthusiasm in this work of mercy, which was very much like “clothing the naked.” The youngsters, too, grateful for the benefits received, offered themselves willingly for singing and for serving as altar boys in those same institutes. They also expressed their gratitude by praying morning and evening for their benefactors.

4. External Members of the Salesian Society

This is an added chapter (appendix) in Don Bosco’s Constitutions 1860-73. It was suppressed in 1873. See Motto, *Const. SDB, Testi Critici*, 210-211.

MS Do 1860 - Italian	MS Gb 1862-4 - Italian	Printed Ls 1867 - Latin	Printed Ns 1873 - Latin
<p>1. <i>Any person (persona), even one living in the world, in one's house, in the bosom of one's family, can belong to this society</i></p> <p>2. <i>He (Egli) takes no vows, but shall try to practice those portions of the present rule that are compatible with his age and condition.</i></p> <p>3. <i>In order to share in the spiritual benefits of the society he must at least promise the Rector to use his wealth and his powers in the manner that, in his judgement, will redound to the greater glory of God</i></p> <p>4. <i>Such promise, however, shall not be binding under pain of sin, not even venial sin.</i></p>	<p>1. <i>Any person (persona), even one living in the world, in one's house, in the bosom of one's family, can belong to this society</i></p> <p>2. <i>He (Egli) takes no vows, but shall try to practice those portions of the present rule that are compatible with his age and condition. [He might] teach or promote the teaching of catechism in behalf of poor children, work for the spreading of good books. [He might] help organize triduums, novena, retreats and similar works of charity that have the spiritual good of the young and of the common people especially in view.</i></p> <p>3. <i>In order to share in the spiritual benefits of the society he must at least promise the Rector to engage in those things that, in his judgment, will redound to the greater glory of God.</i></p> <p>4. <i>Such promise, however, shall not be binding under pain of sin, not even venial sin.</i></p> <p>5. <i>Any member of the society who leaves from the same for a reasonable cause is regarded as an external member, and shares at once in the spiritual benefits of the society, provided he keeps those parts of the rule that are binding on external members.</i></p>	<p>1. <i>Any person (persona), even one living in the world, in one's house, in the bosom of one's family, can belong to this society</i></p> <p>2. <i>He (Egli) takes no vows, but shall try to practice those portions of the present rule that are compatible with his age and condition.</i></p> <p>3. <i>In order to share in the spiritual benefits of the society he must at least promise the Rector to adopt a mode of life that, in the same Rector's judgment, will redound to the greater glory of God</i></p> <p>4. <i>If one, however, fails to keep the promise made, he will not be guilty of any sin, not even venial sin.</i></p>	<p>1. <i>Any person (persona), even one living in the world, in one's house, in the bosom of one's family, can belong to this society</i></p> <p>2. <i>He (Egli) takes no vows, but shall try to practice those portions of the present rule that are compatible with his age and condition.</i></p> <p>3. <i>In order to share in the spiritual benefits of the society he must at least promise the Rector to adopt a mode of life that, in the same Rector's judgment, will redound to the greater glory of God</i></p> <p>4. <i>If one, however, fails to keep the promise made, he will not be guilty of any sin, not even venial sin.</i></p>

III. Comments on the Documents and their Interpretation

1. The Existence of an Early Congregation of St. Francis de Sales before the First Constitutions (1858) and its “Division” in 1859

Desramaut’s Interpretation in Summary

In the foregoing pages we outlined Francis Desramaut’s interpretation of the data, and submitted relevant documents. In essays of 1873 and 1883 he cites documents stemming from Don Bosco himself (given above) tending to prove the existence since 1841 of a broadly based “Congregation” composed of priests and lay people, men and women engaged collaboratively in the work of the oratory with Don Bosco as religious superior. This *Congregation of St. Francis de Sales* of cooperators received ecclesiastical approval from Archbishop Fransoni by Decree of 1852. This same Congregation was divided into two families in 1859—one opted to live in community and profess the three canonical vows; the other did not form community or take vows, but continued to help, in a variety of ways and with various degrees of commitment, with the work of the oratories. The extern members described in the chapter-appendix to the Constitutions would “represent” the second family. This in broad outline is Fr. Desramaut’s view.

Before summarizing Stella’s critique, I should make a brief comment on how Don Bosco in 1876 petitioned for the “approval” of the Salesian Cooperators, as we know them, and of the Work of Mary Help of Christians.

The Salesian Cooperators of 1876 and the Case of their “Approval”

Between 1874 and 1876, Don Bosco developed the concept of the Cooperator apart from the constitutions, and wrote appropriate regulations. The Association of Salesian Cooperators and the Work of Mary Help of Christians (Sons of Mary) were presented to Pius IX together. Pius IX encouraged both projects in early 1875; then a few months later he granted a commendation and spiritual favors by a decree of July 30. Finally the two institutions were presented together on March 4, 1876 *as already established*, and therefore

not for “approval” but for “recognition,” through the granting of indulgences (decrees of May 9, 1876).⁶

About a month later, Don Bosco printed a pamphlet describing the objectives of the Salesian Cooperators.⁷ It included the Holy Father’s blessing on the association. Don Bosco also hoped to include in his brochure Archbishop Gastaldi’s approval and blessing. On submitting the pamphlet, he wrote: “These Cooperators are a type of *Third Order* through which the Holy Father is granting a few spiritual favors to our benefactors. Now that the Holy Father has granted his blessing, I humbly beg Your Excellency also to [...]” Faced with this *fait accompli*, the archbishop raised strong objections.⁸ But Don Bosco had the pamphlets printed in the diocese of Albenga with the approval of Bishop Anacleto Pietro Siboni.

Some two months later, wishing to publish the decree of “approval,” Don Bosco submitted a copy to the chancery. The archbishop was quick to point out that the papal brief merely granted “indulgences and spiritual favors” on the basis of an assumed prior canonical approval. Who gave this canonical approval? The papal brief on the Salesian Cooperator, as also that on the Work of Mary Help of Christians, was clearly worded to that effect: “We have been informed that a Pious Sodality of Christian men and women, under the name of Sodality or Union of Salesian Cooperators, has been canonically established. [...]”⁹

It is certain that Pius IX strongly supported the establishment of both the Work of Mary Help of Christians and the Salesian Cooperators, and that

⁶ For the Sons of Mary see petition and decree in *IBM XI*, 533-535, Appendix 3 (omitted in *EBM*). For the Cooperators, see petition in *EBM XI*, 65 and decree in *IBM XI*, 546f., Appendix 7 (omitted in *EBM*).

⁷ This was the fourth and final elaboration of the statutes entitled, “*Cooperatori Salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società* (The Salesian Cooperators—an association dedicated to furthering Christian morals and the good of society)” in *IBM XI*, 540-545, Appendix 5 (omitted in *EBM*).

⁸ Letter of July 11, 1876, *EBM XI*, 66. For a discussion of the conflict between Don Bosco and Archbishop Gastaldi over the Salesian Cooperators and the Work of Mary Help of Christians (Sons of Mary), cf. also A. Lenti, “The Bosco-Gastaldi Conflict, Part II,” *Journal of Salesian Studies* 5:1 (1994) 55-59. (The subject of the Cooperators will be taken up in a later volume.)

⁹ “Cum sicuti relatum est Nobis, Pia quaedam Christifidelium Sodalitas, quam Sodalitatem seu Unionem Cooperatorum Salesianorum appellant, canonice instituta sit, [...] Nos, ut Sodalitas huiusmodi maiora in dies suscipiat incrementa, [etc.]”

prior to this decree (of May 9, 1876) he had expressed his approval both by word of mouth and through a brief granting spiritual favors. But the fact remains that the brief in question merely granted indulgences, and did so on the assumption of prior canonical approval—clearly not by the Holy See; then, by whom?

Apparently Don Bosco had not meant to request the Holy See's approval of a *new* association. He had merely requested spiritual favors for an association *already in existence* and (as far as he was concerned) *canonically erected*. He argued this point in the famous (and much discussed) memorandum written in late 1876 or early 1877, entitled "Salesian Cooperators," probably intended for the *Salesian Bulletin*, but never published (see Document II above). Here Don Bosco argues that the Salesian Cooperators were in existence since 1841, were identified with the collaborative work of the oratories, and became known as "the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales," of which Don Bosco figured as "Superior." This "congregation" received encouragement, faculties, and spiritual favors at various dates from the Holy See and from Archbishop Luigi Fransoni by decree of 1852 (appointing Don Bosco Spiritual Director in Chief of the three oratories).

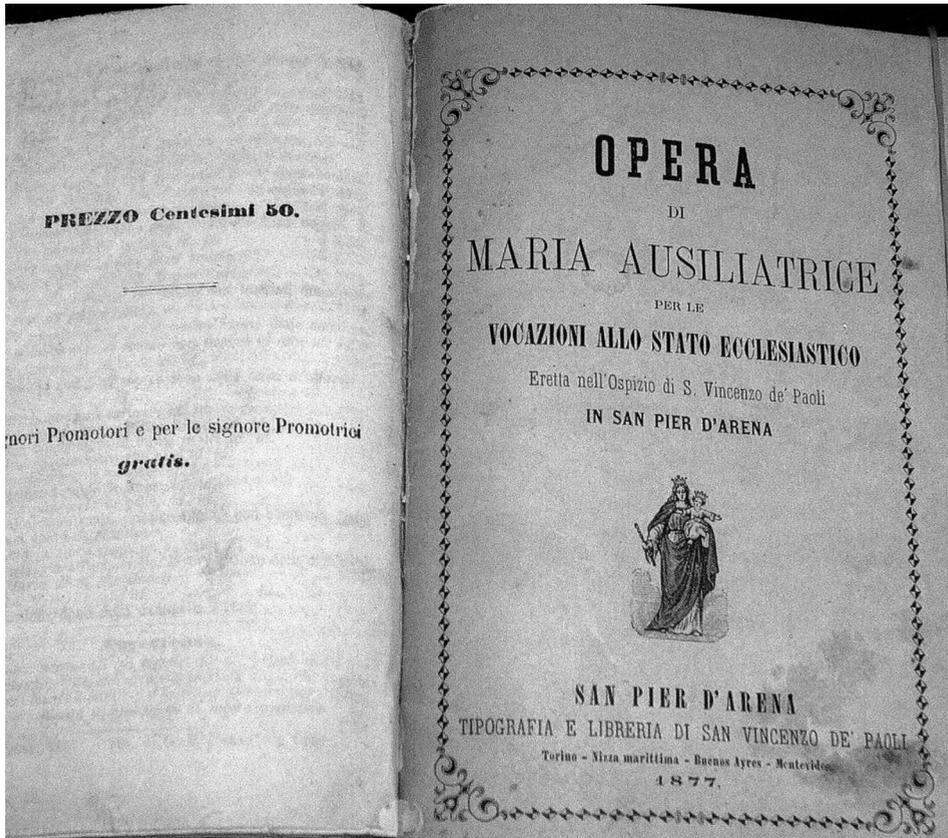
In 1858/1859 this "congregation" was divided into two families: one bound by vows and living in community, the other (still known as "*Union* or Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, *Promoters* or *Cooperators*") continued "to live in the world while working on behalf of the oratories." Therefore, when the papal decrees speak of a sodality already canonically erected, they refer:

To those early promoters who were actually (*di fatto—de facto?*) approved and recognized over a period of ten years as true cooperators in the work of the oratories. This association was formally established (*formalmente costituita*) with the decree of 1852. These cooperators continued as associates (*ad essere aggregati*) even after 1858, when some of their number began to live in common under their own constitutions.¹⁰

The Work of Mary Help of Christians (Sons of Mary)

The Decree on the Work of Mary Help of Christians expresses the same understanding, and went through the same process as that on the Coopera-

¹⁰ Cf. Document II above, final paragraph.



27 – Work of Mary, Help of Christians, on behalf of Priestly Vocations (1877)

tors. Hence the same question may be asked: What is the origin and the character of this “pre-existing, canonically established” association?

In the case of the Work of Mary Help of Christians, it is important to note that the spiritual favors are granted not to the young adults (between the ages of 16 and 30 years) who would be recruited (“Sons of Mary”), but rather to the “Sodality,” that is, to a “group” of men and women (assumed to exist already as a *canonically* approved association). The work of this association was to recruit and educate priestly vocations. Rightly then one may ask, “What existing association is Don Bosco speaking of? Which Church authority gave canonical approval to the ‘Pious Work?’” Don Bosco could make a case for the prior “canonical” existence of the Cooperators by referring their

canonical approval to Archbishop Frasoni's decree of 1852. But could a similar claim be made in the case of the Work of Mary Help of Christians?

It seems, therefore, that Don Bosco in speaking of the Work of Mary Help of Christians as a pre-existing association engaged in recruiting and educating priestly vocations (Sons of Mary) was referring to the Salesian Co-operators. The association of Salesian Cooperators is the pre-existing canonically approved association. The Cooperators were also pledged to work for vocations.

Clearly the Sons of Mary were a creation of mid-1870. But the association or sodality on which the ministry for delayed vocations was based had a prior existence. This association or sodality is identified with the Cooperators, that is, the group of men and women bonded to work for the oratory from the start.

*Stella's critique to Desramaut's Interpretation*¹¹

Father Pietro Stella has often stated his conviction that Don Bosco's *idea* of how the work of the Oratory should be carried forward and made permanent underwent developments at various points. But he maintains that no officially approved society of any sort existed before the approval of the Society of St. Francis de Sales in 1869, and that no project for such a society was set forth officially before the constitutions of 1858 and the founding of 1859. (Unofficially, however, Don Bosco was gathering and cultivating some young people through the 1850s in view of binding them to himself and to the work of the oratory).

Neither the granting of indulgences, nor Archbishop Frasoni's decree of 1852 amounts to an ecclesiastical (canonical) approval of such a society. It follows that if there was no society, neither was there a "division" of a society in 1858/1859. Hence the documents cited by Desramaut should be read in a different light. Stella makes the following comments.

There is no record of the existence of such a "congregation." In his *Memoirs of the Oratory* (which tell the story up to 1854), Don Bosco speaks of groups and societies, but never mentions this "congregation" dating back to 1844 or 1841, presided over by himself and made up of priests and lay

¹¹ Cf. P. Stella's review or comment in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 2 (1983) 451-454.

people, both men and women. Secondly, contemporary documents, such as letters, registrations, public and private appeals, lottery circulars, newspapers, etc. are completely silent on the existence of such a “congregation.” Thirdly, apart from the documents on the Cooperators cited by Desramaut, we find no mention of such a “congregation” in the archives of the Salesian Society, of the Turin Chancery or of Murialdo’s Society of St. Joseph, etc.

How, then, explain the language of the documents cited by Desramaut, chiefly the two documents on the Cooperators. In the first place, one document is a manuscript in the hand of Father Berto, and corrected by Don Bosco, that was published in *Bollettino Salesiano* [3 (Sep.-Oct. 1877) 6], and bears the title, “*Storia dei cooperatori salesiani*.” Here Don Bosco speaks of “a kind of congregation” (*una specie di congregazione*). Stella believes that this document merely aims at encouraging the cooperators by reminding them that they were part of the work from the beginning—men and women from every walk of life. The readers knew well that he didn’t mean that he had established, and won approval for, a congregation that included men and women from every walk of life in the 1840s or 1850s. Secondly, the other document is a manuscript in Don Bosco’s own hand, entitled “*Cooperatori Salesiani*” and dating from late 1876 or early 1877. It is bolder and more explicit, for in it there is mention of a “real congregation.” Stella points out that the basis for speaking of the group gravitating around Don Bosco in these terms was the concession of spiritual favors (*ad personam*, but applicable to others). This, however, does not establish a congregation. It is significant also that this document was never used, that is, never published in the *Salesian Bulletin*, to describe the Salesian Cooperators.¹² Don Bosco set it aside and used the former document in its place perhaps because he feared it might engender misconceptions. Thirdly, Desramaut also refers to other documents. One such document dating from 1850 likewise relates to indulgences. It is a papal Rescript given in response to a petition by Don Bosco for favors on behalf of “a Congregation with the title and under the protection of St. Francis de Sales.” P. Stella notes that a similar petition on behalf of “a Congregation of the Guardian Angel” is held in the Central Salesian Archive. Presumably there was also one on behalf of “a Congregation of St. Aloysius.” This shows that the term “congregation” simply meant the groups involved in the work of the oratory. Fourthly, On the strength of the above-mentioned document, “*Cooperatori*

¹² Later published by Ceria, cf. note 4, above.

Salesiani,” Desramaut argues that in 1859 there was a “restructuring” in the earlier, more generic society. This restructuring was preceded by the early constitutions of 1858 (generally Tridentine in form), and it entailed a division reflected in the distinction between “internal members,” living in community in accordance with the constitutions, and “external members” as described in the early constitutions.

Stella remarks that the chapter on the “external members” was not part of the first constitutions, but was inserted later by Don Bosco (Stella says, around 1864).¹³ Therefore the concept of the “external member” is to be understood not as the carry-over from the earlier, more generic society, but only in reference to the religious congregation of *men* that Don Bosco was establishing and that won commendation in Rome with the *decretum laudis* (1864). Women would be automatically excluded. Furthermore it should be noted that between 1864 and 1874 Don Bosco accepted only two such external members (two priest).

(Desramaut also mentions the fact, but takes these two officially listed externs to represent the many unlisted ones working for the oratory with various degrees of commitment.)

Stella’s conclusion is that in the two documents on the Cooperators (written in 1876/77 with a special purpose in mind) Don Bosco uses the term “congregation” in a wider or figurative sense. The different forms of commitment by different people to Don Bosco and to the work of the oratory cannot be reduced to one proper of a religious congregation, although it is *collaborative ministry*. Perhaps Desramaut did not take sufficiently into account the character of the writer (Don Bosco) and the “tendency” (*Tendenze*) of the documents in question.

Final Comment

What are we to think of all this? This is my tentative understanding of the matter.

¹³ According to Motto [*Costituzioni SDB, Testi critici*] the articles on external members are first documented in a manuscript draft of the constitutions dated no earlier than 1860. This does not invalidate Stella’s argument, for these articles are lacking in earlier drafts of the constitutions.

(1) The documents show that a lot of people, besides Don Bosco, were involved collaboratively in various capacities and with various degrees of commitment in the work of the oratories (as cooperators or promoters, etc.). Desramaut seems to understand “congregation” in this wider sense.

(2) But this collaborative ministry did not make these cooperators into a “congregation,” and neither did the “spiritual favors” received from the Pope nor Archbishop Franson’s Decree of 1852 amount to ecclesiastical canonical approval, though Don Bosco may have thought so. That may be the reason why Stella could not find any attestation of the existence of such a “congregation,” apart from Don Bosco’s statements in the documents cited above.

That Don Bosco was convinced that a congregation of collaborators had been canonically established might be confirmed by the manner in which he applied to the Pope for “approval” of the Cooperators and of the Work of Mary Help of Christians in 1875-76. He presented both associations and already in existence and approved by the Church. This must have been his conviction, unless (as Stella suggests) this representation was due “to the character of the writer and to the *Tendenç* of the writing.”

(3) The crucial point in any interpretation, however, has to deal satisfactorily with the nature of the “division “ of 1859. Don Bosco writes:

[In 1858] the Congregation [of cooperators, promoters...] was divided into two branches, or rather, families. Those who believed they had a vocation and had no impediment joined together to live in community, [...] called the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales. [...] The rest, that is the laypersons, kept on living in the world with their own families but continued to work on behalf of the oratories. They retained the title of *Union* or Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, *Promoters* or *Cooperators*. In the first Salesian Constitutions a chapter is dedicated to them under the title of “External Members”.¹⁴

We note, in the first place, that the people who in 1859 opted for living in community with vows were all (with the exception of Don Bosco and Father Alasonatti) in sacred orders or aspiring to ordination—and were all trained by Don Bosco at the Home. Hence realistically, in spite of Don Bosco’s statement, the division (in any division there was) did not concern the broadly based congregation of cooperators or promoters of the work of the oratories.

¹⁴ Crucial passage from Document II, above.

Secondly, the chapter on Extern Salesians, which (so Don Bosco states) was “dedicated to the *Union of Promoters or Cooperators*” (extern family resulting from the division) even if not factually true may represent Don Bosco’s (unsuccessful) attempt to unite all forces, old and new, involved in oratory work under the constitutional umbrella of the Salesian Society. If that is the case, Don Bosco’s statement transcends historical factuality.

In 1864 the Salesian Society received the Decree of Commendation (*Decretum Laudis*) together with 13 critical observations. One of these ordered the removal of the chapter on Extern Salesians. Don Bosco, however, persisted and retained the chapter (first introduced in 1860) until forced to remove it in 1873, before the definitive approval of the constitutions in 1874. But the idea, under a different form, was afterwards more successfully realized in the re-organization of the Salesian Cooperators (1876).

Chapter 9

THE FOUNDING OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY (1859)

Bonetti, *Early Apostolate* 343-358; *EBM* as cited under point 1 of Summary, below and *EBM* V, 523-602; P. Stella, *DB:LW*, 133-179; F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 495-508, 571-586.

Summary

1. Working toward a Decision to Gather an Inner Group for the Work of the Oratory (1850-1858)
 1. Survey of Experiments through the 1850s to the Founding of 1859 (as in *EBM*)
 2. The pivotal Year 1854
 3. Don Bosco's Idea of a Group Dedicated to Continuing the Work of the Oratories—a Religious Society?
 4. Don Bosco's Meeting with Minister Urbano Rattazzi (1857)
 5. Religious Commitment of the Group Gathered in the Fifties—What Kind of Religious Society?
2. Don Bosco and Pius IX (1858)—a “Plan” for a Religious Society (1858)
 1. Bonetti's and Lemoyne's Interpretation regarding the Audiences and previously Written Constitutions
 2. Correction of Bonetti's and Lemoyne's Interpretation on the basis of Don Bosco's Letter to Rosminian General Father Pagani and of the Rua Diary
 3. The Form of the Society in the first Draft of the Constitutions (1858)
3. Official Founding of the Salesian Society (1859)—Division in the Group Gathered in the Fifties
4. Official Profession of Vows “as Prescribed by the Rules” (1862)

1. Don Bosco Gathers “His Men” and Forms the Salesian Society— Summary of the Process

Before engaging in a detailed discussion of the founding of the Salesian Society in the later fifties, it seems useful to give a summary of the process

that led to the founding. The process may be said to begin with the year 1849, at a time when the oratory crisis was looming ahead. Don Bosco began to cultivate certain young men who could serve as catechists and leaders in the oratories, and at the same time found new purpose for the lads at the Home (*Casa Annessa*). The process gains new momentum in the year 1854, a watershed year that (in this respect) closes the book on the oratory era and opens the era of the Salesian Society (see below).

The process by which Don Bosco's gathered "his men" is described both in *Documenti* and in the *Biographical Memoirs*. Lemoyne did not join Don Bosco until 1864. He describes the events on the basis not only of Don Bosco's own communications, but also of archival documents originating with the participants, of the chroniclers and of Bonetti's *Storia* for the years 1857-1858.¹

Our summary of the process relies on the *Biographical Memoirs*.

EBM III, 383-386, 402-403 (July 1849)

Don Bosco picks out four young men for special consideration and teaches them Latin: Felix Reviglio, James Bellia, Joseph Buzzetti and Charles Gastini. Don Bosco's interest in these young men as a "group" would indicate that Don Bosco was looking for "helpers" among promising lads as early as 1849. Only Buzzetti became a Salesian. (These four should be distinguished from the second group of four of 1854).

EBM IV, 63-64 (September 28, 1850)

Don Bosco submits a petition and obtains the first papal document addressed to the "Director of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales," granting indulgences to oratory workers. Don Bosco regards this favor as a kind of "approval."

The editor of *EBM* notes: "This petition is particularly important because Don Bosco for the first time mentions the Salesian Congregation." [!] Note that a similar document addressed to the Director of the Congregation of the Guardian Angel held in *ASC* (and presumably also one regarding that of St. Aloysius) shows that the group of oratory workers is what's meant. (But

¹ Bonetti is a major source for the year 1857 (dialogue with Rattazzi) and 1858 (audiences with Pius IX), but does not describe the actual founding on December 9 and 18, 1859.

see also Desramaut's interpretation of the term and Stella's critique in the preceding chapter).

EBM IV, 96-98 (October 1850)

Don Bosco petitions Archbishop Fransoni to have the above-mentioned "four" take examinations to don the clerical habit, hence with the priesthood in view. Furthermore, Michael Rua is mentioned as the object of Don Bosco's special care. Other boys are mentioned, but it is not clear just where they stood.

EBM IV, 161 (February 2, 1851)

The above-mentioned "four" receive the clerical habit in the Pinardi chapel on the feast of the Purification, coupled with the external celebration of the feast of St. Francis de Sales.

EBM IV, 262 & 527 (March 31, 1852)

Archbishop Fransoni's decree confirms Don Bosco as spiritual director-in-chief of the three oratories. Don Bosco regards, and henceforth refers to, this resolution of the "oratory crisis" in his favor as an official "approval."

EBM IV, 294-298 (June 5, 1852)

The "Seven Joys of Mary Group" – On the evening of Saturday, June 5, 1852, Don Bosco gathered a group of select young men for a conference—during which they resolved to recite the Seven Joys of Mary every Sunday until the first Saturday of May the following year. "At that time we shall see how each of us carried out this resolution." The event and the names were recorded by Rua: [Fr. (or Deacon?) Joachim] Guanti, [James] Bellia, [Joseph] Buzzetti, [?] Gianinati, Angelo Savio, Stephen Savio, [Secundus] Marchisio, [John] Turchi, [Joseph] Rocchietti, [John Baptist] Francesca, Francis Bosco, [John] Cagliero, [John] Germano, and [Michael] Rua. Of these fifteen (including Don Bosco) six were among the founders in 1859: Don Bosco, Rua, Cagliero, Francesca, A. Savio, Buzzetti, and Rocchietti, who became a Salesian but left the Society.

EBM IV, 337-338 (October 3, 1852)

Michael Rua and Joseph Rocchietti receive the clerical habit from Fr. Anthony Cinzano in the chapel of the Holy Rosary, set up in Joseph's house at Becchi.

EBM V, 7-8 (January 26, 1854)

A new “group of four” meets with Don Bosco. “On the evening of January 26, 1854, we gathered in Don Bosco’s room. Present were Don Bosco, [Joseph] Rocchietti, [James] Artiglia, [John] Cagliero, and [Michael] Rua. Don Bosco suggested that, with the help of the Lord and St. Francis de Sales, we should engage in the *practical exercise of charity* toward neighbor [i.e., the work of the oratory]. This would be in view of making a promise of it—and later, if possible and appropriate, a vow to the Lord. From that evening on those who committed, or would in the future commit themselves, to this exercise were called ‘Salesians’.”²

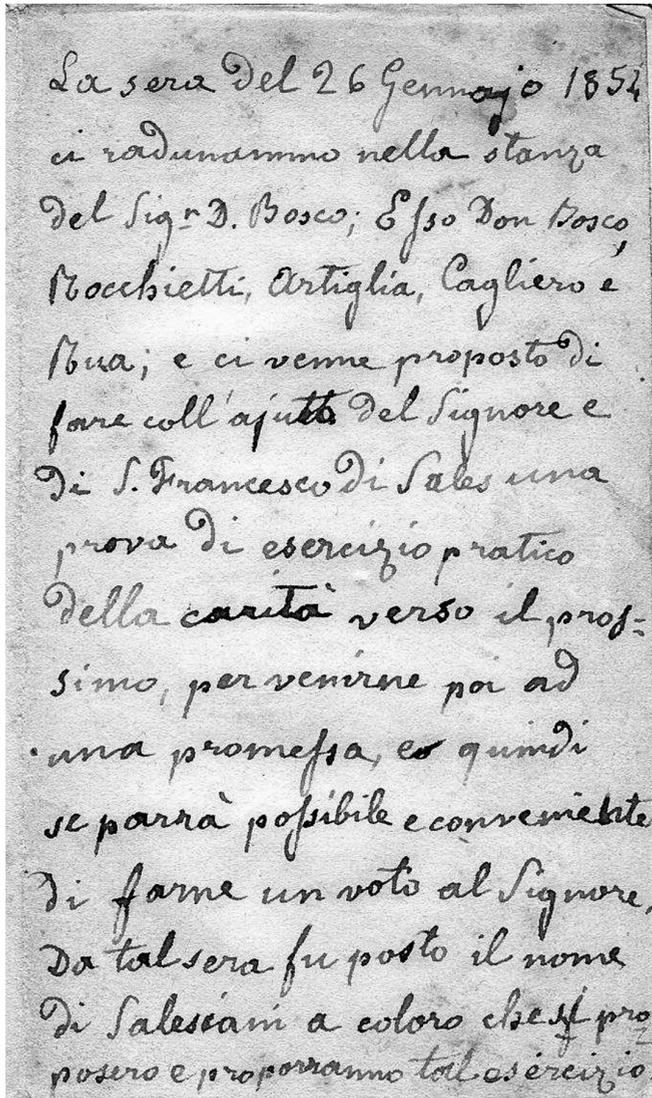
EBM V, 80-81 (October 1854)

Angelo Savio has already received the clerical habit. John Turchi and some others are about to do likewise. Don Bosco speaks of the future in hopeful terms.

EBM V, 452-464 (1857) (from Bonetti’s Storia)

Previous suggestions made to Don Bosco about establishing a religious society are mentioned. They come from Fr. Ascanio Savio, Fr. Cafasso, Archbishop Fransoni, etc. This leads up to the famous *conversation with Minister Urbano Rattazzi*, who suggested the type of society (with no reference to a religious congregation) that would be viable under the law. Don Bosco “re-

² From a *later* note by Fr. Rua (not found in *Documenti*). The use of the designation “Salesian” at this early date (1854) is disputed. It is worth noting that 1854 was the year in which the Cavour-Rattazzi bill against religious corporations was introduced to Parliament. It was the year of Rattazzi’s visit to Don Bosco and of their conversation on the educational method. It was the year of the great cholera (summer) and of Dominic Savio’s enrollment at the Oratory (Autumn).



La sera Del 26 Gennaio 1854
ci radunammo nella stanza
Del Sign. D. Bosco; E sso Don Bosco,
Mocchiatti, Artiglia, Cagliari e
Rua; e ci venne proposto di
fare coll'ajuto del Signore e
Di S. Francesco di Sales una
prova di esercizio pratico
della carità verso il prof-
simo, per venire poi ad
una promessa, e quindi
se parrà possibile e conveniente
di farne un voto al Signore.
Da tal sera fu posto il nome
di Salesiani a coloro che si pro-
posero e proporranno tal esercizio.

28 – “On the evening of January 26, 1854, we gathered in Don Bosco’s room...”
(brief memoir by Fr. Michael Rua)

ceived illumination” from Rattazzi’s explanation of the point of law. He then consulted various bishops, as well as Archbishop Fransoni (in exile). It is noted that Don Bosco had for some time been gathering some students and seminarians for conferences (see detailed discussion below).

EBM V, 561 (March 9, 1858) (from Bonetti's Storia)

Don Bosco's had a *first audience with Pius IX*, on the occasion of his first trip to Rome. The Pope asked, "What if you should die [...]?" Don Bosco presents Archbishop Fransoni's letter of commendation and a brief plan for a religious society. Pope Pius IX lays down the kind of congregation it should be (detailed discussion below).

The *first draft of the Salesian Constitutions* follows the Roman trip and is dated later in 1858. In the Historical Introduction Don Bosco writes: "Fifteen persons are at present committed to these rules, namely, 5 priests, 8 seminarians, and 2 laymen" [Motto, *Cost. SDB, Testi Critici*, 70].

EBM VI, 180-183 (December 18, 1859)

On December 9, 1859, at a conference to the select group of 22 people he had been cultivating, Don Bosco formally *proposed the forming of a religious society* and invited those who were willing to take part in it to meet again on December 18. This meeting (December 18, 1859) marks the *birth of the Salesian Society*.

The *Biographical Memoirs* quote the minutes signed by Don Bosco and by Fr. Alasonatti acting as secretary, and give 18 names including Don Bosco's. This manuscript bearing Don Bosco's authentic signature is in *ASC D868: Cons. Sup., Verballi* [FDB 1,873 D9-11]. Stella, however, writes: "The names of those who joined the Society of St. Francis de Sales are taken from the minutes of the founding conference, in a Ms. by Giulio Barberis in ASC 055." He gives 19 names, the additional one being that of "Gaia Giuseppe, coad." (35 years of age) [Stella, *DBE&Soc*, 295, note 1 and related text].

Although Don Bosco had been cultivating select young men as early as 1849, the year 1854 (as indicated above) marks Don Bosco's resolve to move forward with the formation of a religious society. This we know from Don Bosco's words as reported by Fr. Giulio Barberis in his chronicle.

2. The Year 1854, a True Starting Point in the Formation of the Salesian Society

In speaking of Don Bosco's *Memoirs* we noted the pivotal position of the year 1854. In 1876, as reported by Barberis, Don Bosco spoke of the *Memoirs*

(just completed) emphasizing the importance of the year 1854 as a turning point in the story of his work. Barberis writes:

Speaking of the beginnings of the Oratory, Don Bosco said: “Truly the story of the beginning of the oratories is at once so memorable and so poetic that I myself would very much like to gather our Salesians together and relate it in detail. [...] I have set down the main events up to the year 1854. *It was at that point that the Oratory acquired stability and gradually took on the present shape. One might say that with that year the poetic period came to an end and the prosaic period began.*”³

This was the year in which Don Bosco first drafted a complete set of regulations for the “festive” oratory. The new building capable of housing some 100 boys was ready for occupancy. That same year 1854, the famous second group of four came together for “a practical exercise in the work of charity.”

During the Conferences of St. Francis de Sales Don Bosco again returned to the subject.⁴ As Barberis reports it, Don Bosco spoke of the pivotal importance of the year 1854 and voiced his belief that his own life had become inextricably wedded to that of the Society.

Don Bosco said: “As for me, I have set down a summary account of events relating to the oratory, from its beginnings to the present;⁵ and up to 1854 [in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*] the narrative goes into details in many instances. *From 1854 on, the discourse begins to be about the Congregation, and matters begin to loom larger and put*

³ Cronachette, Barberis, *Autograph Chronicle*, January 1, 1876, Notebook III, 46-47, *FDBM* 835 D9-10 (italics mine).

⁴ The conferences of St. Francis de Sales, so called for their being held around the feast of the saint (January 29, at the time), were general convocations of directors and other “superiors” for the purpose of discussing the business of the Congregation. They were the forerunners of the general chapters, and were held every year from 1865 to 1877, when the first general chapter was held in accordance with the constitutions.

⁵ “The present” would be early 1876 and therefore the reference could not be to the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. However, Don Bosco produced a number of “historical summaries” in the 1870s describing the development of his work. But the historical summary referred to here cannot be identified, unless he is referring to the historical summary of 1874 compiled for the approval of the constitutions: *Riassunto della Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel 23 Febbraio 1874*. It is transcribed with commentary in Pietro Braidò, *Don Bosco per i giovani: l’“Oratorio” una “Congregazione degli Oratori.”* Documenti. (Roma: LAS, 1988), 147-155. Cf. also *Opere Edite* XXV, 377-384.

on a different face. [...] I realize now that Don Bosco's life is totally bound up with the life of the Congregation; and therefore we have to speak of things [...].⁶

Barberis' comment on how Don Bosco gradually put across to his select young men the idea of a religious society is of interest. In those early days he avoided speaking of a religious society both for political reasons and for fear of frightening his young men away.

In those days Don Bosco would not speak overtly of a religious congregation in order not to frighten us away. He kept it under wraps. When inviting someone to be part of the Society, he would carefully avoid even the least reference to its being a religious congregation. Anything more explicit would have scared us all away. The four of us [Salesians chatting with Don Bosco] agreed, and so would all other first-generation priests and brothers, that if Don Bosco had openly proposed to us life in a religious order, none of us would have entered. In those days Don Bosco would simply use such expressions as, "Do you love Don Bosco? Would you like to do your seminary studies here at the Oratory? Would you like to help Don Bosco when the time comes? [...]" This is how we were baited and hooked. And fortunate are we for allowing Don Bosco so to deceive us [...].

"Don Bosco," I asked, "You tried to deceive us and draw us in against our will, didn't you?" "I had to be cautious," Don Bosco explained. "I did it that way so as not to frighten anybody. Now things have changed, and religious life is seen in a different light. For a long time I carefully avoided using the very word novitiate, for example, so as not to arouse people's suspicion about our being a religious order. Now I see that the word is used as a matter of course. But only two years ago using the word novitiate would have been, shall we say, counterproductive. We've come a long way!"

Don Bosco continued: "Things have changed also with respect to external discipline. Seminarians in those days carried on with great freedom. You could hear them shouting and arguing about literary or theological points at all hours. They would raise a din in the study hall when the boys were not there. They might stay in bed in the morning, and without warning fail to appear in class. They would skip meditation and spiritual reading as a matter of course, and the boys' spiritual retreat was enough retreat for them. I was well aware of all this, and would have liked to put a stop to it, but I preferred to let things be. The situation gradually improved, and order and discipline were established. If I had acted to enforce religious discipline all at once my seminarians would have walked out, and I would have had to send the boys home and shut down the Oratory. But

⁶ Barberis, *Autograph Chronicle*, February 2, 1876, Notebook IV, 41, *FDBM 837 D1* (italics mine).

I could see that most of those young men had a lot of good will and were very good at heart. I knew that once the wild days of youth were behind them, they would settle down and be a great help to me. A number of priests in our congregation are of that vintage, and they are exemplary for their dedication to their work and for their priestly spirit.”⁷

3. The Founding of the Salesian Society (1854-1859)

Besides the sources and literature listed above, in the paragraphs that follow below use is made of the documents critically edited in Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco per i giovani: l'«Oratorio»: una «Congregazione degli Oratori»*. Documenti (Piccola Biblioteca dell'Istituto Storico Salesiano 9). Roma: LAS, 1988. The documents edited by Braido are the following: [1] *Introduzione* and [2] *Cenno storico dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* (from the *Piano di Regolamento per l'Oratorio* [...] of 1854) [given in Vol. 2]; [3] *Cenni storici intorno all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* of 1862 [to be given later]; [4] *Cenno storico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales e relativi schiarimenti* (drafted early August 1873). (Roma: Tipografia Poliglotta della S.C. di Propaganda, 1874). [5] *Riassunto della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel 23 Febbraio 1874*.

1. The Concept of a Group to Continue the Work of the Oratories

In the early 1850s, Don Bosco was trying to find a way to make his work permanent. A number of priests and lay people had been associated with him in the work of the oratories; but the bond that united them among themselves and to him was loose at best. They each had their commitments and their ideas. Don Bosco may indeed have wished to band them together by some tighter bond under him and under some kind of rule. The *Regulations for the “festive” Oratory* of 1852-54 were written (so he states in the Introduction) to “serve as a norm in the exercise of this part of the sacred ministry, and as a guideline for the fairly numerous priests and lay people who devote their labors to this ministry with love and concern.”⁸

⁷ Barberis, *Autograph Chronicle*, December 7, 1875, Notebook III, 43-45, FDBM 835 D6-8.

⁸ Regulations of the Oratory, Historical Summary, in Braido, *DB per i giovani*, 33. As discussed earlier, Don Bosco regarded the many people (clergy and laity, men and women) as forming a (kind of) congregation (the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales) of which he was the superior.

As late as 1852-54, therefore, the years in which those regulations were elaborated, Don Bosco was still cherishing the hope of being able to bind the group together. Hence we may deduce that he had not succeeded in unifying that charitable, devoted, but very heterogeneous group of volunteers. In spite of statements by Don Bosco in later documents, a society gathered under common rules and recognizing Don Bosco as superior had never come into existence either *de jure* or *de facto*.⁹

The years 1848-1852, the years of the liberal revolution and of the First War of Independence and its aftermath, were critical for Don Bosco. Following Archbishop Fransoni's leadership and the example of Father Cafasso and other priests, he had taken a thoroughly conservative position with deep emotional involvement on the side of the Church's cause, in opposition to the more liberal patriotic priests, several of the oratory priests among them. The rift was now fully revealed and it involved coworkers (priests and laymen) as well as older oratory lads.¹⁰ Sponsored efforts to bring the parties together failed. Don Bosco maintained his autonomy but lost the support of some close associates.¹¹ Archbishop Fransoni seemed to have favored Don Bosco and officially appointed him Spiritual-Director-in-Chief of the three oratories by decree of March 31, 1852. This action gave Don Bosco and the oratories a place *within* the archdiocesan structure (though *outside* the established parish structure).

As he sought to make the work permanent, at one point he may have considered attaching the oratories to some existing religious institute, such as Rosmini's Institute of Charity, provided he be allowed to continue the work he had begun.¹² Finally (perhaps encouraged by Archbishop Fransoni's decree) he opted for a third way—to look among his boys (the inner circle of the students in the *Casa annessa*) for his helpers. Thus in that very year 1852, Don Bosco sought “to bring together a group of young men, who had been publicly and privately engaged in many charitable activities, and enjoyed the

⁹ On this point see earlier discussion of Desramaut's interpretation and Stella's critique.

¹⁰ This is substantiated by Father Giovanni Anfossi and by Giuseppe Brosio, the “Bersagliere”: cf. Anfossi's letter to Lemoyne and Brosio's *Memorie*, both in *ASC* A102.

¹¹ Stella, *DB:LW*, 109f. The larger group of “cooperators,” as discussed earlier, remained in place, even though they may not have constituted a “congregation,” as Don Bosco claims.

¹² Cf. Barberis, *Autograph Chronicle*, Notebook III, 46-56, Jan. 1, 1876, *FDB* 835 D9-E7, given separately; and *EBM* III, 171-173.

esteem of all classes of people.”¹³ Two years later, on January 26, 1854, according to Father Rua’s written testimony, Don Bosco picked four young men for a trial: Joseph Rocchietti, James Artiglia, Michael Rua and John Cagliari. He invited them

to engage, with the help of God and of St. Francis de Sales, in an experiment in the practical exercise of charity toward neighbor, in order eventually to make a promise and later, if possible and appropriate, a vow of it to the Lord. [...] From that evening the name *Salesians* was given to those who chose and would in the future choose to engage in such an exercise”¹⁴

This would indicate that in the early 1850s Don Bosco had gradually settled on his young men, formed to his standards, for his collaborators, and that in 1854 he had judged these four to be suitable candidates. He proposed to them the ideal of the “practical exercise of charity toward neighbour,” though he carefully avoided any reference to a religious congregation. Don Bosco proceeded cautiously because the idea of becoming “monks” did not appeal to him or to the youngsters. It seems also that in those historic circumstances, he had not yet decided what kind of religious commitment he would propose to them.

It should be borne in mind that through this period of transition Don Bosco was not alone. Besides Father Cafasso, Father Borel and his trusted “second in command” in the Home, Fr. Victor Alasonatti, he had helpers, both priests and lay people, but he apparently realized that a new approach was needed. The service that Don Bosco wished to offer poor and abandoned young people would still be in the form of a collaborative ministry, but it would be structured in a new way. There would be an inner group totally committed to that ministry according to a model that was becoming clearer to him with continuing experience.

2. The Idea of a Religious Society

When and how did Don Bosco first come by the idea of founding some kind of religious congregation? It should be borne in mind that by mid-1850s

¹³ *Cenno Storico...*, 1874, in Braido, *DB per i giovani*, 116f.

¹⁴ E. Ceria, *Vita del Servo di Dio Don Michele Rua* (Torino: SEI, 1949), 29; *EBM* V, 7f. See earlier footnote 2 and related text.

Don Bosco had a small group of followers already converted to a form of life that would even then be recognizable as a kind of religious life. Don Bosco's closest associate at this time was Father Vittorio Alasonatti, who had not been one of the early oratory workers. (Father John Borel was withdrawing because of his commitments to Barolo's institution). There were also a few young men, such as Rua, Cagliari and Francesia. Father Alasonatti and clerical student Michael Rua made a vow or promise in 1855, and clerical student John Baptist Francesia in 1856. These (and perhaps a few others) made up the group that began to live at the *Casa Annessa* under the regulations in force at the time and under Don Bosco's direction. They had made a commitment to the exercise of charity toward neighbor, for this was the vow or promise they made—not the vow of obedience, poverty and chastity.

Does the existence of a group bound to Don Bosco by vows or promises signify that by mid-1850s Don Bosco had decided on some kind of religious congregation to insure the future of his work? It may well be; but the evidence presently available allows us only to situate such a decision around 1857, when Don Bosco met with Minister Rattazzi and received *illumination* from his suggestions.

3. Don Bosco's Meeting with Minister of Interior Urbano Rattazzi (1857)

Our sole source for the historic meeting between Don Bosco and Minister Rattazzi is Father John Bonetti's *History of the Oratory (Storia dell'Oratorio)*, referred to above.

Desramaut summarizes the discussion as follows:

All things considered, the following points seem assured: (1) The conversation took place at the ministry of the Interior between Don Bosco and Rattazzi himself (as Bonetti's *Storia* affirms). (2) Don Bosco may have gone to the ministry for the purpose of thanking the minister for his support of the raffle (especially for the decree of April 30, 1857). (3) The meeting and the exchange probably took place at the beginning of May, 1857. (4) Probably the minister himself raised the question of how Don Bosco's humanitarian work might be carried on after his death. (5) When Don Bosco expressed his fears that a religious association might run into trouble with the government, Rattazzi explained to him that an association of free citizens exercising their individual inalienable rights would not incur the government's sanction. Rattazzi's advice, as reported in the *Storia*,



29 – Minister of the Interior Urbano Rattazzi (1808-1873)

is coherent with the minister's attested political [and juridical] principles. It also explains Don Bosco's stubbornness in wanting to give his congregation a non-religious visage.¹⁵

With this in mind, let's look at the essential parts of the lively exchange on the subject of the future of the work of the oratories, and offer some comments. Bonetti reports:

¹⁵ Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 521-522, note 35.

[Rattazzi:] “[...] You are mortal like everyone else. [...] What measures do you intend to adopt to secure the permanent existence of your institute?”

[DB:] “To tell you the truth, your Excellency, I have not reckoned on dying so soon; I have thought about procuring some help for the present, but not about the means of carrying on the work of the Oratories after my death. Now, since you have mentioned the matter, might I ask you, in my turn, by what means do you think it possible for me to establish such an institution on a safe footing?”

[R:] “In my opinion,” replied Rattazzi, “you should select a certain number of laymen and ecclesiastics, form a society under certain rules, imbue them with your spirit, teach them your system, so that they may not merely give you assistance [now], but may carry on the work after your departure.”

[Bonetti’s Comment I:] It seemed strange to Don Bosco that this very same man [who had authored the law of suppression of religious orders] should advise him to institute another of these congregations. He therefore replied:

[DB:] “But does your Excellency believe it possible to found such a society in these days? The Government two years ago suppressed certain religious communities, and is perhaps preparing now to do away with the rest. Do you think it would allow the establishment of another of a like nature?” [...].

[Rattazzi:] “It should not be a society that has the character of mortmain, but one in which each member keeps his civil rights, submits to the laws of the State, pays the taxes, and so forth. In a word, the new Society, as far as the Government is concerned, would be nothing more than an association of free citizens, united and living together, and having the same charitable purpose in view.”

[DB:] “And is your Excellency sure that the Government will allow the founding of such a society, and its subsequent existence?”

[Rattazzi:] “No constitutional or regular Government will oppose the founding and development of such a society, just as it does not prevent, but rather promotes, commercial, industrial and other similar companies. Any association of free citizens is allowed as long as its purpose and actions are not opposed to the laws and institutions of the State.”

[DB:] “Well,” said Don Bosco, in conclusion, “I shall think the matter over [...]”

[Bonetti’s Comment II:] The words of Rattazzi [...] were for Don Bosco as a ray of light, and made things that he had thought impossible before appear feasible.¹⁶

Before proceeding with the conversation, the following comments seem appropriate.

¹⁶ Bonetti, *Don Bosco’s Early Apostolate*, 344f.

In view of what was said above, Don Bosco (contrary to his own disclaimer) had indeed already considered the matter of how to make the work of the oratories permanent. Furthermore he had already banded together a group and bound it to himself and to the work by a promise (or vow). He may have stated the contrary so as not to show his hand; or he may have meant that he couldn't see how that was possible, short of founding some kind of religious society.

Bonetti [*Comment I* above] seems to imply that Don Bosco at first understood Rattazzi to be suggesting a new kind of religious congregation. But his subsequent words [*Comment III* below] make clear that Rattazzi meant no such thing. Probably the minister himself had raised the question of how Don Bosco's humanitarian work might be continued after his death. When Don Bosco expressed his fears that an association, humanitarian but also clearly religious, might be suppressed by the government, Rattazzi explained the point of law applicable to the case. An association of free citizens exercising their individual inalienable rights would not incur the government's sanctions.

Therefore, as Bonetti's words make clear [*Comment III*, below], Rattazzi did not suggest the founding of a religious congregation of any type, old or new. He would certainly not suggest a religious congregation of the kind he was suppressing; nor would he be suggesting a *new kind* of religious congregation, the kind that even Roman canonists could not conceive at the time. He was simply explaining to Don Bosco a *point of law* that was a foundation of liberal jurisprudence—namely that individual citizens were free to associate and use their time, money and ability for any lawful cause they might choose, and no liberal government would interfere.¹⁷ Rattazzi's explanation, therefore, was a "ray of light" for Don Bosco [Bonetti's *Comment II* above] because it showed him the way in which he could gather together a group, even if bound by vow for a religious purpose. Don Bosco then began to act with this in view.

This is the basis of the "civil right" article that Don Bosco wrote into the constitutions, in the chapter on the Form of the Society. The Roman authori-

¹⁷ The following were fundamental principles of liberal jurisprudence. Individual right is inviolable because it is from nature. Hence individual liberties exercised within the state's legitimate laws cannot be interfered with. On the other hand, corporate right is from the State, and from it alone. Therefore, only the state has the power to approve any corporation, including religious corporations (such as congregations). The Church is a spiritual entity that cannot generate a juridical order of its own.

ties for various reasons removed the article before the constitutions could be approved. Don Bosco, however, always maintained (the fiction?) that the Salesian Society was an association of free citizens and not a religious corporation needing the government's approval.

Bonetti continues his narrative:

[Don Bosco] began by framing and writing down certain rules according to the purpose of the new Society; he interviewed certain priests and laymen of Turin who, on hearing of his project, willingly offered their services. He then mentioned the matter to his seminarians and to some of the best boys of the Oratory, and in a short time he was surrounded by a dozen individuals on whom it seemed he could rely. Some of these members stayed at their own homes, limiting themselves to help in the Oratory [...]. Others, on the contrary, lived at the Oratory in common with Don Bosco, and were always at his command.¹⁸

But, looking down the road, Don Bosco began to wonder whether such a society of free citizens bound to him by a promise or vow and working together for a religious purpose, might not at the same time figure as a religious congregation in the eyes of the Church. For this additional element he would have to see the Pope. Bonetti expresses this further "speculation" of Don Bosco.

[Bonetti's Comment III] The foundations thus laid, Don Bosco soon perceived that [...] much more was needed. The society suggested by Rattazzi *was a purely human one* [...]. He therefore began to reflect, and to ask himself: "Cannot this society, whilst having a civil character before the Government, acquire also the nature of a religious institute before God and the Church; cannot its members be free citizens and religious at the same time?"¹⁹

Later Don Bosco would credit Rattazzi with making the Salesian Society possible. Don Bosco, however, never states that Rattazzi suggested a religious congregation of any kind. The *illumination* received from Rattazzi's words had to do with the viability of a religious association that would have the same

¹⁸ Bonetti, *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate*, 346. These words of Bonetti would indicate that before his visit to Rome in 1858 Don Bosco had already mentioned the project of some kind of society to a number of individuals who, though accepting the idea, made two different kinds of commitment. But note that no mention is made of vows or promises.

¹⁹ Bonetti, *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate*, 346.

legal basis as a secular association of individual free citizens banded together for a lawful purpose. But, as stated above, Don Bosco hoped that this religious association would also qualify as a religious congregation in the eyes of the Church. However, Don Bosco's discussion of his plan with Pope Pius IX the following year started a process that ultimately brought the Salesian Society well, if not squarely, within the traditional model for a religious congregation.

The much-quoted passage in which Don Bosco gives credit to Rattazzi is in Barberis' *Autograph Chronicle*. One evening, Don Bosco spoke of the providential guidance that enabled the Salesian Society to come into existence and to survive "in evil times." In this connection Don Bosco made comments on such political figures as Camillo Cavour, Urban Rattazzi, Paul Vigliani, etc. Barberis records Don Bosco's comment.

Several ministers of state, the very worst types on the political scene [*dei più cattivi che ci fossero*], gave me encouragement and help: Cavour, Rattazzi, Vigliani. [...] Rattazzi for one came to the Oratory several times and had the greatest respect for poor Don Bosco. He even spoke of me as a great man. One might say that it was consequent to his suggestion that I could write into our rules certain provisions that define our society's stance vis-à-vis the civil authorities and the State. One might therefore truly say that if we never had any trouble with the civil authority we owe it all to him.²⁰

4. Type of Religious Society Envisaged by Don Bosco

To qualify as a religious congregation in the Church, a religious association would have to have vows. Was Don Bosco thinking of traditional *public* simple vows, having traditional juridical status in the Church, or was he thinking only of *private* vows—either of obedience, poverty, chastity or simply of the exercise of charity toward the poor? If the former, then in what respect

²⁰ Barberis, *Autograph Chronicle*, January 1, 1876, Notebook III, 57, *FDBM* 835 E8. "Varii ministri mi diedero incoraggiamento[,] mi ajutarono, e dei più cattivi che ci fossero: Cavour, Rattazzi, Vigliani, etc.— [...] Rattazzi è venuto varie volte all'oratorio ed aveva una riverenza così grande pel povero D. Bosco che mi chiamava nelle conversazioni un grand'uomo; anzi si può dire che è con lui che io ho combinato varie cose delle nostre regole che riguardano il modo di tenersi della nostra società in rispetto al civile ed allo stato. Si può dir proprio che ciò che spetta le relazioni col civile per non poter mai noi esser molestati fu cosa tutta Sua."

would that be different from the traditional congregations, the religious corporations that were being suppressed? If the latter, then he would be thinking of something like a religious society with simple promises—and expect to have juridical status in the Church!

Don Bosco's mind regarding this point cannot be ascertained from Father Bonetti's words. But we note that when Don Bosco presented his plan for the society to Pius IX, as will be discussed below, the Pope immediately insisted on the necessity of traditional vows for the sake of unity and discipline. This seems to indicate that Don Bosco's own proposal called only for private vows or, more simply, for a promise of the exercise of charity (in the work of the oratory).

And yet in the Historical Introduction (*Origine di questa Congregazione*) in the earliest draft of the constitutions (the Rua draft, dated 1858) Don Bosco states that those who "professed" (meaning, "pledged to observe") those constitutions were fifteen, "that is, 5 priests, 8 clerical students and 2 laymen."²¹ Now the constitutions of 1858 prescribed traditional simple public vows. True, the above statement was written *after* Don Bosco's audience with Pius IX in March 1858, and may indicate that, because of the pope's injunction, Don Bosco changed his position and organized the group on a new basis. However, a community of that sort could be gathered only over a considerable period of time and could not be banded together on a new basis on the spur of the moment following upon his return from Rome. Thus Don Bosco's statement may imply that a group pledged to observe whatever rules were in force had been in existence for some time. Moreover the members of the group would at least be "open" to the idea of traditional vows, that is, of a religious society such as that described in the constitutions of 1858.

As a matter of fact, Father Alasonatti writing to clerical student Angelo Savio on February 6, 1858 (before Don Bosco's trip to Rome), though making no reference to vows, confirms the existence of such a group "united as confreres in spirit under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales." He cautions him not to speak about it in public, "until we see more clearly whether it is the Lord's good pleasure to prosper the group or to dissolve it—and this might shortly be decided when Don Bosco journeys to Rome at the beginning of Lent."²²

²¹ Motto, *Cost. SDB*, 70.

²² Letter of Feb. 6, 1858 in *ASC B505*: Alasonatti.



30 – Pope Pius IX (1792-1878)

5. Don Bosco and Pius IX (1858) according to Bonetti and Lemoyne

Don Bosco's audiences with Pius IX

Don Bosco left for Rome on Ash Wednesday, February 18, 1858. In March-April he discussed the matter of the Society in an audience with Pius IX. After reading the letter of commendation from Archbishop Fransoni, according to Bonetti, the pope said:

It is necessary that you should establish a Society with which the Government cannot interfere. At the same time, however, you must not be satisfied with binding its members through mere promises, otherwise you would never be sure of your subjects, nor could you count on them for any length of time.²³

Bonetti adds that after this consoling audience Don Bosco thought of returning at once to Turin, but that the pope asked him to preach a retreat, and that later “he was pleased to give him a private audience on two different occasions.”²⁴

“Foundations” or “Plan” of the Society Laid down by the Pope

Later Don Bosco stated that Pius IX had laid the foundations (*basi*) for the society,²⁵ that the Pope himself had traced out “its plan.”²⁶ What foundations or plan did the Pope lay down? Don Bosco himself tells us, (1) The society “would have to have vows to serve as a bond and as a guarantee of unity in spirit and works.” These vows, however, would have to be simple, and such as to be easily dissolved, lest some member’s ill will perturb the peace and unity of the others.” (For questions concerning the meaning that Don Bosco attached to the phrase, “simple and easily dissolved,” see below). (2) The Society would therefore “be a true religious congregation as far as the Church was concerned,” but at the same time it had to be such as “to guarantee its members freedom from anything that would cause them trouble from civil laws.”²⁷ Hence, the foundations laid down by the Pope dealt with the basic provisions of the society’s constitutions, namely with its basic form.

Bonetti’s and Lemoyne’s Interpretations

Father Bonetti seems to have understood the above to mean that the Pope, as though to make sure that the “foundations” he had given were clearly ex-

²³ Bonetti, *Don Bosco’s Early Apostolate*, 356.

²⁴ Bonetti, *Don Bosco’s Early Apostolate*, 357.

²⁵ Cf. Appeal to Pius IX, Feb. 12, 1864, in Motto, *Testi critici*, 228.

²⁶ *Breve notizia*, 1864, cf. IBM VII, 892 (omitted in EBM).

²⁷ *Breve notizia*, 1864, cf. IBM VII, 892 (omitted in EBM).

pressed, worked over a manuscript of the constitutions that Don Bosco (supposedly) had submitted.

He writes:

Don Bosco, during the time he still remained in Rome, revised the rules of the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales, already written in the previous year; some he omitted, and made alterations here and there, in order to make them more conformable to the sentiments of Pius IX. His Holiness read them carefully, adding certain observations in his own writing, and sent them to his Eminence Cardinal Gaude. [...] Before leaving Rome, Don Bosco held several conferences with him [Gaude] on the subject, and they agreed together that the Rules should be practiced for a time in their amended form, and then forwarded to his Eminence [Gaude], who was to present them to the Holy See for approval. Unfortunately the Cardinal was soon afterwards called to his reward.²⁸

Lemoine follows Bonetti closely for the first audience (March 9), but expands the scenario for the two subsequent audiences merely mentioned by Bonetti. He has Don Bosco hand the manuscript to the pope in the second audience (March 21, the audience in which Pius IX urged Don Bosco to put his extraordinary experiences down in writing). Then in the third audience (April 6) he has the pope hand the manuscript back.²⁹

6. Correction of Bonetti-Lemoine Regarding Previously Written Constitutions and Three Papal Audiences

It is now known how things fared in Rome. Don Bosco did not bring with him to Rome a previously written draft of the constitutions. At first he had intended only to present his plan for a religious society orally. In Rome, however, he asked his friend, Cardinal Gaude, for guidance in the matter; and the Cardinal advised him not to see the Holy Father without a written plan. Don Bosco then, on the basis of what was already being done in Turin, worked up a “brief plan for a religious congregation.”

²⁸ Bonetti, *DB's Early Apostolate*, 358.

²⁹ Audiences described by Lemoine: March 9 (*EBM* V, 558-562); Sunday, March 21 (575-579), April 6 (594-596).

Before his audience with Pius IX, Don Bosco wrote to the General of the Rosminians, Fr. Giovanni Battista Pagani, asking him to review “a brief plan for a religious congregation” which he had just set down.³⁰

[Rome], 49 Quirinale Street
March 4, 1858

Most Reverend and Esteemed Father General,

I need a big favor from you. Please read the enclosed brief plan for a religious congregation, and make any observation that you may think fit to make in the Lord. My intention was simply to make an oral presentation of my idea [to the Holy Father], but Cardinal Gaude advised me to put something down in writing. Hence, in the past couple of days, working from memory as well as I could, I set down [this brief plan] guided by what is done in the Home of the Oratory.

I thank you for the great and kind help you are giving us these days, and I pray for God’s abundant blessings on you and on the congregation entrusted to your care.

With gratitude and high esteem, I remain

Sincerely yours
Father John Bosco

Don Bosco did most likely present the written plan (not a copy of the constitutions!) to the Pope at the audience of March 9 (first audience). But it is not very likely that the Pope read it, personally annotated it, and returned it to Don Bosco, as Lemoyne would have it. No such annotated document is extant, nor did Don Bosco ever show such a document to anyone, or even ever refer to it.

Then there is the matter of the audiences themselves (according to the Lemoyne, on March 9, on March 21 (Sunday) and on April 6). As indicated above, Bonetti’s principal source for Don Bosco’s activities in Rome is the Rua diary.³¹ He also had access to letters written by Don Bosco from Rome, which however, do not decide the issue. He also could draw on Rua’s oral

³⁰ *Rosminian Archives*, A1. Box 11: S. Giov. Bosco 87-88; Motto, *Epistolario*, I, 339. Don Bosco was staying at the de Maistre residence (Quirinale Street). Seminarian Rua after a couple of days moved to the Rosminian residence.

³¹ *Viaggio a Roma, 1858*, FDB 1,352 E3 - 1,354 A5. It is a medium-size notebook with 75 pages of text. It’s mostly in Rua’s hand, but also additions by others appear, including some by Don Bosco (e.g., 51-52, March 8). The diary is styled in the first person (Don Bosco), but no one doubts that Rua is the author.

information, the extent of which is obviously unknown. Unfortunately the diary is incomplete. It covers the period from February 18 (departure from Turin) to March 20, in detail. For the week of March 21-28 it provides only a summary in an uncertain hand. The remaining days (to April 16, return to Turin) are not chronicled.

If we are to credit the last summary entries, sightseeing activities for March 21 are briefly enumerated, but no audience is mentioned.

Day 32. March 21, Sunday: St. Mary on the Way; Feast of the Seven Sorrows; The Roman Forum and Trajan Column; Publius Bibulus' burial place; Via Argenteria; Cattle Field; Arch of Septimius Severus; The Forum; Ss. Cosmas and Damian."

Day 33. March 22, Monday: Visit to the Cardinal Vicar [Gaude] [...]."

It is strange that trivial sightseeing activities and a visit to a cardinal should be recorded, whereas an important audience with the Pope (if it took place) should be overlooked! It seems unlikely that it ever took place. It appears to be an inference by Lemoyne (interpreting Bonetti) to make room (1) for an initial discussion of the plan for a congregation (March 9), (2) for revising the constitutional text (that supposedly Don Bosco had brought with him) in accordance with Pius IX's twin foundations, and presenting it to the Pope in an inferred second audience (March 21), and (3) for taking back the constitutions (annotated by the Pope) in a third audience (April 6).

This "house of cards" collapses when we learn that Don Bosco had not brought a copy (nor even a written sketch) of the constitutions with him to Rome (as his letter to the Rosminian General makes clear). The first draft of the constitutions was put together after Don Bosco's return to Turin on April 16 (late 1858 to early 1859).

7. First Draft of the Salesian Constitutions and Form of the Society

Back in Turin, in 1858 or early 1859, Seminarian Rua (who had accompanied Don Bosco on the Roman trip) produced the earliest known draft of the constitutions from texts authored by Don Bosco himself. This draft served as a starting point in the subsequent development of the constitutional text.³²

³² Motto, *Cost. SDB, Testi Critici*, 44-45.

The form of the Society in this earliest-known draft is that of a traditional congregation with common life and simple, public vows. Perhaps Don Bosco's earlier idea of the Society was that of an association of private citizens using their right to come together for a legitimate purpose and bonded by private vows or promises. However, Pius IX's imposition of canonical simple public vows disposed of such a concept.

The twin foundations laid down by the Pope found clear expression in the 1858 constitutions, articles 1 and 2 of the chapter on Form:

1. All the associates live the common life, united only by [the bond of] fraternal charity and the simple vows, which bind them so as to form one heart and one soul in order to love and serve God.
2. No one on entering the congregation shall forfeit his civil right, even after taking vows; therefore he retains ownership of his goods [...].³³

But the twin "foundations" so expressed (traditional vows before the Church and civil right before the state) were in themselves irreconcilable because the state, while admitting the private right of individuals, arrogated to itself all corporate right. The state claimed the right to originate corporations and to decide whether any existing religious corporation should be approved. The state did not recognize the Church's right to establish corporations apart from the state under her own parallel legal system. By prescribing traditional simple public vows Pius IX was doing precisely that. Don Bosco, however, always maintained that the Salesian Society was not a corporation of any sort, whether civil or ecclesiastical.

The civil right(s) clause that the Pope (in Don Bosco's understanding) placed as one of the twin foundations met with strong objections from the Roman Congregation. In this regard, one should bear in mind that since the unification of Italy (1861) the policy of the Holy See was to avoid any move and reject any formula that could be construed as a capitulation to the state's claims, or as a compromise with the secular legal system. To approve a religious society whose members retained all the rights and accepted all the obligations of free, private citizenship was seen in Rome as surrendering to the state what was the Church's prerogative. This became the Vatican's inflexible position in the 1870s.

³³ Motto, *Cost SDB, Testi Critici*, 82: "civil right" (sing.) in the draft of 1858; "civil rights" (plur.) in subsequent drafts.

Don Bosco, in order to have the constitutions approved at all, in the end had to accept a compromise. According to it, the second “foundation,” (civil right(s) as form of the Society) was weakened into the traditional concept of “radical ownership” under the vow of poverty; and the vows (the first “foundation”) were to be regular canonical vows totally under the jurisdiction of the Holy See. This formula is completely Tridentine. Consequently the civil rights clause and references to it were removed from the chapter on Form before their definitive approval in 1874, and what pertained to private ownership and use thereof was transferred to the chapter on Poverty.

In practice, however, Don Bosco, through the ruse of putting all goods in private ownership after the passing of the Rattazzi bill against religious corporations in 1855, could claim that his Society was not a corporation of any sort, but was an association of free citizens.³⁴

It should be noted that similar provisions regarding civil rights (though not quite as explicit) could be found already in the constitutions of the Schools of Charity (Cavanis brothers) and of the Institute of Charity (Rosmini). These had indeed received the Church’s approval, but in times of non-confrontation with the State. Moreover, at about the same time (early 1860s) a number of religious societies were seeking approval as congregations of traditional form, and the Holy See was not going to make a drastic exception in Don Bosco’s case.

Thus the Salesian Society, a novel creation as conceived by Don Bosco in the years 1854-1858, was forced by stages into the common ecclesiastical mold. Don Bosco’s acceptance testifies not only to his realism, but also, and above all, to his uncompromising spirit of faith and obedience to the Church.

8. Immediate Developments after Don Bosco’s Audiences with Pius IX in 1858

The significance of the year 1858 with reference to the origin of the Salesian Society and its immediate development may be gauged from the decisive forward movement that followed.

³⁴ For a more extended discussion of this point, see a later chapter on the Constitutions.

So-called Division of the Group: Salesians in Community and Extern Salesians

Referring back to the year 1858, Don Bosco in 1877 described the first step taken in setting up the society:

The Congregation was divided into two categories, or rather two families. Those who were free and felt the calling came together to live in community [...]. The others, namely the externs, continued to live in the world in the bosom of their families, but did not cease to promote the work of the oratories.

The text (referring more appropriately to the year 1859) raises a number of critical questions that have been addressed in the preceding chapter, with special reference to Desramaut's and Stella's views.

Suffice it here to say that the group that had coalesced around Don Bosco prior to his trip to Rome and the resulting constitutions, would have existed as a "pious religious association" with a simple promise to engage "in the practical exercise of charity" and with the option of living in community or not.

The Founding Moment (December 18, 1859)

Don Bosco was not slow to move the dynamic group that had been forming around him toward its first organization. At a historic meeting held on December 9, 1859, Don Bosco finally announced to his group of twenty young men his intention of founding a religious congregation. It would be for those only "who, after mature reflection, *intended to take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in due time,*" and gave them a week's time to come to a decision. The thought of a religious congregation filled those young men with apprehension. But in the case of most of them, Cagliari's struggle and final decision were typical: "Monk or not, I'll stay with Don Bosco." Out of the original twenty, eighteen returned to keep the appointment on December 18, 1859. Don Bosco, as "initiator and promoter," was asked to accept the post of Major Superior (*Superiore Maggiore*); he accepted on condition that he could appoint his own Prefect-Vicar. He confirmed Father Alasonatti in that post and other officers were elected. The stated purpose of this Society was: "to promote and preserve the spirit of true charity that is required by the work of the oratories on behalf of young people abandoned and at risk [...] [and] to help one another toward personal holiness."

Italian Text

Nel Nome di Nostro Signor Gesù Cristo
Amen

[1] L'anno del Signore mille ottocento cinquantanove alli diciotto di Dicembre in questo Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales nella camera del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni alle ore 9 pomeridiane si radunavano, esso, il Sacerdote Alasonatti Vittorio, i chierici Savio Angelo Diacono, Rua Michele Suddiacono, Cagliari Giovanni, Francesia Gio. Battista, Provera Francesco, Ghivarello Carlo, Lazzerò Giuseppe, Bonetti Giovanni, Anfossi Giovanni, Marcellino Luigi, Cerruti Francesco, Durando Celestino, Pettiva Secondo, Rovetto Antonio, Bongiovanni Cesare Giuseppe, il giovane Chiapale Luigi, tutti allo scopo ed in uno spirito di promuovere e conservare lo spirito di vera carità che richiedesi nell'opera degli Oratori per la gioventù abbandonata e pericolante, la quale in questi calamitosi tempi viene in mille maniere sedotta a danno della società e precipitata nell'empietà ed irreligione.

Piacque pertanto ai medesimi Congregati di erigersi in Società o Congregazione che avendo di mira il vicendevolesse aiuto per la santificazione propria si proponesse di promuovere la gloria di Dio e la salute delle anime specialmente delle più bisognose d'istruzione e di educazione.

[2] Ed approvato di comune consenso il disegno proposto, fatta breve preghiera ed invocato il lume dello Spirito Santo, procedevano alla elezione dei Membri che dovessero costituire la direzione della società per questa e per nuove Congregazioni se a Dio piacerà favorirne l'incremento.

Pregarono pertanto unanimi Lui iniziatore e promotore a gradire la carica di Superiore Maggiore siccome del tutto a Lui conveniente, il quale avendola accettata colla riserva della facoltà di nominarsi il prefetto, poichè nessuno vi si oppose, pronunziò che gli pareva non dovesse muovere dall'uffizio di prefetto lo Scrittore il quale fin qui teneva tal carica nella casa.

Si pensò quindi tosto al modo di elezione per gli altri socii che concorrono nella Direzione, e si convenne di adottare la votazione a suffragi segreti per più breve via a costituire il Consiglio, il quale doveva essere composto di un Direttore

English Translation

In the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Amen

In the year of Our Lord eighteen hundred and fifty-nine, on the eighteenth of December, in this Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, at 9 in the evening, the following gathered in Father John Bosco's room: [Don Bosco] himself, Father Vittorio Alasonatti, the Seminarists Deacon Angelo Savio, Subdeacon Michele Rua, Giovanni Cagliari, Gio. Battista Francesia, Francesco Provera, Carlo Ghivarello, Giuseppe Lazzerò, Giovanni Bonetti, Giovanni Anfossi, Luigi Marcellino, Francesco Cerruti, Celestino Durando, Secondo Pettiva, Antonio Rovetto, Cesare Giuseppe Bongiovanni, and the young man Luigi Chiapale. All [present were] united in one and the same spirit with the sole purpose of preserving and promoting the spirit of true charity needed for the work of the oratories on behalf of neglected young people at risk. For in these disastrous times of ours such young people are liable to being corrupted and plunged into godlessness and irreligion to the detriment of the whole of society.

The Gathered group then decided to form a society or congregation with the aim of promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls, especially of those most in need of instruction and education, while providing the members with mutual help toward their own sanctification.

The project met with unanimous approval. Hence, after a short prayer and the invocation of the light of the Holy Spirit, the group proceeded to elect the members that would make up the central body of the society and would lead this and future communities, if it should please God to grant increase.

The group then unanimously requested Him [Don Bosco] who has been the initiator and promoter [of the work] to accept the office of Major Superior, as is becoming in every respect. He accepted the office on condition that he should have power to choose for the office of prefect the present writer [Alasonatti], who has held that office in the house up to the present.

The group then considered the method to be followed in electing the other members of the central governing body, and it was decided to hold the election by secret ballot. This was deemed the speediest way of setting up the council, which

Spirituale, dell'Economo e di tre consiglieri in compagnia dei due predescritti uffiziali.

Or fatto Segretario a questo scopo lo Scrivente, ei protesta di aver fedelmente adempiuto l'uffizio [3] commessogli di comune fiducia, attribuendo il suffragio a ciascuno dei Soci secondochè veniva nominato in votazione; e quindi essergli risultato nella elezione del direttore Spirituale all'unanimità la scelta nel chierico Suddiacono Rua Michele che non ne ricusava. Il che ripetutosi per l'Economo, riuscì e fu riconosciuto il Diacono Angelo Savio il quale promise altresì di assumerne il relativo impegno.

Restavano ancora da eleggere i tre consiglieri, pel primo dei quali fattasi al solito la votazione venne il chierico Cagliari Giovanni. Il secondo consigliere sortì il chierico Gio Bonetti. Pel terzo ed ultimo essendo riusciti eguali suffragi a favore dei chierici Ghivarello Carlo e Provera Francesco, fattasi altra votazione, la maggioranza risultò pel chierico Ghivarello, e così fu definitivamente costituito il corpo di amministrazione della nostra Società.

Il quale fatto come venne fin qui complessivamente esposto fu letto in piena Congrega di tutti i prelodati Soci ed uffiziali per ora nominati, i quali riconosciutane la veracità, concordi fermarono che se ne conservasse l'originale, a cui per autenticità si sottoscrisse il Superiore Maggiore e come Segretario

Sac. Bosco Gio.

Alasonatti Vittorio Sac. Prefetto

was to consist of a spiritual director, of a financial administrator, and of three councilors, in addition to the two already mentioned officers.

The writer [of these minutes] was appointed secretary and [now] solemnly declares that he has faithfully discharged the task entrusted to him by general agreement. As the balloting progressed, he recorded the votes by the name of the individual concerned; and this was the result of the elections: the Seminarian, Subdeacon Michele Rua was unanimously elected spiritual director, and he accepted [the appointment]. The same procedure was followed for the financial administrator, with the result that Deacon Angelo Savio was elected. He also accepted, pledging to discharge the duties of that office.

Three councilors remained to be elected. The balloting for the first of these resulted in the election of Seminarian Giovanni Cagliari. The second councilor to be elected was Gio[vanni] Bonetti. The balloting for the third and last [councilor] resulted in a tie between seminarians Carlo Ghivarello and Francesco Provera. A second balloting produced a majority favoring Seminarian Ghivarello. Thus the central administrative body of our Society was definitively established.

The report of these proceedings, as summarily described herein, was read before the assembly of all the members and elected officers and was approved as true to fact. It was then unanimously resolved that this original record should be kept on file, and to guarantee its authenticity the Major Superior and the Secretary affixed their signatures.

Father Gio Bosco

Father Vittorio Alasonatti, Prefect

9. Minutes of the Founding Meeting of December 18, 1859

The three-page Manuscript is in *ASC* D868 Consiglio Superiore Verbali, *FDBM* 1,973 D9-11. As stated in the document, it is the work of Fr. Vittorio Alasonatti who acted as secretary at the meeting. The text is given with some editing in *EBM* VI, 181-183.

10. Towards Profession of Canonical Vows

F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 656-640; P. Stella, *DBE&Soc*, 295-297.

The General Council (then called “Superior Chapter”) held its first meeting on February 2, 1860, and admitted to the “practice of the rules” (that is, “novitiate”) the first Lay Salesian, Joseph Rossi. It met regularly thereafter to pass on admission of candidates to the “practice of the rules.” Paul Albera (not quite fifteen years of age) was admitted on May 1, 1860 and Seminarian Dominic Ruffino, on May 3, 1861.

Financial Administrator Angelo Savio’s priestly ordination took place on June 2, 1860; and Spiritual Director Michael Rua’s, on July 29, 1860, the first two Salesians of the group to be ordained.

The first Extern Salesian (Father John Ciattino), referred to as a “tertiary,” was received on May 21, 1861.³⁵ Up to this point these “clerics and priests of Don Bosco,” as they were commonly known, were bound to Don Bosco and to each other only by a *personal commitment to the exercise of charity (the work of the oratory)*, rather than by any ideal or structures of religious life.

The first official profession of canonical vows in accordance with the constitutions that had been in the process of development since 1858 took place on May 14, 1862. The minutes read:

The confreres of the Society of St. Francis de Sales were convened by the Rector [Major], and *most of them* re-committed themselves to the Society by the official profession of triennial vows. [...] Then [when the prayers were over] the confreres in sacred orders all together pronounced the formula of vows loudly and clearly, [...] Then each signed his name in the book prepared for that purpose. The following were professed: Father Victor Alasonatti, Father Michael Rua, Father Angelo Savio, Father Joseph Rocchietti, [Deacon] John Cagliero, [Deacon] John Baptist Francesia, and [Subdeacon] Dominic Ruffino; the seminarians Celestine Durando, John Baptist Anfossi, John Boggero, John Bonetti, Charles Ghivarello, Francis Cerruti, Louis Chiapale, Joseph Bongiovanni, Joseph Lazzero, Francis Provera, John Garino, Louis Jarach, Paul Albera, and the lay members Chevalier Frederick Oreglia di Santo Stefano and Joseph Gaia. [...].³⁶

³⁵ Cf. *ASC D868*: Cons. Sup., Verbali 1859-1869, *FDB 1873 E3*; *EBM VI*, 571. After the word “tertiary” Lemoyne interprets: “what today we would call a Cooperator.”

³⁶ *ASC D868*: Cons. Sup. Verbali, May 14, 1862, *FDB 1873 E5-6*; *EBM VII*, 101.

In his chronicle, Bonetti also records the event: “Twenty-two of us, not counting Don Bosco, [...] took vows as prescribed by the rules. Because of the number, we repeated the formula together as Father Rua read it phrase by phrase.” He also records Don Bosco’s words on that occasion. Among other things Don Bosco is quoted as saying:

“Did Don Bosco,” someone may ask, “also take these vows?” Yes! As you were making your profession before me, I too was taking my vows in perpetuity before this same crucifix. I offered myself to the Lord, ready for any sacrifice for his greater glory and for the salvation of souls, especially of the young.³⁷

³⁷ ASC A012: Cronachette, Bonetti, Annali III. FDB 922 E10; EBM VII, 102.

